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**LEONARD SWIDLER AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE
THEOLOGY FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

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Abstract: Transformative theology is an idea to explore the meaning of dialogue that does not only focus on aspects of theological teachings but needs to touch on real human issues. This article aims to analyze the implementation of transformative theological ideas in Indonesia that have gone beyond the concept of dialogue itself. This research is qualitative, data collection using the in-depth reading of Leonard Swidler's works, websites, and other relevant sources. The results of this research are the implementation of transformative dialogue values in socio-cultural aspects and an emphasis on universal humanitarian services based on philosophical and social analysis, which is evidenced through, first, the implementation of transformative theology oriented towards the appreciation of religious and cultural diversity; second, enrichment of theological perspectives with acculturation of local culture; Third, oriented towards humanitarian, social services. The conclusion of this study shows that interfaith dialogue needs to transform into an activity oriented towards positive relationships to respond to the challenges of the development of the times collectively (I-Thou) based on the ethical awareness of universal humanity.

Keywords:

Transformative Theology, Leonard Swidler, Interfaith Dialogue, Social Service Theology, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Leonard Swidler's transformative theological ideas have been put into practice in Indonesia, going beyond mere interfaith dialogue. The concept of dialogue has evolved from simply exchanging knowledge about different religions' theological aspects, such as religious teachings and figures. Resane (2022) demonstrates how to integrate theology into dialogue and make it the focal point (Resane 2022). Additionally, Meir's study (2022) highlights theology as a key element in dialogue (Meir 2022). Both Resane and Meir's studies emphasize that theology remains central to dialogue activities. In contrast, this model of theological dialogue transforms the traditional focus on religious teachings among leaders into one that addresses socio-cultural issues involving all religious people.

The current interfaith dialogue, as it is commonly understood, is primarily focused on theological aspects. This includes exchanging information, knowledge, understanding, and experience of religious teachings. However, it has not deeply explored the transformation of these theological teachings into actual socio-cultural activities. This shift towards socio-cultural activities is not just a change in perspective but a necessary evolution in the dialogue process. As Resane's (2021) study on Moltmann's thought suggests, there is a crucial need to translate theology into a liberating value (Resane 2021). Therefore, studying transformative theology, particularly Swidler's ideas is paramount and warrants significant discussion.

Previous studies on interreligious dialogue can be categorized into three main trends. First, some studies discuss the basis of dialogue from various perspectives (Mubarokah 2023; Kubacki 2021; Koh 2020; Krauze 2021). These studies analyze interreligious dialogue from different angles, including Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, and sociological and historical perspectives. Second, there are research papers that delve into the forms and models of dialogue (Deta 2021; Tahir and Wijaya 2024; Dulin 2022; Nasir 2022; Mansur 2023). The authors of these papers believe that dialogue can take on various models and patterns, such as seminars, workshops, and visits to worship sites, and they argue for framing theological dialogue in different settings. Lastly, some studies outline the benefits of dialogue (Schumacher 2023; Hasanović 2023). These researchers highlight the benefits and utility of theological dialogue between different religions within their respective contexts and advocate for further academic study. However, these existing studies are limited in their coverage of the theological aspects and the practice of interreligious relations. Additionally, they do not address the implementation of Leonard

Swidler's transformative theology in the Indonesian context. Therefore, this research aims to address these gaps and contribute to this field's existing body of knowledge.

This paper enriches prior studies by examining Swidler's transformative theological concepts within Indonesian interreligious dialogue from an epistemological perspective. The research outlines the foundational principles for implementing these concepts and their diverse application models in dialogue, highlighting their practical implications. The article pursues three objectives: delineating the epistemological foundation of dialogical theology that honors diversity, investigating the evolution of Christian theology from Western traditions to acculturative theology, and assessing the transition from theological dialogue to dialogues incorporating universal humanitarian efforts. These objectives collectively aim to elucidate Leonard Swidler's notion of theological transformation, particularly in Indonesia, and its practical ramifications for interreligious dialogue.

