

# Theological Philosophy of Encounter: Fostering Interreligious Dialogue in Pluralistic Societies

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Received: 24-04-2025; Accepted: 16-12-2025; Published: 20-12-2025

**Abstract:** This study aims to clarify the role of theological philosophy as a medium for dialogical and interreligious communication in an increasingly pluralistic and globalised world. It seeks to confront epistemological, theological and social barriers that often hinder interfaith dialogue and to propose an inclusive framework grounded in universal ethical values such as love, justice, peace and human dignity. Methodologically, the research adopts a theoretical, descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on key literature in theological philosophy, religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, with particular attention to the Abrahamic traditions. Through reflective analysis of primary and secondary sources, it identifies major obstacles to interreligious engagement, including divergent epistemological assumptions, historical prejudices, power asymmetries and persistent resistance to pluralism. The findings indicate that a dialogical form of theological philosophy can function as a mediating bridge between religious traditions by emphasising shared ethical commitments without compromising the doctrinal integrity of each faith. Philosophical reflection proves crucial for uncovering common metaphysical and moral ground, for reshaping attitudes to religious “others” and for informing practical strategies, such as dialogical pedagogies, interfaith forums and the constructive use of digital media. The study contributes to current scholarship by integrating theological philosophy more explicitly into both theoretical and practical discussions of interfaith dialogue and by articulating a conceptual framework that links metaphysical reasoning, hermeneutics and social practice. Its implications extend to the promotion of social cohesion in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia, where constitutional pluralism and rich religious diversity coexist with real risks of polarisation.

**Keywords:** philosophy; interreligious dialogue; religious pluralism; interfaith communication; social harmony

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengklarifikasi peran filsafat teologis sebagai sarana komunikasi dialogis dan antaragama dalam dunia yang semakin pluralistik dan global. Penelitian ini berusaha mengatasi hambatan epistemologis, teologis, dan sosial yang sering menghalangi dialog antaragama, serta mengusulkan kerangka kerja inklusif yang didasarkan pada nilai-nilai etis universal seperti cinta, keadilan, perdamaian, dan martabat manusia. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan teoretis, deskriptif-analitis, dengan mengacu pada literatur kunci dalam filsafat teologis, pluralisme agama, dan dialog antaragama, dengan perhatian khusus pada tradisi Abrahamik. Melalui analisis reflektif terhadap sumber primer dan sekunder, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi hambatan utama dalam keterlibatan antaragama, termasuk asumsi epistemologis yang berbeda, prasangka historis, ketidakseimbangan kekuasaan, dan resistensi yang persisten terhadap pluralisme. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa bentuk dialogis filsafat teologis dapat berfungsi

sebagai jembatan mediasi antara tradisi agama dengan menekankan komitmen etis bersama tanpa mengorbankan integritas doktrinal masing-masing agama. Refleksi filosofis terbukti krusial untuk mengungkap dasar metafisik dan moral yang bersama, untuk membentuk ulang sikap terhadap “yang lain” dalam agama, dan untuk menginformasikan strategi praktis, seperti pedagogi dialogis, forum antaragama, dan penggunaan media digital yang konstruktif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kajian akademik dengan mengintegrasikan filsafat teologis secara lebih eksplisit ke dalam pembahasan teoretis dan praktis dialog antaragama, serta merumuskan kerangka konseptual yang menghubungkan penalaran metafisik, hermeneutika, dan praktik sosial. Implikasinya mencakup promosi kohesi sosial di masyarakat pluralistik seperti Indonesia, di mana pluralisme konstitusional dan keragaman agama yang kaya beriringan dengan risiko polarisasi yang nyata.

**Kata kunci:** filsafat; dialog antaragama; pluralisme agama; komunikasi antaragama; harmoni sosial

## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly plural and globalised world, interreligious interaction constitutes a critical philosophical and theological challenge. Processes of globalisation, migration, and modernisation bring diverse religious traditions into sustained contact, yet theological differences frequently become a source of misunderstanding, tension, or even conflict (Castells, 2000). When constructive dialogue between religious believers remains limited, theology can polarise rather than bridge communities. Theological philosophy, broadly conceived as the reflective study of religious doctrines, ultimate realities, and human–divine relations, offers an alternative framework. It can function as a medium for dialogical communication that regards difference not as an obstacle but as an opportunity for mutual understanding, moral growth, and peaceful coexistence.

This study, therefore, investigates how theological philosophy may catalyse interreligious dialogue by addressing epistemological, theological, and social barriers and by promoting shared ethical values such as love, justice, and peace. Scholars of religious pluralism provide valuable foundational insights. John Hick, in his pluralistic hypothesis, argues that major religions represent different human responses to the same ultimate reality and that no single tradition holds a monopoly on truth (Hick, 1989). His work emphasises epistemological humility, namely the idea that human religious understanding always remains mediated by cultural, historical, and linguistic matrices, and ethical transformation, since religions should be evaluated by their capacity to foster moral virtues rather than by rigid doctrinal conformity (Hick, 1988).

