

Calvinist Ethics as a Framework for Interfaith Harmony

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Calvinist ethics;
Predestination;
Interfaith Tolerance;
Social Harmony;
Religious Pluralism.

Article history:

Received 2024-12-03
Revised 2024-12-07
Accepted 2024-12-18

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore Calvinist ethics as a foundation for tolerance in religious life within pluralistic societies. Calvinist ethics, with its principles of predestination, hard work, simplicity, and social responsibility, demonstrates significant potential to foster social harmony and interfaith tolerance. This study employs a qualitative approach through a literature review of relevant primary and secondary sources. The findings indicate that the doctrine of predestination provides a theological foundation for respecting individual freedom and fostering mutual respect. Furthermore, the principles of hard work and simplicity in Calvinism promote the reduction of social disparities, which are among the primary causes of religious conflict. In the Indonesian context, these values can be applied to overcome social segregation and create inclusive interfaith relationships. Examples from Calvinist communities in Indonesia and the Netherlands confirm how Calvinist principles facilitate interfaith dialogue and support social harmony. This research expands previous discussions by introducing a new dimension to understanding the relationship between Calvinism and religious pluralism. The integration of love, justice, and religious freedom into the modern societal context establishes Calvinism as not only a theological tradition but also an ethical framework relevant for addressing the challenges of religious pluralism.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi etika Calvinisme sebagai fondasi toleransi dalam kehidupan beragama di masyarakat pluralistik. Etika Calvinisme, dengan prinsip predestinasi, kerja keras, hidup sederhana, dan tanggung jawab sosial, menunjukkan potensi besar untuk menciptakan harmoni sosial dan toleransi antaragama. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka terhadap literatur primer dan sekunder yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa doktrin predestinasi

memberikan dasar teologis untuk menghormati kebebasan individu dan menciptakan hubungan yang saling menghormati. Selain itu, prinsip kerja keras dan hidup sederhana dalam Calvinisme mendorong pengurangan kesenjangan sosial, yang menjadi salah satu penyebab utama konflik agama. Dalam konteks Indonesia, nilai-nilai ini dapat diterapkan untuk mengatasi segregasi sosial dan menciptakan hubungan lintas agama yang inklusif. Contoh dari praktik komunitas Calvinis di Indonesia dan Belanda menegaskan bagaimana prinsip Calvinisme mampu mempromosikan dialog lintas agama dan mendukung harmoni sosial. Penelitian ini memperluas diskusi sebelumnya dengan menambahkan dimensi baru pada pemahaman hubungan Calvinisme dengan pluralisme agama. Integrasi nilai-nilai cinta kasih, keadilan, dan kebebasan beragama ke dalam konteks masyarakat modern membuat Calvinisme tidak hanya menjadi tradisi teologis tetapi juga kerangka etika yang relevan untuk menjawab tantangan pluralisme agama.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a nation with extraordinary ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, faces significant challenges in maintaining harmony and tolerance among religious communities (Haq et al., 2023; Idharoel Haq & Ziaulhaq, 2021). Despite upholding the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), cases of discrimination, religion-based conflicts, and intolerance frequently occur (Gultom & Haq, 2024). According to the SETARA Institute (2022), there were 217 incidents with 329 actions violating freedom of religion or belief in 2022, an increase from 175 incidents with 333 actions in 2021. Additionally, a national survey by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) (2023) in May 2022 revealed that extreme violence and tensions among religious communities persist, with ongoing discrimination and intolerance against minority groups despite the government's slogan of 'religious moderation.'

This phenomenon not only threatens social harmony but also directly impacts economic and political development, particularly in conflict-prone regions (Munawar-Rachman et al., 2022). On a global scale, challenges to religious pluralism are becoming more complex due to the rise of identity politics, which often exploits religion to deepen social segregation (Arnel et al., 2024). Consequently, an approach capable of bridging differences and encouraging interfaith cooperation is essential for fostering sustainable social harmony.

