

Understanding Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: A Christian and Muslim Debate

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ABSTRACT

Religious diversity in Malaysia has led to the development of what social scientists refer to as “religious pluralism.” Comprising of major religions of the world such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese Religion, Taoism, Sikhism and “others,” it has become a recent challenge for Malaysia to manage religious diversity and maintain social harmony. The discourse of “religious pluralism” started when some prominent Muslim scholars warned that Muslims in Malaysia are threatened by liberalism and religious pluralism, which can impinge into the faith of Muslims. The method used is based on semi-structured interviews with Muslim and Christian representatives who have been coloured with religio-political voices which was carried out in the year 2015. One of the objectives of this article is to present various academic interpretations of the term religious pluralism, exploring selected writings of social scientists. In addition, the article examines the current debate of religious pluralism in contemporary Malaysia, particularly with respect to the Christian and Muslim communities in the country. Finally, it will propose a number of recommendations on how the discourse can be used as an instrument for healthy coexistence in Malaysia. The findings also assert that different interpretations of religious pluralism among scholars have resulted in misunderstanding of the concept, particularly of members of Muslim and Christian communities in the country.

Keywords: Pluralistic Society, Muhibah, Malaysia, Christian-Muslim Relation, Interfaith Relations

1. Introduction

Religious diversity in Malaysia, has led to the development of what social scientists refer to as “religious pluralism”. Comprising of many religions of the world such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese Religion, Taoism, Sikhism and others, it is of recent challenge for Malaysia to manage religious diversity and maintain social harmony. Different interpretations of “religious pluralism” in the previous decades among scholars have been noticeable, particularly among members of Muslim and Christian communities in the country. Having divided into different groups, it is hard to attain to the common understanding of the term in the country. Some religious groups believe that “religious pluralism” is a mere term for religious plurality which has no implications on religious and philosophical perspectives. Whereas,

several notable figures have endeavoured to examine the meaning from the religious background of Islam and Christianity. It has paved for the way for scrutinizing this ideas as detrimental to Malaysia, particularly towards making the country a healthy multi-religious society. This article aims to highlight the background of the literature on selected writings of Muslim and Christian scholars on the discourse of religious pluralism in Malaysia. The discussion will include the penetration of this idea into Asia region particularly from Indonesia and Malaysia. It will highlight further the discourse of scholars on Hick's religious pluralism, its interpretation, significance and implications particularly how scholars embraced this idea from religious and philosophical perspectives. It is prevalent that many scholars have attempted to equate the meaning of religious pluralism with the essential modern values such as tolerance, religious freedom and inclusivism. However, this idea which has been endorsed by John Hick and the promotion of plural truth claims was deemed as problematic and perilous to Islamic and Christian faith. Due to this, many scholars have come out with further recommendations as to ensure unity and harmony among diversity of faiths in the country.

2. Religious Pluralism: Approaching Southeast Asia Region

The scenario of religious pluralism in Malaysia and Indonesia surfaced to be tougher, whereby many religious representatives attempt for in-depth discussion (Anis Malik Thoha, 2005). As Hefner describes countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia "illustrate the striking examples of the legacy and the challenge of cultural pluralism". (Hefner, 2001: 4) In fact, Feener is of the view that there is a significant shift in the discourse of religious pluralism notably in Indonesia, from a theological-based discussion to socially-oriented basis, which provides more rooms for diversity and differences in the local administrative and the State. He asserts that the interpretations of religious pluralism, religious freedom as well proselytization, which are differently deployed in the contemporary Asian societies, could be made possible in what he termed as "the secular models of state-regulated religious pluralism." (Feener, 2014: 3) This scenario is more vigilant in Indonesia whereby a formal structure of organization called as "Liberal Islam's network" (*JIL or in Malay Jaringan Islam Liberal*) were set up in Indonesia in 2001, to pave the way for a more "modern" and "secular" outlook of religion particularly for "new" interpretations of Islam which are compatible with the modern values such as religious diversity, tolerance, religious freedom, and human rights. (Budi Handrianto, 2013). Most of the scholars of this thought recognize the Qur'an as the source of legitimacy for religious pluralism. (Azyumardi Azra, 2007).