Barriers to interreligious dialogue are manifold. Epistemological divergence, namely differences in the nature and sources of knowledge within religious traditions, often leads to mutual misrecognition. Theological exclusivism and dogmatic claims that one tradition uniquely possesses salvific truth also hinder openness (McGrath, 2006). Historical prejudices, colonial legacies, and sociocultural power imbalances reinforce distrust and prevent equitable dialogue in social and political spheres (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017).

Theological philosophy, when it adopts an explicitly dialogical orientation, has the potential to mediate these tensions. By fostering philosophical reflection on shared ethical themes, encouraging alternative forms of communication, and advocating inclusive methods that respect particularities while seeking common ground, theological philosophy can contribute to a deeper understanding of interreligious relations. This mediating role becomes particularly relevant in pluralistic societies, such as Indonesia, where multiple religious communities coexist, and social harmony depends in part on religious toleration and mutual respect (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017).

In such contexts, philosophical engagement with theological claims does not replace confessional commitments; rather, it offers a reflective space in which adherents can articulate their beliefs in ways that remain faithful to their traditions while being intelligible and responsible in the public sphere.

This study examines these dynamics through a theoretical methodology, focusing on Abrahamic religious traditions, and proposes a framework in which theological philosophy serves as a catalyst for dialogue. The investigation addresses three guiding questions: (1) what epistemological and theological obstacles impede interreligious communication; (2) how shared universal values might be emphasised within theological philosophical discourse without undermining doctrinal integrity; and (3) how philosophical reflection and dialogical methods may be applied in practice to foster social cohesion in pluralistic contexts. By structuring the inquiry around these questions, the study seeks to clarify both the conceptual conditions and the practical possibilities of philosophically grounded interfaith engagement.

The development of contemporary theological thought in a pluralistic world has prompted theologians to reconsider the role of philosophy within theology as a bridge for interfaith engagement. David Tracy proposes that theology should be articulated as a public and dialogical discipline capable of mediating between religious traditions and secular cultures. In *The Analogical Imagination: Christian theology and the culture of pluralism* (1981) and *Plurality and ambiguity: Hermeneutics, religion, hope* (1994), Tracy argues that authentic theology must remain open to the “other” and cultivate inclusive forms of interfaith communication that deepen mutual understanding rather than reinforce boundaries. Similarly, Miroslav Volf highlights the philosophical dimension of theology as a space where universal values, such as love, justice, and peace, can emerge as common ground across traditions. In *Exclusion and embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation* (1996) and *A Public Faith: How followers of Christ should serve the common good* (2011), Volf emphasises that dialogical engagement must prioritise these shared ethical commitments if religious differences are to become opportunities for reconciliation rather than conflict.

Hans Küng’s call for a global ethic further underscores the normative potential of theological philosophy. In *Global responsibility: In search of a new world ethic* (1991) and *A Global Ethic in an Age of Globalization* (1997), Küng argues that all religions share core moral imperatives, including non-violence, justice, truthfulness, and mutual respect, which can serve as a philosophical and theological basis for interreligious dialogue and global peace. Despite these constructive proposals, several persistent barriers still hinder effective interfaith engagement. First, epistemological divergence arises when different conceptions of religious knowledge prevent agreement on the very terms of dialogue; the analytical rationality characteristic of many Western traditions frequently collides with experiential or symbolic epistemologies in other contexts. Second, historical prejudice and power asymmetry, rooted in legacies of colonialism and sectarian conflict, reinforce suspicion and restrict the possibility of trust. Third, doctrinal comparativism without philosophical reflection leads to dialogues that focus solely on comparing doctrines, neglecting deeper philosophical questions about truth, reality, and ethics, which reduces engagement to apologetics (Krasicki & Klarin, 2022). Fourth, resistance to pluralism arises when communities fear that the recognition of multiple paths threatens their theological identity and authority, thereby producing impasses in dialogue (Wong & Lee, 2019). Fifth, many actors still neglect alternative media and contexts, so opportunities to use digital platforms, art, and grassroots encounters as inclusive dialogical spaces remain underexplored.

Against this backdrop, the dynamics of interreligious interaction continue to be a defining challenge for contemporary society. Globalisation and modernisation create spaces where diverse religious traditions coexist, yet theological differences persist as sources of tension and conflict. History demonstrates that religion can serve as both a force for peace and a flashpoint of division, especially when constructive dialogue is absent. Within this complex landscape, theological philosophy, understood as the critical and reflective engagement with ultimate realities and foundational concepts, offers a distinctive medium for dialogical communication (Nussbaum, 2008). Rather than reducing interfaith engagement to sociological negotiation or doctrinal comparison, theological philosophy seeks to interrogate the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions that undergird religious claims, thereby creating a deeper basis for mutual understanding and happiness. Amiruddin et al. (2021) emphasise that the ultimate goal of religion is to attain happiness, in harmony with the purpose of human creation and moral perfection.