In this context, Calvinist ethics becomes highly relevant and urgent for in-depth exploration. Calvinist theological principles, such as love, justice, and social responsibility, have immense potential to encourage tolerance and interfaith harmony. However, this potential is often overlooked or misunderstood, largely due to stereotypes that depict Calvinism as exclusive and rigid, stemming from its Protestant roots. By examining how Calvinist principles can be contextually applied within pluralistic societies, this study not only provides new insights into the role of theology in social life but also offers practical solutions for addressing religion-based conflicts in the modern era. This makes the study crucial in contributing significantly to the development of interfaith tolerance in Indonesia and beyond.

Various studies have addressed the relationship between religion and tolerance (Ginting, 2021; Japar, 2019; Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020; Lercaro, 1961; Velassery, 2020), including the contributions of Protestant ethics to capitalism and studies on religious tolerance in Indonesia (Munawar-Rachman et al., 2022; Kurniawan, 2018; Mulya, 2019; Munawar-Rachman, 2018; Rosyad et al., 2022; Setia & Haq,

2023; Viktorahadi et al., 2022). However, previous research often focuses on sociological aspects or church institutions without delving into the specific theological principles of Calvinism that can be applied within the context of religious pluralism. For instance, the doctrine of predestination is often perceived as exclusive, hindering interfaith dialogue. This study seeks to address that gap by highlighting how Calvinist principles of love, justice, and social responsibility can be realized as an ethical framework supporting interfaith tolerance.

This study aims to analyze how Calvinist ethics can contribute to promoting interfaith tolerance in pluralistic societies. By focusing on three key aspects—internal challenges within Calvinist doctrine, Calvinist ethical principles supporting social harmony, and the relevance of these ethics in contemporary contexts—this research endeavors to offer a theoretical and practical framework for building tolerance based on inclusive and relevant theological values.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data (Samosir et al., 2023). Primary data were collected from key sources such as books discussing Calvinist ethics as a foundation for religious tolerance and other relevant works. Secondary data were derived from journal articles examining Calvinist ethics and its contributions to fostering interfaith tolerance.

The research process consisted of several stages. The first stage involved identifying and gathering literature relevant to the research topic. Data collection was conducted through a comprehensive literature review, including searches for books, journal articles, and other scholarly sources related to Calvinist ethics and religious pluralism. Subsequently, the collected data were selected based on their relevance and credibility to the study.

The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques (Huriani et al., 2022; Rofiqi & Haq, 2022). The analysis stages included data reduction to filter relevant information, data presentation in the form of main themes, and drawing conclusions based on emerging patterns and findings. The data were systematically processed to generate findings that could be formulated into conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2013). This analysis was conducted using a multidisciplinary approach, integrating theological ethics, pluralism theory, and interfaith studies to provide a deep understanding of the role of Calvinist principles in promoting harmony in diverse societies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Calvinist Ethics as a Moral Framework

Calvinist ethics originated from the thoughts of Jean Calvin, a prominent 16th-century theologian and a key figure in the Protestant Reformation (Mullett, 2016). Calvinism emerged as a response to the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, which were perceived to focus excessively on religious rituals and church hierarchy (Kempff, 2022). In his seminal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin proposed a new understanding of the relationship between humans and God, emphasizing the authority of the Bible as the ultimate guide for life (Thianto, 2022). Calvin highlighted the importance of personal faith and God's grace in human salvation, which became the core of the doctrine of predestination (Calvin, 2020). In a social context, Calvinist ethics developed as a critique of church corruption and feudal society, which were seen as barriers to morality and individual responsibility. As a result, these ethics provided a moral framework relevant to creating a more disciplined life focused on serving God while addressing the social challenges of the era.

Calvinist ethics are deeply rooted in the doctrine of predestination, forming a robust moral framework for social, economic, and spiritual life (Pitkin, 2021). Calvin's doctrine of predestination emphasizes that salvation is a divine gift that does not depend on human effort. This belief inspires followers to lead disciplined, industrious, and moral lives. These principles manifest in practices that promote simplicity, eschew luxury, and encourage individuals to utilize their potential as a form of worship to God (Batlajery, 2018).