This article argues that specific epistemological factors influence the Catholic theological transformation in Indonesia. These factors include the importance of diversity, which encourages transformative dialogue. This dialogue adjusts local socio-cultural conditions, prioritizing humanitarian and social services and fostering collective motivation to create solid social engagement among people. Thus, this article demonstrates that the implementation of Swidler's ideas, particularly in Indonesia, indicates that transformative dialogue has moved beyond the theological discussions that have previously taken place.

2. Literature review

2.1. Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Diversity

Interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool for sharing knowledge and fostering understanding among diverse communities (Portilla 2022; Aye 2023). In today's globalized world, marked by cultural diversity and encounters, interfaith dialogue has the potential to bridge differences, creating a platform for harmony and peace (A. S. Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022; Siahaya et al. 2023). It is crucial to recognize the vital role of interfaith dialogue in addressing religious extremism and shaping the identity of religious societies (Shahreen 2023). Therefore, it is essential to understand the significance of this dialogue deeply (Ibrahim et al. 2012).

By disseminating this idea through various educational media, we can ensure that its significance is understood and embraced by all (Kruja 2022; Pope 2020). Influential figures and leaders must champion this dialogue and spread awareness of its importance, ultimately paving the way for a peaceful and civilized world (Hutabarat 2023; Mchedlova 2022). The

dissemination of the importance of interfaith dialogue will ultimately become a common awareness to realize human life in this peaceful and civilized world (Thameem 2024; Bano et al. 2023).

2.2. Transformative Theology

The power of deep dialogue and critical thinking characterizes Leonard Swidler's groundbreaking concept of transformative theology. This idea has significantly impacted how we approach religious diversity, interreligious relations, and the intersection of religion with scientific studies (Anderson 1993). In his influential work, "Toward a Universal Theology of Religion" (2015), Swidler emphasizes the importance of a universal theological perspective that celebrates and honors religious diversity and fosters a sense of inclusivity and respect. Additionally, Swidler's introduction of the "Dialogue Decalogue" underscores the essential role of dialogue in fostering understanding, respect, and a genuine willingness to listen and learn from individuals practicing different religions (Swidler 2015). This transformative theological approach is designed to combat ignorance while embracing advancements in science and technology while maintaining a critical mindset (Barros 2022; Ogden 2021).

According to Swidler, transformative theology is a powerful tool in fighting social justice, especially for the oppressed. It also encompasses the spirit of liberation, emphasizing the essential process of freeing oneself from various forms of oppression. Furthermore, promoting social solidarity among members of different religious communities is crucial to advocating for justice and peace. Lastly, actively engaging in dialogue across religious differences is seen as a means to enrich religious understanding, expand humanitarian networks, and bolster social services (Krijnsen 2023).

2.3. Social Service Theology

Social Service Theology offers a versatile and relevant approach that can be implemented across different contexts (Klaasen 2023). In Christian theology, social service theology is an inseparable element of the Christian faith and a practical embodiment of its teachings (Opuni-Frimpong 2023b; 2023a). This concept signifies that social service theology ensures religious inclusivity and social integration.

Among the areas that are the focus of social service theology are the problems of poverty, social injustice (Hermkens, Kenneth, and McKenna 2022), conflict and violence (Shannahan and Denning 2023), and environmental issues (Hahne 2024; Rappaport and Corbally 2023). Trudeau

(2024) emphasizes the definition of poverty in a theological context as death while making someone rich is a necessity of life (Trudeau 2024). Departing from this conceptual definition, Reyneke (2024) states that social service theology can realize rights at the level of access to education (Reyneke 2024). Within social service theology, it is evident that religion can significantly contribute to alleviating poverty by providing a sense of security, comfort, and hope for a brighter future (Shunmugam 2024). These studies emphasize the importance of addressing poverty from a comprehensive, rights-based approach, engaging all stakeholders.