While extensive scholarship addresses interreligious dialogue from theological and sociological perspectives, few studies explicitly investigate the role of theological philosophy as a mediating catalyst. Existing research tends to: 1) prioritise sociological models of conflict resolution or community-building without examining the philosophical underpinnings of theological claims; 2) treat comparative theology primarily as doctrinal analysis, with limited attention to metaphysical and epistemological foundations; and 3) focus on normative ethics, such as Küng's proposal of a global ethic (Küng, 1991), while seldom analysing how philosophical reasoning enables these ethics to gain cross-religious traction. As a result, the literature often under-theorises the specific ways in which philosophical reflection can reshape theological categories, reconfigure perceptions of religious others, and generate conditions for more symmetrical and self-critical dialogue.

This study addresses these gaps by developing a framework of dialogical theological philosophy for interfaith engagement. It advances three interrelated aims: 1) to examine how theological philosophy can bridge epistemological, theological and terminological barriers that often hinder interfaith dialogue; 2) to identify universal ethical and metaphysical principles, such as love, justice and truth, that foster inclusive communication while respecting doctrinal integrity; and 3) to explore alternative and practical methods, including digital media platforms, artistic expression and structured dialogical protocols, as tools for expanding the contexts and accessibility of interreligious dialogue. Glavind (2023) argues that individuals can remain unaffected by terrorism if they synchronise with interreligious dialogue in the rhythm and tempo of social life. This vulnerability to disruption is exacerbated by what Jansen et al. (2019) refer to as a VUCA environment, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, where legal norms and societal roles remain in constant flux and affect individuals' ability to maintain stable responsibilities and identities. In a related vein, Khotimah, K., & Sukron, M. (2023) state that, for the realisation of religious moderation, people need to sustain a positive environment, even though they commonly associate contemporary conditions with uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical literature review to examine how theological philosophy can function as a catalyst for interreligious dialogue. Using purposive sampling, this study engages 25 peer-reviewed publications from 2004 to 2024 that directly address theological philosophy, interreligious dialogue, or religious pluralism, offering either conceptual frameworks or practical implications for interfaith communication. The literature, retrieved from Scopus, JSTOR, SpringerLink, and ATLA Religion Database, includes seminal works such as Karen Armstrong's *The Case for God* (2010), Hans Küng's *Global Responsibility* (1991), Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), and John Hick's *An Interpretation of Religion* (2004), which provide historical and conceptual depth. The study organises all texts in Zotero and codes them thematically with NVivo 12 around three axes: universal ethical values (e.g., love, justice, peace) as mediating principles; epistemological and terminological barriers that hinder interfaith dialogue; and practical applications of theological philosophy, including dialogical methods and alternative media such as digital platforms and artistic expression. Through iterative coding and cross-comparison, it identifies recurring philosophical patterns and formulates a dialogical theological philosophy framework that links conceptual reflection with practical guidance for interfaith practitioners.

Methodologically, this research employs critical analysis of primary texts and secondary literature within the Abrahamic traditions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), whose intertwined theological heritage provides fertile ground for both conflict and cooperation. Drawing on thinkers such as Karl Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg, who emphasise the necessity of philosophical reflection within theology, and John Hick, whose concept of religious pluralism highlights the transformative potential of interreligious encounter (Hick, 2004), this study develops a theoretical framework that links philosophical reasoning with practical dialogue. The analysis aims to show not only how theological concepts can be clarified philosophically but also how such clarification can inform concrete practices of engagement in multi-religious contexts.

The proposed framework serves as a practical guide for interfaith actors, providing operational steps to foster mutual understanding. It begins with conceptual clarification, in which participants

establish shared definitions of key concepts, such as love, justice, and salvation, to avoid semantic confusion. It then encourages epistemic humility by inviting dialogical partners to recognise the limits of their own truth claims while remaining faithful to their traditions. On this basis, it promotes ethical co-action through the identification of common ethical commitments, such as peace-building and social justice, which can serve as entry points for joint projects. Finally, it highlights the importance of mediated spaces by utilising digital platforms, public art, and community forums to expand access and engagement beyond traditional academic or clerical settings.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which combines philosophical reflection and theological analysis within a single, coherent framework. While the scope of this study remains theoretical and limited to the Abrahamic traditions, its findings provide conceptual and methodological foundations for future empirical applications, including dialogues that involve non-Abrahamic religions. By articulating both theoretical insights and practical pathways, this research demonstrates how theological philosophy can serve as a catalyst for deeper and more sustainable interreligious dialogue, ultimately contributing to social cohesion in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia.

## 2. Theological Philosophy and Biblical Values in the Reality of Interreligious Dialogue

Theological philosophy provides a conceptual bridge between the normative claims of sacred texts and the concrete practices of interreligious engagement. Within the Christian tradition, biblical values, articulated in both the Hebrew *Tanakh* and the Greek New Testament, constitute a significant reservoir of ethical and metaphysical resources for interfaith dialogue. These values, however, require critical interpretation in light of contemporary pluralism if they are not to remain merely informational or abstract.

The Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanakh*) and the Greek *Biblía* (“books”) embody a diversity of voices that invite dialogical engagement. The Hebrew concept of *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם), for example, extends beyond “peace” to encompass holistic well-being and communal harmony. At the same time, the Greek term *agápē* (ἀγάπη) denotes self-giving love that transcends tribal or religious boundaries (Pannenberg, 1991). Both concepts provide a philosophical foundation for fostering relationships of mutual respect among diverse religious communities. Similarly, the Hebrew notion of *tzedek* (צֶדֶק, justice) underscores moral integrity and social responsibility, grounding dialogue in ethical commitment rather than mere tolerance. These values become genuinely transformative only when they enter into critical conversation with the lived realities of interreligious encounter and are allowed to inform concrete patterns of life together.

In Indonesia, *shalom* resonates with the local concept of *rukun* (social harmony), which undergirds Pancasila’s first principle of religious respect. Practical initiatives such as *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* (FKUB, or Religious Harmony Forums) illustrate how biblical values of peace and justice can be translated into civic action. In this context, theological philosophy does not simply describe ideals; it interrogates the epistemological assumptions that sustain them and asks how *shalom* or *agápē* can operate in situations marked by historical grievance or socio-political inequality. The historical Church has also modelled such dispositions, as Paul and Barnabas embodied *shalom* and *agápē* as integral dimensions of their missionary practice (Alawode, 2023).

Scholars such as John Hick (2004) argue that these shared values disclose a transcendent Reality that invites all religions to participate in a “theocentric” dialogue. Rather than privileging one tradition, Hick’s pluralism encourages Christians to regard biblical values not as exclusive possessions but as universal invitations. In a complementary way, Miroslav Volf (1996) emphasises reconciliation, particularly through forgiveness and hospitality, as a response to concrete conflicts in the Balkans and beyond. These insights demonstrate how theological philosophy can explore the metaphysical foundations of love and justice, while also providing practical guidance for overcoming prejudice, as observed in post-conflict contexts, such as Bosnia, and in interfaith peace-building efforts in Central Sulawesi.

Furthermore, theological philosophy challenges interreligious actors to move beyond comparative doctrinal debate toward philosophical reflection on ultimate realities. The command to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44), for instance, cannot remain a purely private moral aspiration. It calls for concrete strategies of engagement, such as restorative justice programmes, interfaith education curricula and dialogue circles that prioritise listening over proselytising. Volf’s notion of “embrace” offers a constructive model for this process, requiring both clear self-differentiation and genuine openness to the other, an approach increasingly adopted by Christian–Muslim dialogue initiatives in Southeast Asia and by grassroots reconciliation projects in Nigeria (Volf, 2006).

In this way, biblical values function not as static doctrines but as living philosophical categories: justice as an ontological demand for right relation, love as an epistemological posture of openness and peace as a metaphysical orientation toward the common good. Theological philosophy sharpens these categories by clarifying their conceptual depth and testing their applicability in contested social spaces. By holding together the universal claims of Scripture and the particular realities of plural societies, it cultivates a dialogical praxis in which faith commitments and philosophical reasoning mutually illuminate and enrich one another.

### 3. Media for Dialogical and Interreligious Communication in the Indonesian Context

Indonesia, home to the world’s largest Muslim population and a rich mosaic of Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous traditions, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for meaningful interfaith engagement (Hou, Wu, & Huang, 2023). Within this plural setting, theological philosophy serves as a mediating framework that not only interprets religious dogma but also facilitates dialogical communication across traditions. Rather than remaining a purely speculative discipline, theological philosophy articulates critical categories, such as justice, love, and reconciliation, that enable diverse communities to negotiate shared ethical horizons while still respecting doctrinal integrity (Tracy, 1994; Volf, 1996).

#### *Theological Philosophy as a Bridge*

Interreligious dialogue in Indonesia requires an approach that integrates local wisdom with global values. Pancasila, the state ideology, enshrines belief in one God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*) as a foundational principle of national unity, echoing the Abrahamic emphasis on transcendent reality while allowing for diverse confessional expressions. Theological philosophy deepens this framework by examining the metaphysical claims of each tradition and identifying common ethical ground, such as compassion (*karuṇā* in Buddhism, *rahmah* in Islam, and *agápē* in Christianity), that can guide public discourse. By doing so, it encourages religious communities to see themselves as partners in a shared moral project rather than as competitors for cultural dominance.

#### *Education as a Medium of Dialogue*

Religious education constitutes a primary arena for cultivating interfaith understanding in Indonesia. Schools and universities increasingly adopt inclusive curricula that highlight shared moral values while introducing students to multiple religious traditions. Empirical studies indicate that dialogical pedagogies, in which students engage in structured conversations on ethics and Scripture, can reduce prejudice and foster mutual respect. In this educational context, theological philosophy informs both content and method, encouraging critical reflection on ultimate truths rather than mere doctrinal memorisation and fostering intellectual virtues such as humility, fairness, and willingness to revise one’s views in light of better arguments.