Yet, the idea of religious pluralism, which implies that no religion has a privilege claim to religious truth, has been made unlawful by the *Fatwa* Council of Indonesia predominantly due to its alliance with liberalism and secularism.(Anis Malik Thoha, 2005). This is also due to the claim that it is capable to infringe the da'wah movement in Indonesia and the fundamental pillars of Islam. (Bagir, & Cholil, 2008). Albeit, stringent measures against the spread of Hick's version of religious pluralism in Indonesia, the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism was established in July 2003 in Jakarta to disseminate the authoritative Muslim texts advocating pluralism. It has been a platform for the "progressive Muslims" (Mun'im Sirry, 2004) in the

Southeast Asian regions to gain support and to promote values such as justice, gender equality, religious freedom, tolerance, human rights and democracy.

In Malaysia, various interpretations of religious pluralism have spurred discrepancies among scholars of Muslim and Christian; and this reflects one of the challenging conundrums in the region. This is true as Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman (1997), both share their belief that religious phenomena in Malaysia, despite having its uniqueness, is challenged by many circumstances and breakdowns in facing different religious backgrounds and identities. It is also prevalent that a number of scholars are of the view that the discourse of religious pluralism is inevitable in the making of a multi-racial Malaysia, consisting of diverse religions, races and cultures. This was due to the historical and legal facts that Malaysia from the beginning was in favour of the idea of “plural society”. (Christopher Rodney Yeoh, 2014).

Meanwhile, scholars have viewed that it is inappropriate for Muslims to believe that the idea of religious pluralism was merely directed to the meaning of diversity or having different belief systems. Harussani, the Mufti of Perak was noted addressing to the Muslims that they should be prudently cautious of the threats of “religious pluralism” and liberalism particularly that can impinge into the *tawhidic* nature of Islam. (Mustapha, 2006). This is due to the implication of this idea that have proven to lead to liberal and secular approach in understanding religion particularly to the Muslims. It has subsequently led to crucial debates and controversies mainly to Muslim communities in particular, religious representatives and also academics.

Quite often too that some religious representatives quote religious pluralism with the value of multiculturalism or the co-existence of multi-religions which no doubt implies to its literal meaning. Yet, the concern of scholars, as for Muslims and Christians are not due to the meaning of multiculturalism or plurality of religions, as many would like to believe. Rather, it is more towards scrutinizing the impacts of this belief on the theological and religious point of views. For the Evangelical Christian Movement in Malaysia, they could comprehend that one of the meanings of religious pluralism will denote to the coexistence of multiple beliefs and religions in a society, but the idea has undoubtedly imposed pivotal implications on Christian doctrines and the proselytizing efforts in Malaysia. Due to this, the government and religious scholars have been in attempts to curtail the penetration of this belief into the religious spectrums of Malaysian society. A significant number of scholars have noted to be having serious problem with the penetration of Hick’s version of religious pluralism into Malaysia. (Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, 2012).

Still, the discourse of religious pluralism in Malaysia comes with intriguing findings that it has also brought unsparing criticism to Malaysia. Yeoh, who has been part of the pluralism project of Harvard University notices that the rigid stance of Muslim scholars on the idea has resulted towards termination of several important activities and celebrations which have been in practice for quite some time in order to foster multi-racial unity. This is due as they were seen as a threat to Islam. Yeoh further examines that because of this, many “shared celebrations” (*kongsi raya*), open houses (*rumah terbuka*) organized by many ethnic groups were discouraged in Malaysia. (Yeoh, 2013).

This has been further illustrated by Rita Camilleri (2014) declaring that the state's response towards the discourse of religious pluralism in contemporary Malaysia was seen as the decline of "religious tolerance" in the country. She indicates that;

In spite of earlier periods of relative harmony, reports in the last few years have signalled the decline of religious tolerance, and with it the curtailing of religious freedoms and "Islam" tightening its on what is considered acceptable conduct by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For some, this unfolding situation indicates a lack of tolerance of the religious other that has reached crisis point, manifested, for instance, in the desecration of the sacred places of people of other faiths. (Camiller1, 2014: 230)

Camilleri, is not alone to demonstrate the importance to equate the meaning of religious pluralism with a so-called modern values such as tolerance, religious freedom and inclusivism. Some studies have yet to predict a similar trend has been extended that several important scholars in Malaysia, mainly among Muslims and Christians, have thought a similar view.