"We are not our own: therefore, neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions. We are not our own: therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature. We are not our own: therefore, let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and the things that are ours. On the contrary, we are God's: to him, therefore, let us live and die. We are God's: therefore, let his wisdom and will preside over all our actions. We are God's: towards him, then, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our life be directed." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chapter 7, 2009).

Calvinist ethics emphasize not only hard work but also simplicity and a sense of responsibility (Little, 2024). From the Calvinist perspective, every individual possesses a divine calling to contribute to society through hard work and prudent resource management. Emphasizing frugality and rejecting materialism are hallmarks of these ethics, ultimately fostering productive and disciplined societies.

In this study, Calvinist ethics prove relevant as a framework for promoting interfaith tolerance. The principles of love and justice in Calvinism affirm the importance of respecting diversity and treating individuals equitably without discrimination (Lynch, 2022). In pluralistic societies, these ethics offer a theological foundation for fostering harmony and cross-religious cooperation.

This study finds that Calvinist principles, such as hard work and avoidance of waste, contributed to the growth of capitalism in Western Europe, as Max Weber explained (1992). However, this research also reveals that these same values can be applied to support tolerance in multicultural societies. These principles enable Calvinism to foster social solidarity by emphasizing universal values such as justice and love.

The relationship between Calvinism and capitalism highlights that these ethics are not only economically relevant but can also address social challenges, including identity-based conflicts. Calvinist principles that reject extravagance and emphasize hard work create a social environment that values diversity and promotes tolerance (Ndzi, 2023). These concepts align with the idea of religious tolerance, illustrating how Calvinism, often perceived as exclusive, can function as an ethical framework for strengthening interfaith tolerance (Rofiqi & Haq, 2022). These principles demonstrate that the theological values can be applied to pluralistic contexts to foster sustainable social harmony.

A concrete example of how Calvinist ethics reduced social conflict is evident in the history of German society during the post-Reformation era (Cromartie, 2021). In regions such as the Rhineland, Calvinist doctrine played a significant role in shaping the social and economic structures of the community. The principles of hard work and frugality taught by Calvinism became the foundation for cultivating a disciplined culture and collective responsibility within German society. These values were applied not only in individual lives but also in community management.

For instance, Calvinist communities in Germany successfully established economic networks based on work ethics and mutual trust (Snyder, 2020). Cooperative systems developed in these regions reflected how Calvinism encouraged collective resource management for shared benefits. Calvinist principles of simplicity and justice helped reduce economic inequality, often a source of social conflict. By ensuring wealth was not concentrated among a select few, these communities fostered equality, which strengthened social stability.

Moreover, Calvinist values encouraged a culture of dialogue among religious groups in Germany (Zafirovski, 2020). Calvin's teachings on religious freedom created a space for interfaith tolerance. In situations where differing beliefs often sparked conflict, Calvinist communities demonstrated that religious differences could be managed through cooperation and mutual respect. This was evident in local policies that prioritized interfaith education and social programs involving various religious groups.

This research also illustrates how Calvinist ethics support interfaith tolerance. One central principle is predestination, which asserts that salvation is solely God's decision. This belief fosters respect for individuals' freedom to choose their faith. Calvin argued that true faith is a gift from God and cannot be coerced. Consequently, Calvinism acknowledges religious freedom as a fundamental right for everyone.

The Calvinist work ethic contributes to harmonious interfaith relationships. Calvin viewed hard work as an act of worship and a simple lifestyle as a sign of respect for fellow humans. This principle fosters healthy social relationships where religious differences do not hinder collaboration toward

common goals. For example, Calvinist communities in Minahasa actively engage in interfaith dialogue and social activities involving various religious groups.