#### *Digital and Mass Media Platforms*

The rapid expansion of digital technology has created new spaces for interreligious engagement. Social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), now serve as venues for inter-religious dialogue, allowing religious leaders and laypersons to share theological reflections

and promote tolerance. While online environments can also amplify sectarian polarisation and facilitate the spread of misrepresentation, theological philosophy offers tools for critical discernment. By clarifying concepts such as truth, justice, and freedom, it equips users to evaluate digital content more responsibly and to curate online interactions that support constructive rather than antagonistic forms of religious encounter. In this sense, digital and mass media become not only channels of communication but also testing grounds for the viability of a philosophically informed interreligious ethic.

### *Challenges of Polarisation*

Despite these opportunities, social polarisation remains a persistent obstacle. Sectarian conflicts in Ambon (1999–2002) and Poso (1998–2001) illustrate how historical grievances and political manipulation can fracture interfaith relations (Sabri & Abdullah, 2022). Contemporary tensions, often inflamed by hate speech and misinformation online, highlight the need for philosophical frameworks that move beyond surface-level tolerance and address the deeper structures of fear, resentment and exclusion. Theological philosophy responds by articulating universal ethical imperatives, for example Hans Küng's (1991) "global ethic", and grounding them in metaphysical reasoning that can speak to multiple faiths without erasing their distinct revelatory claims.

### *Toward Practical Implementation*

To operationalise these insights, religious leaders and scholars are encouraged to develop dialogical theological programmes that integrate scriptural study, philosophical reasoning, and community action. For example, the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), a government-supported interfaith council, has mediated local conflicts by employing values of justice (*tzedek*), peace (*shalom*), and love (*agápē*) as shared points of negotiation (Alawode, 2023). Such initiatives demonstrate how theological philosophy can transition from abstract discourse to practical mediation, shaping public policy, guiding pastoral responses, and fostering patterns of everyday interaction that normalise cooperation rather than suspicion.

## **4. Theological Philosophy as a Medium for Dialogical and Interreligious Communication**

### *Overcoming Epistemological Assumptions through Open Dialogue*

Open dialogue between religious traditions in pluralistic societies depends largely on addressing and overcoming differing epistemological assumptions. Within Christian theology, knowledge of divine truth is often grounded in revelation, Scripture and religious experience (McGrath, 2006). Biblical values such as love, humility and justice stand at the centre of this understanding and can serve as foundations for dialogue that not only acknowledges difference but also builds mutual respect and understanding (Volf, 1996). For example, Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44, New Revised Standard Version) prescribes more than rational discourse; it demands a posture of humility and listening that resists the urge to dominate or dismiss the other (Tracy, 1994). When religious traditions regard truth as their exclusive possession, dialogue often stalls, and barriers to reconciliation harden (Küng, 1991).

The philosophy of theology provides a framework in which universal values are recognised without erasing the sacredness and identity of each faith (Knitter, 2020). The biblical affirmation that "all people are created in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26–27, NRSV) functions as a philosophical principle affirming human equality and dignity, which are key prerequisites for sincere dialogue (Hick, 2004). Hermeneutics plays a central role in this process. Biblical hermeneutics, for example, offers interpretative strategies that are dialogical, allowing texts to be understood in relation to their cultural context, historical background, and the perspectives of others (Tracy, 1981). Theological philosophy, therefore, encourages openness to interpretation while preserving doctrinal integrity, enabling

interfaith encounters that are both critically reflective and spiritually transformative (Khotimah & Sukron, 2023; Volf, 2011).

### *Confronting Deep-Rooted Prejudices for Cross-Trust Understanding*

In practice, cross-faith understanding often falters due to entrenched prejudices, whether social, theological, or cultural. Biblical teachings such as Jesus' command to love one's neighbour and even one's enemy (Matt. 5:44) offer not only moral exhortation but also a mechanism for dismantling stereotypes and rehumanising the other (Wright, 2011). For Christians, the recognition that all people are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27) challenges prejudice by affirming equal status, regardless of religious identity, ethnicity, or social class.

Theological philosophy contributes to the identification of assumptions that underlie prejudice and offers tools such as critique, self-reflection, and philosophical reasoning to transform them. In Indonesia, historical conflicts, such as those in Ambon and Poso, are often characterised by religious, ethnic, and politico-cultural prejudices (Wende, M., & Markus Schäfer, 2021). Philosophical reflection on biblical values such as forgiveness, humility, and reconciliation can help religious leaders and communities identify these prejudices, understand the fears and narratives that sustain them, and imagine alternative patterns of coexistence.

Comparative theology seeks to engage with the truths of different religious traditions not merely to describe their doctrines but to enter a transformative process of mutual understanding (Sabri & Abdullah, 2022). When enriched by philosophical reflection rooted in biblical values, this approach moves beyond descriptive comparison toward a praxis of reconciliation and ethical collaboration. For example, the biblical commandments of love (Matthew 22:37–39) and forgiveness (Matthew 18:21–22, New Revised Standard Version) invite Christians not only to compare doctrines but also to allow those doctrines to shape interreligious conduct through acts of mutual service, shared social justice initiatives and collaborative peace-building (Volf, 1996).