It is also worth to describe the historical religious background of Malaysia that would discover how Islam and Christianity penetrated in Malaysia. This is essential as it would in brief highlight the religious scenario which has notably given a significant influence to the contemporary relations. The study will make attempt to highlight some significant religious phenomena in relation to the discourse of religious pluralism in Indonesia which has influenced the situation in Malaysia and the significant efforts taken by the Malaysian Government to withdraw the penetration of the idea of religious pluralism.

3. Historical Development of Religion in Malaysia

Malaysia is observed for its diversity pertaining to its cultures, religions and people. It is also famously known for its multiculturalism, and was recorded back in the history for becoming the meeting place for the traders all across the world. It is also outstanding that Malaysia continues to become such a vibrant "home" for all religions of the world including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Chinese Religions, Sikhism, Baha'ism and the aborigines' belief. According to the recent statistics of Malaysia the total population is 29, 336, 800 and 63 percent are Muslims, 20 percent are Buddhists, 9 percent are Christians), 7 percent are Hindus) and the remaining 1 percent are the adherents of other Taoism, Confucianism, Tribal and Traditional Chinese Religion.

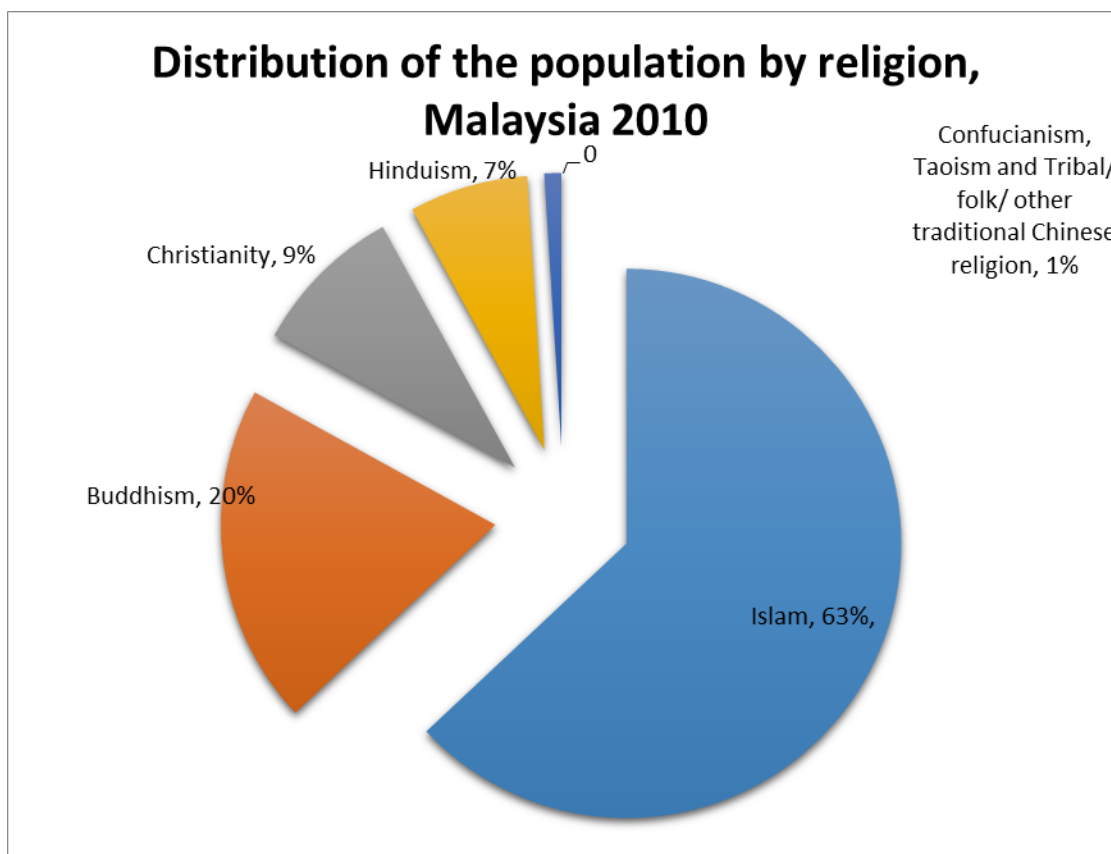


Fig 1: Distribution of Malaysian Population by Religion in Year 2010 (Source: http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&id=1215,2010)

Religious experience in Malaysia has been painted with encounters and challenges. Scholars and religious authorities play a very significant role as to maintain stability and harmonious relationship among religious people of different cultures and beliefs. The Article 153 in the Constitution stipulates the importance of Malaysia as being pluralistic society whereby it explains rights and responsibilities of religious communities to live together. We could also see how both counterparts of Christians and Muslims have been learning how to co-exist and cooperate in a peaceful and responsive manner. Due to some conflicts and misunderstandings among Muslims and Christians in recent years, particularly over the usage of the Supreme Name “Allah” by the Christians, religious stability and harmony in Malaysia has been somehow challenged.