This study finds that Calvinist values of simplicity and justice are also relevant for addressing religion-based conflicts. By promoting a simple lifestyle, Calvinism helps reduce economic disparities, often a root cause of conflict. In Indonesia, these principles can be implemented to create a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Additionally, examples from the Netherlands demonstrate how Calvinist traditions support religious diversity through the "pillarization" system, where religious or ideological groups collaborate on public matters. This tradition fosters a tolerant and harmonious society despite comprising diverse groups with differing beliefs. This model is relevant for Indonesia, which also has significant religious and cultural diversity.

This study supports Weber's view that Calvinist ethics foster disciplined and productive societies. However, it adds a new dimension by showing how Calvinist values can promote tolerance and inclusivity in pluralistic societies. While previous studies focused on the relationship between Calvinism and capitalism, this research highlights the potential of Calvinist ethics to create sustainable social harmony.

In conclusion, Calvinism offers an ethical framework that promotes interfaith tolerance by applying universal values such as love, justice, and social responsibility. This research provides critical insights into how theological traditions can integrate into modern society to build more inclusive and peaceful communities.

3.2. Calvinist Ethics: A Framework for Social Harmony

One of the core aspects of Calvinist ethics is the doctrine of predestination, which emphasizes that salvation is a divine gift determined in advance, independent of human effort (Clerici, 2022). Calvin's teachings on predestination provide spiritual assurance to his followers, removing the anxiety over salvation. Instead, they are encouraged to lead disciplined, moral, and grateful lives. These practices reflect the values of integrity and moral character upheld by Calvinists as marks of the "elect" (Weber, 1992).

Predestination also motivates Calvin's followers to live lives that reflect their divine calling (Ndzi, 2023). A moral life is considered both a testimony to God's grace and a way to glorify Him through daily conduct. This principle underscores the importance of individual moral responsibility in fostering social harmony. In pluralistic societies, these values become relevant for promoting tolerance and respecting diversity.

Additionally, social responsibility and justice are vital pillars of Calvinist ethics. Calvin taught that the "elect" have an obligation to live within communities characterized by justice and love (Mullett, 2016). This responsibility includes caring for the welfare of others and rejecting social injustice. These principles are not only spiritual obligations but also means of creating more humane societies. The values of justice and love provide a strong theological foundation for fostering interfaith cooperation, especially in contexts of religious pluralism that demand social harmony.

Therefore, Calvinist ethics holds significant potential for establishing social harmony. Theological values often regarded as exclusive can be adapted to support tolerance in multicultural societies. Globally, these findings are relevant for addressing challenges such as religious conflicts and social segregation.

The author believes that Calvinist ethics can effectively promote interfaith tolerance. One key principle is the doctrine of predestination, which emphasizes that salvation is entirely God's decision. This belief cultivates respect for individual freedom in choosing one's faith. Calvin argued that genuine faith is a gift from God and cannot be forced (Thianto, 2022). Thus, Calvinism acknowledges the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental right for every individual.

The Calvinist work ethic also contributes to harmonious interfaith relationships. Calvin viewed hard work as an act of worship, and a simple lifestyle demonstrated respect for fellow humans. This principle fosters healthy social interactions, where religious differences do not hinder collaboration for common goals (Pitkin, 2021). For instance, Calvinist communities in Minahasa actively engage in interfaith dialogue and social initiatives involving various religious groups (Kimbal & Sumakul, 2021).

This study finds that Calvinist values of simplicity and justice are particularly relevant for addressing religion-based conflicts. By encouraging a simple lifestyle, Calvinism helps reduce economic disparities, which often serve as sources of conflict. In the Indonesian context, these principles can be applied to create a more inclusive and tolerant society. In other regions, such as the Netherlands, Calvinist traditions support religious diversity through the "pillarization" system, where religious or ideological groups collaborate on public matters (Houtman, 2020). This tradition fosters a tolerant and harmonious society despite its diverse population with differing beliefs. This model is highly relevant for Indonesia, which also has significant religious and cultural diversity (Hellemans, 2020).