Biblical affirmations, such as the creation of all humanity in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27, NRSV), provide a philosophical foundation for respecting human dignity across religious boundaries (Hick, 2004). When comparative theology takes this principle seriously, it can bridge doctrinal differences concerning the nature of God, salvation, or religious authority by foregrounding ethical convergence, that is, how beliefs are embodied in lived practice rather than solely debated in abstract propositions (Tracy, 1981). This ethical focus also encourages traditions to assess themselves self-critically in light of their own ideals, asking whether their treatment of others coheres with their professed doctrines of creation, grace, and judgement. In this way, the integration of theology and philosophy transforms comparative study into a vehicle for dialogical ethics, where shared moral commitments emerge without erasing the distinctiveness of each tradition (Berger, 2011; Küng, 1991).

### *Embracing Religious Pluralism through Theological Philosophy*

Accepting religious pluralism involves a crucial shift: not the dilution of Christian truth, but the decision to hold Christian self-identity in meaningful relation to others without hostility. Biblical values support this orientation, including love for one's neighbour (Matthew 22:39), peace (John 14:27), and the recognition of human dignity as those created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Within such a framework, Christians, along with adherents of other faiths, can approach pluralism not as a threat or a source of insecurity but as a condition that requires deeper mutual respect and a shared ethical commitment (Calzado, 2020; Volf, 1996).

In Indonesia, pluralism is constitutionally embedded in Pancasila, which affirms belief in one God while protecting religious diversity. This framework becomes transformative when theological philosophy engages questions such as religious freedom, minority rights, and public policy, thereby linking abstract principles to institutional arrangements. When religious communities acknowledge that divine truth may be expressed in diverse ways and that God may be at work beyond the boundaries of their own tradition, new opportunities open up for cooperative action in areas such as humanitarian relief, environmental stewardship, and advocacy for justice (Levi, 2022).



*Alternative Pathways for Deeper Dialogue*

Biblical values also illuminate deeper and more sustainable responses to interreligious tensions. The Pauline vision of reconciliation, “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18), suggests that repairing relationships, not merely resolving conflict, constitutes a central theological goal. Forgiveness, humility, and peace are therefore not abstract ideals but practices that demand embodiment in dialogue (Tracy, 1981; Volf, 2011). Philosophical theology encourages models of engagement that incorporate such practices, for example, restorative justice processes, narrative-sharing circles and community-based reconciliation rituals in plural societies (Liefbroer, Ganzevoort, & Olsman, 2019).

Moreover, communities can explore non-traditional media as vehicles for theological philosophy (McLuhan, 1964). Storytelling, art, music and digital testimony provide means of interfaith encounter beyond formal theological or institutional settings. In Indonesia, digital platforms and social media have become significant spaces for interfaith interaction, though challenges remain, such as misinformation, polarisation and algorithmic “echo chambers” (Tyurina & Stavkova, 2020). By integrating theological reflection with these emerging forms of dialogue, religious communities can nurture pluralism that is both intellectually robust and socially transformative, enabling interreligious communication to permeate everyday cultural practices rather than remaining confined to elite or academic forums.

## **5. Theological Philosophy as a Mediating Framework for Interreligious Dialogue in Plural Societies**

This study demonstrates that theological philosophy can serve as a strategic catalyst for interreligious dialogue by reinterpreting biblical and theological values as dynamic philosophical categories rather than static doctrines. Concepts such as *shalom*, *agápē*, and *tzedek*, together with universal ethical principles like love, justice, peace, and human dignity, provide a shared normative ground on which religious communities can meet without erasing their confessional identities (Hick, 2004; Küng, 1991; Pannenberg, 1991; Volf, 1996). In the Indonesian context, these values align with local concepts such as *rukun* and the constitutional framework of Pancasila, and they can inform practical initiatives, including FKUB and interfaith educational programs (Alawode, 2023; Hou et al., 2023). The findings also indicate that a descriptive–analytical engagement with theological and philosophical literature makes it possible to construct a coherent dialogical framework that addresses epistemological, theological, and social barriers.

At the same time, the results highlight that theological philosophy is most effective when it is understood holistically, that is, when religious beliefs are interpreted as interconnected with cultural practices, narratives, and social structures rather than as isolated propositions. This holistic orientation, which recent intercultural theology emphasises, supports a more flexible and context-sensitive form of dialogue that remains faithful to tradition while open to the other.

The findings confirm and extend existing scholarship on religious pluralism, global ethics, and interreligious dialogue. Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis and “theocentric” orientation already suggest that different religious traditions participate in a single transcendent Reality and can therefore meet based on shared ethical commitments (Hick, 1989, 2004). Volf’s work on reconciliation and “embrace” demonstrates how practices of forgiveness and hospitality respond to concrete conflict situations (Volf, 1996, 2011), while Küng’s “global ethic” highlights cross-religious convergence on core moral imperatives (Küng, 1991). This study aligns with these contributions yet differs in that it explicitly systematises theological philosophy as a mediating framework that links metaphysical reflection, hermeneutics, and practical dialogue, particularly in relation to Indonesian pluralism (Khotimah & Sukron, 2023; Sabri & Abdullah, 2022).