There is no doubt that religious experience in Malaysia is incomparable from any other country in this world. Despite the fact that Islam is seen as a dominant and popular religion among the population, other religions including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Chinese religions are given appropriate freedom to continue practicing their religious obligations (Yousif, 1998). It is also quite unique that although Islam has become the religion of the State, which confirms its special place over non-Muslims in areas such as to protect the faith of the Muslim believers, to withstand any propagation of other religions toward its followers, and to repudiate any religious ideology that is detrimental to the Muslims and to

enforce laws to protect Muslims' welfare, the welfare of the others are well stipulated in the Constitution. Still, it is a great challenge for Malaysia to maintain the rights of all nations and religions. Nevertheless, issues concerning religious minorities continued to have been portrayed negatively; mainly on the moves taken by the Malaysian authority. Such an attitude is, however, very disappointing, that predominantly occupied in the "foreign" perspectives. Negative images were directed especially to the acts of proscribing the usage of the supreme name Allah by the Christians, the resentment of *Shiah* teachings, restrictions over religious pluralism and many others. This is also among the main challenges for Malaysian authorities to bring into actions the spirit of harmonious relationship in the society (Gomez, 2014).

4. Pluralistic Nature of Malaysian Society

Along with its religious and cultural diversity, Malaysia has never anticipated that religious communities other than Muslims are deemed unimportant. Each and every religion is treated essential and has been given duly respect and rights to be appropriately embraced and practiced by its community. This is the very essence values that have been promoted since the leadership of Tun Mahathir, that the society was accustomed to the spirit of living together regardless of different languages, cultures and faiths that certainly make up vigorous Malaysians. Therefore, some scholars is of the view that the idea of "plural" is innate from the very beginning of Malaysian history. Osman Bakar explains this essential value which has been nurtured and developed ever since the independence days of Malaysia (Osman Bakar, 2009).

Husin Mutalib, a political scientist who is well-verse on Malaysian studies, when describing the state of religious and cultural pluralism in Malaysia, asserts that the country has sustained an "admirable record of both democratic rule and economic prosperity" along with the "manageable degree of stability in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims." (Husin Mutalib, 2007: 43). Mutalib further alludes that the phenomena of religious pluralism in Malaysia illustrates a striking example in the region. This is also observed by Azhar Ibrahim Alwee that there is a serious request for pluralism, diversity and inclusivism among Muslims and Christians despite of the escalating fear of civilizational conflicts. "Recognizing the need for and the possibility of pluralism is fundamental, though there are divergent of views on this matter" (Azhar Ibrahim Alwee, 2011: 217).

As Malaysia has been succumbing to the idea of plural society, the idea of "religious pluralism" is persuaded into the country, which has been received quite well in the West, and also in Indonesia. Therefore, Malaysia is subsequently challenged to accommodate with the process of globalization and modernization in the West that posed an implication on how it should perceive "religious pluralism" (Asma Asfaruddin, 2008). Meanwhile, some scholar even argues that as Malaysia has been consistent portraying a plural landscape in its political and religious background, it is further requested to experience the values that apparently look similar yet very alien to its culture and norms. (David Chong, 2014). Haslina Ibrahim (2005), in explaining her discontent to this idea argues that religious pluralism brings misunderstanding and religious disputes particularly in relation to its religious truth-claims. Some scholars have been using the term "religious pluralism" interchangeably to indicate a mere plurality of religions while some might use it to indicate a philosophical values that advocate equality of

religious truths (Haslina Ibrahim, 2014). It was further heated when the former Deputy Minister, Anwar Ibrahim quoted Rumi in his speech at London Economic School and therefore was accused of promoting Hick's pluralism. Yet, Hick's version of religious pluralism was later renounced by Najib Tun Razak, current Prime Minister of Malaysia insisting that it is perilous to Islam and Muslims. He was noted saying that "pluralism, liberalism – all these 'isms' are against Islam and it is compulsory for us to fight these" (*Utusan Malaysia*, July, 19, 2012).