Ultimately, this study supports Weber's perspective in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992) that Calvinist ethics can create disciplined and productive societies. However, this research adds a new dimension by demonstrating how Calvinist values can be applied to promote tolerance and inclusivity in pluralistic societies. While previous studies primarily focused on the relationship between Calvinism and capitalism, this research highlights Calvinist ethics' potential to create sustainable social harmony.

3.3. Calvinist Ethics and Interfaith Tolerance

Calvinist ethics, formulated by John Calvin in the 16th century, has profoundly influenced religious and social life, including attitudes toward religious diversity. Core principles such as predestination, the work ethic, simplicity, and religious freedom form the foundation of Calvinist perspectives on interfaith relationships (Little, 2024). Although Calvinism emphasizes the exclusivity of Christian truth, its doctrines also accommodate tolerance by respecting individual freedom and recognizing the human capacity for making independent choices (Snyder, 2020).

The Calvinist work ethic significantly shapes social interactions, including those with individuals of different faiths. Calvin viewed work as a form of worship and a divine calling that must be performed with dedication (Calvin, 2020). This ethic encourages followers to live orderly, moral, and responsible lives, both personally and socially. The emphasis on hard work and simplicity helps minimize material disparities and strengthens shared social values. These principles enable Calvinists to interact with people of other faiths without generating conflict or violence.

The emphasis on simplicity also plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance. Calvinism rejects extravagance and the accumulation of excessive wealth, considering them distractions from higher spiritual goals. Instead, simplicity fosters social equality, positively impacting interfaith relationships. In a pluralistic religious context, this principle creates inclusive social spaces where individuals are seen as equals, regardless of religious or socioeconomic differences (Clerici, 2022).

Furthermore, Calvinism promotes social responsibility and justice as expressions of love for others. According to Calvin's teachings, the "elect" have a duty to live in just and harmonious communities. This principle is evident in the activities of Calvinist communities worldwide, including in the Netherlands, South Korea, and Indonesia. In Indonesia, Calvinist communities in Minahasa actively participate in interfaith dialogue and humanitarian programs, reflecting the values of unity and cooperation aligned with Calvinist teachings (Mawikere & Hura, 2022).

This research supports Max Weber's (1905) view that Calvinist ethics fosters disciplined and productive societies. However, it goes further by demonstrating that Calvinist values can also be applied to promote tolerance and social harmony. Previous studies have focused more on the relationship between Calvinism and capitalism, whereas this research highlights the potential of Calvinist ethics to foster inclusivity in pluralistic societies. For example, while David Little (2024) highlights the exclusivity of the predestination doctrine, this study demonstrates how values of love and justice can provide a foundation for respecting diversity.

The study shows that Calvinist ethics is not only theologically relevant but also socially significant in creating harmony in multicultural societies. Principles such as predestination, the work ethic, simplicity, and social responsibility offer a robust moral framework to address challenges like social segregation and religious conflicts. Globally, these findings are relevant for addressing issues such as social inequality and religious polarization.

Ultimately, Calvinism offers an ethical framework capable of supporting interfaith tolerance through the application of universal values such as love, justice, and social responsibility. This study makes a vital contribution to strengthening interfaith theological discourse and provides practical insights for creating a more inclusive and peaceful society.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that Calvinist ethics, rooted in the principles of predestination, hard work, simplicity, and social responsibility, holds significant potential for fostering interfaith tolerance. These doctrines encourage individuals to lead disciplined and moral lives, ultimately strengthening social harmony in diverse communities. These values are not only relevant to building interfaith relationships but also to creating inclusive and equitable social systems.

In the context of pluralistic societies like Indonesia, applying Calvinist principles can serve as a model to address challenges such as social segregation and religious conflicts. This research makes a significant contribution to developing a relevant theological approach for promoting interfaith harmony. By integrating values of love, justice, and religious freedom, Calvinism becomes more than just a theological tradition; it also serves as an ethical framework for addressing the challenges of religious pluralism in the modern world.

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