Recent work on “pragmatic theologies” of dialogue underlines similar concerns. Theologies of dialogue, such as those proposed by Michael Barnes and Joseph DiNoia, focus on the pragmatics of interreligious discussion and its impact on the public sphere in pluralist societies. They call for

theological frameworks that grow from within interreligious practice itself rather than being imposed from above (Chrabieh & Roussel, 2005). Likewise, hermeneutic approaches to religious diversity argue that the foundations for a theology of interreligiosity must be explicitly interpretative and peace-oriented, emphasising the hermeneutic principles that allow engagement and commitment across differences (Fernández, 2025).

The discussion in this study also converges with debates about the limits of purely rational models of dialogue. Habermasian approaches that prioritise symmetrical rational agreement are critically re-examined by thinkers influenced by Levinas and Metz, who advocate for an asymmetrical relationship that gives privileged voice to the other and to victims of history. They defend prophetic and anamnestic reasons that keep alive memories of suffering and injustice, thereby opening new perspectives for political theology and philosophy (Losada-Sierra & Mandalios, 2014).

Comparative theology and dialogical theology, particularly where they incorporate the category of “hospitality”, further support the integrative direction of this research. Practices such as shared meals and interreligious social engagement, for example, in projects like the Interfaith Youth Corps, illustrate how concrete acts of hospitality can become starting points for dialogue, with shared action preceding or accompanying explicit theological deliberation (Knitter, 2020; Schlenker, 2021). In the field of religious education, work on interreligious dialogue in theology and religious education proposes innovative approaches that integrate theological and pedagogical perspectives, reinforcing the importance of educational spaces as laboratories of dialogue (Comeau, 2012; Weisse, 2025).

Intercultural theology’s emphasis on the holism of religious beliefs also resonates with the present findings. Strahovnik (2022) argues that effective interreligious dialogue requires sensitivity to the cultural background of beliefs and to the narratives, metaphors, and analogies through which communities understand themselves. At the same time, Qur’anic studies on interfaith dialogue highlight scriptural guidelines that frame dialogue and cooperation as ethical necessities aimed at promoting goodness and justice, thereby complementing Christian and philosophical accounts of global ethics (Solihin, Jassem, Osmani, Abbas, & Jani, 2013).

Seen against the broader backdrop of globalisation, digital communication and VUCA conditions, the results indicate that interreligious dialogue now unfolds within environments marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Jansen et al., 2019; Tyurina & Stavkova, 2020). Sectarian conflicts in Ambon and Poso, along with ongoing online polarisation, demonstrate that religious differences can easily become a vehicle for political manipulation and social fragmentation (Sabri & Abdullah, 2022; Wende et al., 2021). The fact that theological philosophy can still identify shared ethical ground and support dialogical practices in such a context suggests that religious traditions retain a significant capacity for self-critique and renewal. The findings, therefore, signal not only a theoretical possibility but also a moral responsibility: religious communities can either reinforce existing patterns of exclusion or contribute to a more just and peaceful public sphere.

Moreover, the convergence between Christian and Islamic ethical discourses on dialogue and cooperation points to a broader intercultural and interreligious movement. Qur’anic guidelines that call communities to “cooperate in goodness and piety”, when read alongside biblical imperatives of love of neighbour and reconciliation, indicate that multiple traditions possess internal resources for resisting instrumentalisation and fundamentalism (Solihin et al., 2013). The emergence of holistic and hermeneutically sensitive approaches in intercultural theology (Strahovnik, 2022) further indicates that the future of interreligious dialogue lies in frameworks that honour the complexity of belief systems while still seeking shared ethical horizons.

This study has implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it demonstrates that the philosophical analysis of theological concepts is not merely an academic exercise; it can reshape how religious actors understand truth, otherness, and coexistence, and it can provide criteria for evaluating whether interfaith encounters genuinely embody love, justice, and peace. By integrating the pragmatic, hermeneutic, and prophetic dimensions of dialogue (Chrabieh & Roussel, 2005; Fernández, 2025; Losada-Sierra & Mandalios, 2014), the framework provides a more nuanced understanding of how religious discourse operates in the public sphere and how it can be reoriented toward peace-building.

Practically, the framework provides a set of tools for religious leaders, educators, and policymakers. It encourages the design of curricula that foster dialogical hermeneutics and epistemic humility, building on work in theology and religious education that experiments with interreligious learning environments (Comeau, 2012; Weisse, 2025). It supports the development of FKUB-style mediation that draws explicitly on shared ethical values, while also encouraging an interreligious social engagement modelled on initiatives such as the Interfaith Youth Corps, where shared service projects become occasions for mutual learning (Knitter, 2020; Schlenker, 2021). In the digital sphere, theological philosophy can inform guidelines for responsible use of social media, equipping communities to counter misinformation and polarisation through critical discernment and ethical communication (McLuhan, 1964; Tyurina & Stavkova, 2020). These implications are particularly significant for plural societies, such as Indonesia, where religious discourse has a direct impact on social cohesion, minority protection, and democratic culture.