Osman Bakar while examining the discourse of religious pluralism, observes that it is not a new phenomenon, rather it was discussed few times ago due to curiosity, intellectual purposes and practical need of the society. Further, it has reached many levels be it theological, philosophical, cultural and legal-political (Osman Bakar, 2009). Chandra Muzaffar, Imtiyaz Yusuf, Osman Bakar and Muhammad Hashim Kamali are among those scholars, whose writings are significantly recognized locally and abroad, discussing diverse interpretations of pluralism which implies a wider perspective of the term "religious pluralism" (Chandra Muzaffar, 2011) For instance, Hashim Kamali (2013) focuses in great details on the verses of the Qur'an pertaining to the understanding of Islam. His treatises are somehow quite confrontational that he acknowledges validity of religions, other than Islam. (Uthman El-Muhammady, 2012). Kamali demonstrates that religious pluralism can be understood if one fathoms the meaning of it in relation to three Qur'anic verses that characterized Islam. Hashim Kamali, Osman Bakar, Chandra Muzaffar and several other scholars share a similar view, recognizing the pivotal importance of understanding Islam from a wider scope.

Quite a number of Muslims find no conflicting view with the idea insisting that it is a sociological reality towards diversity, and thus compatible with Islam and also the Muslims. They are consistent portraying serious attention from scholars and academics on how Islam deals with diversity and modernity. Therefore, Osman Bakar alleges that Muslims should not abstaining themselves from dealing with the idea rather engaging with this reality. Osman Bakar has further come out with Qur'anic principles in dealing with pluralism. (Osman Bakar, 2009). In contrast, other Muslim social scientists who have studied the scenario in Indonesia observed that not only the term has been synonymous with religious diversity, but it is a reality that leads toward a harmonious co-existence as proposed by a so-called the "pluralist-inclusive" group. This highlights the positive minds of living together in facing diversity in the society (Buddhi Munawwar Rachman, 2007). Therefore, Malaysian kind of pluralism to some social scientists, depicting diversity and plurality in religions as not merely a slogan but essentially bind a society of plural coexistence. (Samian, 2010)

The discourse of religious pluralism among Muslims has enabled some scholars to scrutinize every aspects of religious pluralism, its themes, scopes and meanings as to revoke some general assumptions made by Western propagators. A. Harris withdraws the claim that religious pluralism at frequent guaranteed the peaceful co-existence among religions and the presumption that the exclusive stance is often contributed to religious disputes and tensions among religious communities. Tolerance and religious pluralism, though interrelated are two separate entities, that if someone rejects religious pluralism, he or she should not be deemed intolerant. Several important questions were then posted by the experts as whether religious pluralism is at frequent guaranteed the peaceful coexistence among religious communities, as

claimed by the advocators in the West. And, does it always true that the exclusive stance is often contributed to religious disputes and tensions among religious communities? (Khalif Muammar A. Harris, 2006). Likewise, the claim that religion has been the source of religious dispute and that religious indifferentism should take place is another assumption that has no proof at all. Religious tumults happened due to misunderstanding and misjudgement. Still, debates and educational forums are necessary to educate people about this. Religious pluralism is a reality that implies awareness on its consequences. Although, the idea has been deemed unlawful, it is essential for the Government to create a healthy ground in relation to educate people especially majority of them still unsure on the implications of this idea on them.

The Christians too, although have discovered that religious pluralism is a contested term, found the importance to consider discussing the idea in relation to such values including tolerance, religious harmony and freedom. This is because some believed that Muslim rigidity on the idea will impose greater restrictions on religious minorities particularly pertaining to their concerns. Therefore, they would also agree that religious pluralism is inevitable in the making of multi-religious Malaysia. The reactions seem to be divided, and that attempts to highlight the very meaning of the term from literal, philosophical, theological, ethno-religious and sociological point of views have increased. Likewise, the interests of non-Muslims are being presented by some Christian scholars especially to be able to differentiate the divisions of meanings for religious pluralism. The discourse of religious pluralism in Malaysia among the Christians has demanded for a significant attention. The Christians, particularly, have indeed responded in a distinctive way and were divided into different groups and inclinations. Being a majority and a minority group in Malaysia, between the Muslims and the Christians, the latter have been so assertive on the undertakings of the former. Among the Christians too, they have been challenged in understanding the discourse, particularly at maintaining a harmonious relationship between their different sects. This is due, as Nathan also asserts that pluralism refers largely to “the notion of diversity and the acceptance, if not tolerance of difference” (Nathan, 2007: 1).