3. Method

This study explores the practical application of Leonard Swidler's transformative theology for interreligious relations in Indonesia. The research is qualitative, and the data was gathered through in-depth reading of Swidler's works and other relevant literature to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Initially, the study reviewed primary data from Leonard Swidler's works and secondary data from previous studies. The focus shifted to analyzing Swidler's writings on transformative theology and other relevant works from journals and books—the next step involved organizing and categorizing the selected data based on the research questions. Data analysis followed three stages: reduction, display, and verification, all carried out systematically. Data reduction involved sorting and selecting relevant information, while data display presented the analyzed data in a narrative-analytical format. Data verification was performed to test the validity of the data in line with the research theme and approach used.

4. Result

4.1. The Existence of Dialogical Theological Ideas that Respect Diversity

Dialogical theology is a religious view that prioritizes respect for differences and diversity of religions, cultures, and ethnicities. These differences and diversity in Indonesia have challenged Catholic theology and other religions. Catholicism, or Christianity in general, coexists side by side with adherents of Islam and other religions. Together with Muslims and adherents of other religions, Catholics and other Christians build awareness by forming dialogue forums. The primary purpose of the birth of these institutions and dialogue forums is the existence of everyday needs and goals for the progress of the nation and state, so it is necessary to build common awareness. This goal is built from the awareness of *mutual respect, honesty, openness, active listening, and learning*. These realizations

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are institutionalized through institutions and dialogue forums in Indonesia. There are many institutions and forums for interfaith dialogue in Indonesia, and some of them can be seen in the following table:

Category	Name of Institution	Levels
Official Government/ Ministry of Religion	Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) (total number of 2175 units)	National/Province Regency/City
	Indonesian Interreligious Consultative Assembly (MPAI)	National
Independent Institution	Ma'arif Institute	National
	Wahid Institute	National
	Indonesia Interreligious Lajnah (Lajnah Antaragama Indonesia/LAIN)	National
	Confucius Institute	National
	Interfaith Interactive Dialogue (Dialog Interaktif Lintas Agama/DILA)	National
	DIAN Interfidei	National
Woman Movement	Interfaith Women's Caucus (KPLA)	National
	Interfaith Women's Network (JAPEL)	National
	Interfaith Women's Movement (GPLA)	National
	Women and Interfaith Dialogue (PerDAMA)	National
	Srikandi Interfaith Forum	National
College/University	Religious Studies Study Program	There are 22 Study Programs in Indonesia
	Center for Interfaith Studies (PSAU)	Paramadina University, Jakarta
	Laboratory of Local Religion and Religion	UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
	Center for Religion and Cross-culture Studies (CRCS)	Gadjah Mada University
	Center for Religious Studies (PSAA)	Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW)

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	Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies Study Program	Sanata Dharma University
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Table 1. List of institutions and dialogue forums in Indonesia

Source: <https://satudata.kemenag.go.id/statistik>, and other official website sources, in 2024, accessed May 24, 2024.

The table above showcases the institutions and dialogue forums in Indonesia that are involved in interfaith dialogue. This is just a sample, as the country has many more such institutions. These institutions, initiated by the Indonesian people, have a rich history and were established between 1912 and 2000, reflecting a sense of continuity and tradition. Some of the dialogue institutions are managed by the government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, such as FKUB and MPAI. Others, like Muhammadiyah and NU, are independent and have a strong global presence in promoting interfaith dialogue. There are also dialogue institutions initiated by women's movements, such as Aisyiah and Fatayat, which are also internationally engaged. Additionally, various universities in Indonesia have established dialogue institutions, such as PSAU and PSDA. These institutions promote activities that involve all religious and diverse elements in Indonesia through research, seminars, training, publications, community assistance, social empowerment, education, arts, culture, and economics.

The data presented in the table above reveals several significant points. Firstly, dialogical theology has been successfully institutionalized in Indonesia, marking a significant step forward. Secondly, each institution has actively promoted diversity and differences, fostering a positive understanding between religious groups. Lastly, the institutions and activities testify to the growing awareness of our shared needs and goals - a peaceful life, mutual respect, and mutual learning. This progress in promoting religious harmony is a reassuring sign of a productive and harmonious future, and the transformative theological form of dialogical theology is a beacon of enlightenment and appreciation.