The character of the findings reflects both the methodological choices and the contextual focus of the study. By adopting a descriptive-analytical literature review and concentrating on the Abrahamic traditions, the research foregrounds sources that already contain strong philosophical and ethical reflection, for example Hick, Tracy, Volf and Küng, and it reads them in conversation with Indonesian experiences of pluralism, conflict and constitutional pluralism (Küng, 1991; Tracy, 1994; Volf, 1996). At the same time, the incorporation of recent literature on pragmatic theologies, hermeneutic foundations of interreligiosity and intercultural theology means that the analysis is shaped by currents in contemporary scholarship that stress dialogue, practice and holism (Chrabieh & Roussel, 2005; Fernández, 2025; Strahovnik, 2022).

The findings also appear as they do because the study intentionally privileges sources and concepts that can sustain both strong confessional identities and genuine openness to the religious other. The emphasis on biblical values such as *imago Dei*, love of neighbour and reconciliation, as well as Qur'anic guidelines on cooperation and justice, naturally directs attention to those aspects of religious traditions that lend themselves to dialogical and ethical engagement. Furthermore, the engagement with critiques of purely rational dialogue and the turn toward asymmetrical, prophetic, and anamnestic reasoning (Losada-Sierra & Mandalios, 2014) reinforces the conclusion that effective dialogue must address power, memory, and suffering, not simply doctrinal differences.

In light of these findings, several actions suggest themselves. Religious leaders can intentionally embed theological and philosophical reflection in preaching, catechesis, and pastoral practice, so that values such as *shalom*, *agapē*, and *tzedek* shape attitudes toward other faiths as consistently as they shape internal community life. They can also cultivate practices of hospitality, for example, shared meals and liturgical or communal gatherings that intentionally include members of other traditions, recognising, as comparative theology has suggested, that concrete practices of welcome often open deeper avenues for theological conversation (Schlenker, 2021).

Educators at schools and universities can design interreligious learning experiences that combine scriptural study, philosophical reasoning, and dialogical pedagogy, thereby training students to think critically and empathetically across religious boundaries (Tracy, 1981; Volf, 2011; Weisse, 2025). Intercultural and religious education can incorporate narrative, metaphor, and analogy to convey the holistic nature of religious beliefs and foster epistemic humility (Strahovnik, 2022). Policymakers and civil society actors can strengthen and replicate institutions such as FKUB, ensuring that interfaith councils explicitly draw on shared ethical principles in their mediation work and engage not only elites but also youth and grassroots communities (Alawode, 2023; Knitter, 2020).

At the level of broader public policy and global cooperation, theological and philosophical insights can inform legal and political frameworks that protect religious freedom while encouraging responsible participation in plural public spheres (Comeau, 2012; Solihin et al., 2013). Finally, future research can extend this theological-philosophical framework to non-Abrahamic traditions and test it empirically in specific local settings, such as digital dialogue projects, restorative justice initiatives, or community-based reconciliation programs (Liefbroer et al., 2019). These steps indicate how theological philosophy

can move from conceptual analysis to sustained praxis, guiding concrete efforts to build more just, peaceful, and dialogically mature plural societies.

## 6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that theological philosophy plays a pivotal role in promoting inclusive and sustainable interreligious dialogue in today's increasingly pluralistic world. The findings suggest that epistemological, theological, and social obstacles, including conflicting assumptions about truth, historical biases, and resistance to religious pluralism, frequently hinder meaningful interfaith engagement. A dialogical framework grounded in theological philosophy and emphasising universal values of love, justice, peace, and human dignity, offers an effective way to address these divides. Such an approach not only mitigates tensions but also opens space for mutual understanding and cooperation, enabling participants to engage one another seriously without undermining the theological integrity of each faith tradition.

Academically, the research contributes to the literature on interreligious dialogue by integrating philosophical reflection with theological analysis and proposing a conceptual model that transcends purely sociological or doctrinal approaches. This model highlights the role of metaphysical and ethical reasoning in shaping how religious communities perceive one another and in clarifying the conditions under which dialogue can become genuinely transformative, rather than merely procedural. Practically, it provides a framework for religious leaders, educators, and policymakers to cultivate more constructive and harmonious interfaith relationships, particularly in plural societies such as Indonesia, where constitutional pluralism (Pancasila) and vibrant religious diversity generate both opportunities and challenges for public life.

The implications extend beyond the Indonesian context, suggesting that theological philosophy can inform global interfaith communication and peace-building efforts in regions marked by both deep conviction and profound division. Future research may apply this model to non-Abrahamic traditions or evaluate its effectiveness through empirical case studies in diverse communities, thereby testing and refining its categories in lived situations. Ultimately, the study affirms that theological philosophy, when grounded in universal ethical commitments, serves as a vital key to fostering enduring, meaningful, and transformative interfaith dialogue in a world marked by difference.

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