A prominent representative of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, Robin Rodriguez, who defines the term from the word plural and observes that most of the countries in the world today may have got some form of religious pluralism. “People cannot have plural societies without religious pluralism. Whenever there is a plural society, there will also exist religious pluralism.” Obviously, religious pluralism does take various forms (Robin Rodriguez, 2015).

The same quest has been affirmed by Ng Kam Weng a leading Christian Evangelical leader in Malaysia who clarifies that despite its contentious connotation, religious pluralism resembles an inescapable reality. (Weng, 2015) Tan Kong Beng, on the other hand, emphasizes substantially on its significance insofar it does not rob the rights of other religious minorities. No matter how more meanings we can ascribe to religious pluralism yet the most important here how the values of appreciating differences and respecting others can be actualized in our experience. “It has been recognized in the modern world to live peacefully in a country of multi-faiths, religions, cultures and so on” (Tan Kong Beng, 2014). Despite, its importance and survival in most countries in the world, Eugene Yapp corresponds its fundamental consequences to

religious beliefs such as Christianity and Islam that scholars and social scientists should have never ignored (Yapp, 2014).

The evangelical Movements, on the other hand, demands for its interpretation from philosophical point of view. David Chong has consistently reminds the Christians of its connotation and implication in Christian theology. (Chong, 2015) The Asian Evangelicals have been also vocal to voice out their open criticism towards theological pluralism since according to them “it fundamentally shakes the foundations of traditional Christianity” (Ho Jin Jun, 2013, p.32). Chong further explains that idea of religious pluralism in great details that it was once championed by a prominent Christian theologian known as John Hick, who calls for a Copernican revolution in his theological stance. Hick insists of a hypothesis that set up inductively from the ground level and not from the cosmic standpoint. Each tradition is a response to the transcendent reality. Therefore, the centre of this universe of faiths is no more Jesus Christ but what all religions perceived as God/ Ultimate reality, whose light is reflected in all major religions (Chong, 2005). It promises a degree of love, joy, tolerance, patience and peace in the heart of the non-Christians.

In favour of religious pluralism, all religions have to “relativize” their conflicting truth claims and have to agree exclusively on something that is alien to their faith. Scrutinizing the viewpoints of the pluralists especially from the perspective of the ten blind men who tend to take “the position of all-seeing Rajah”, they admit limitations within them. (Chong, 2013). “Is this pluralist’s way of assuming others as mistaken is any more tolerant than others? Would this viewpoint be much more reliable and really deliver its promises of peace and tolerance? (Chong, 2015).

For many evangelical Christians in Malaysia, salvation can only be obtained through evangelical Christian mission (Yapp, 2014). The major impact to Christianity is that the doctrine of incarnation will not be fundamental: it is seen as the main reason for anti-Semitism, exploitation of the third world and hostile towards other religions. This move was mainly driven by a view that the doctrine of Christ incarnation has been the source of enmity with the Christian others. So, it is also noticeable that the ethical criterion to evaluate others is based on “compassionate social implications”. (Chong, 2013).

In fact, the Christian theologians are drastically challenged by a so called modern articulation of the term “proselytization” and “conversion” of which they can no longer sustain the spirit of “evangelization of the world” rather it negatively presupposed the idea of imperialistic arrogance (Ho Jin Jun, 1998). This is true when some Asian evangelicals are even condemned by the pluralist theologians for their exclusivist point of view and their undertakings to cultivate the absolute truth-claim in their method and strategy. Realizing the fact that the West has been so enthusiastic with the idea of religious pluralism, some scholars have determinedly expressed their resentment towards it. (Weng, 1995). Thus, many would insist that *Muhibah* value should guide the religious communities in dealing with diversity. It is a value that can bring people together and enable them to work enthusiastically on social and economic upbringing of the nations (Beng, 2014).

The evangelical movements, although can never tolerate the philosophical connotations of the term, are willing to extend their commitments on issues pertaining to religious freedom,

tolerance – which are the main ingredients of religious pluralism. They have urged for a more conducive understanding with the very fact that Malaysia encompasses of plural religions and ethnic groups. The Christians, such as the Catholic Church in Malaysia, are hopeful that religious pluralism will set ahead for a more tolerant and inclusive society on the basis of the common and universal values of humanity. (Rodriquez, 2015).

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the discourse of religious pluralism in Malaysia demands for a significant attention by many. Religious scholars and representatives, together with authorities and leaders have to look into many aspects be it religious, theological, social and political. The muftis and religious scholars, have agreed in July 2014, to declare a fatwa asserting that religious pluralism and liberalism are antithetical with the teachings of Islam. Muzakarah of the fatwa Council has decided that the penetration of liberalism and pluralism which implies that no religion has a privileged claim to religious truth and salvation, is against the syariah i.e. the Islamic Law. This is a continuation for a resolution made by the Muzakarah Ulama' on 13 Jun 2006 to be committed in preserving purification of 'aqidah from the influence of liberalism and pluralism in Malaysia. Yet, it is also important to educate the people and the religious counterpart, particularly sharing the common values among the Muslims and Christians. It is noticeable that the discourse can provide a healthy and meaningful relationship between these two religions and pave a way for a common understanding.

Due to the alarming religious tension in the country, the Interfaith Relations Working Committee was set up under the Prime Minister's Departments in Feb 2010, to promote understanding and harmonious living among religious communities. It was, upon the approval, called as Committee to Promote Inter-Religious Understanding and Harmony [Jawatankuasa Mempromosikan Persefahaman dan Keharmonian Antara Penganut Agama] (JKMPKA). The committee constitutes both governmental and non-governmental organizations, including Department of National Unity and National Integration [Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi] (JPNIN), Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), Institute of World Fatwa Management and Research (INFAD-USIM), Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM) together with Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN), Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoist (MCCBCHST) and International Spiritual Fellowship (INSAF). Its establishment is an ally to the National Unity Advisory Council [Majlis Penasihat Perpaduan Negara] which was set up on 23rd Feb 1970, which its main responsibility is to execute strategies to promote racial unity in the country.

It is hope that the Committee will provide affiliation between federal government agencies, state departments and religious leaders in order to look forward for sound solutions concerning issues on religious matters, through facilitating the discussions among scholars and studying the existing policies and regulations in the country. Due to the recognition of the role of religion in Malaysia, *Muhibah*, or the spirit of living together should be the guiding principle for the committees and the nations. It is hope that the essence of *Muhibah* which consist of

seven distinctive principles of (Dialogue, Kinship, Harmony, Sincerity, Mutual Trust, Integrity and Respect) will always provide a source of strength for all Malaysians and continuously bind the community with love, respect and mutual understanding.

In a nutshell, Muslim and Christian communities have to play a crucial role to work hard fostering the positive values to bring back the national flavor of Malaysian identity in issues relating to religious experience. The future may be unsettled, yet it is hopeful for all Malaysians to see many positive outcomes in dealing with issue such as religious pluralism. This, in return will lead a more respectful, cooperative and healthy nation. Religious pluralism, is one of any kinds that makes people aware that the state of religious experience in Malaysia, has taken seriously the attention and focus of religious representatives and academics altogether to work for a common understanding. This would bring forth new initiatives and alternatives for other religious communities in Malaysia to take a lead.

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Interviews

Excerpt from the interview with Eugene Yapp, Secretary General of National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia (NECF) on Dec 17, 2014 (Wednesday) at NECF main office, 32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Excerpt from the interview with Pastor David Chong, a representative of Presbyterian Church, on Monday (April 20, 2015), at City Discipleship Presbyterian Church, W-10-2, Subang Square Business Centre, Jalan SS15/4G Subang Jaya, 47500, Selangor.

Excerpt from the interview with Ng Kam Weng, Director of KAIROS Research Centre, on Monday (April 7, 2015) at 19B, Jalan SS22/19, Damansara, 47400, Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

Excerpt from the interview with Robin Rodriguez, a representative of St. John Cathedral, Jalan Bukit Nanas, 50250 Kuala Lumpur on Friday (April 1st 2015) interview held at International Institute of Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Jalan Duta.

Excerpt from the interview with Tan Kong Beng, the Executive Secretary of Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) on Nov 19, 2014 (Wednesday) at CFM's main office, 10 Jalan 11/9, Section 11, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.