4.2. The Transformation of Western Christian Theology to Acculturative Theology

In his book *The Age of Global Dialogue* (2016), Leonard Swidler asserts that Christian theology is deeply rooted in Western traditions that encompass values tailored to diverse socio-cultural contexts, distinct from a perspective of willingness to learn and an aversion to non-Western domination. Swidler posits that the Western theological viewpoint has established a solid philosophical and practical basis for the evolution of static theology into a dynamic one (Swidler 2016: 28). Swidler's concept of

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transformation from static to dynamic theology, from rigid center-peripheral relations to mutually beneficial relationships over diversity, has profound practical implications. To illustrate this, Swidler mapped a pattern of theological transformation called *decatalogue dialogue*, a practical guide for understanding the need for a theological transformation. The complete mapping of theological transformation can be seen in the following table:

Category	Static Dialogue	Transformative Dialogue
Purpose	force change on the other, our partner, polemic debates	to learn, to change and grow, to understand reality, and to act.
Orientation	Dialogue with partners across the faith line and coreligionists	two-sided project dialogue
Method	No trust in dialogue	With complete honesty and sincerity
	Comparing our ideals with our partner’s practice	compare our ideals and practice with our partner’s ideals and practice
	not naturally attempt to express for themselves what they think	Each participant must define her or himself
	Both partners do not listen to one another with openness and sympathy	Come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions.
	Dialogue is a gathering of information as in a sociological interrogation.	Dialogue in equals, or “par cum pari,”
	A tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning	Take place only based on mutual trust
Meaning	A lack of such self-criticism, one's tradition already has all the correct answers.	Learn to be at least minimally self-critical of own religious or ideological tradition.
	Participants do not need to find ways of experiencing something of the emotional and spiritual power	Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology “from within.”

Table 2. Formulation of theological transformation on the concept of Leonard Swidler’s Decatalogue Dialogue

Source: Leonard Swidler, *The Age of Global Dialogue*, Eugene: Pickwick Publishing, 2016, pp.120-123.

Table 2 summarizes Leonard Swidler's book, *The Age of Global Dialogue* (2016: 120-123), which is categorized based on the orientation of each formulation. The second column of Table 2 summarizes Swidler's statements that negate the *statements of the decalogue dialogue* contained in the third column of Table 2. In Table 2, Leonard Swidler states that each formulation of *the Decalogue Dialogue* shows forms of theological transformation from those that previously adhered to the tradition of Western Christian superiority to a theology that acculturated, understood, and respected religions with a background of non-Western Christian traditions. Swidler asserts that a fundamental theological transformation underlies the willingness to learn and avoid domination because religion is not just a concept for Swidler but something that exists 'within me, and between me and thee.' (Swidler 2014: 10). As scholars and theologians, the understanding and interpretation of this transformation are integral to our discussion.

Moreover, within the internal context of Catholic theology, a theological transformation is at play, one that not only accepts but also embraces the influence of non-European local traditions. This inclusivity is not just a theoretical concept but is tangibly evident in various aspects such as dress, church buildings, and other symbols of Catholicism.

4.3. The Transformation from Theological Dialogue to Social Service

The theological transformation in Indonesia is evident in the shift from theological dialogue to ministry dialogue. Ministerial dialogue signifies a form of transformative theology, while theological dialogue mainly focuses on understanding between followers of different religions. This understanding pertains to teachings and ethical systems and behaviors. The key difference lies in the focus of the dialogue. Theological dialogue is limited to the understanding between adherents of one religion and adherents of another about aspects of teachings (Creed) and ethical systems and behaviors (Code). In contrast, as Swidler emphasized, social service dialogue extends beyond theological dialogue. It aims to build a better future together and take collaborative action to address common humanitarian challenges such as poverty, ignorance, lack of health awareness, and more. Applying transformative theology through this dialogue encompasses the dialogue of the head, heart, hand, and holiness (Swidler 2016: 19).

Swidler's assertion highlights the profound impact of dialogue as the core of theological transformation. It does so by encompassing four

essential components: head (religious knowledge and insight), heart (religious appreciation), hand (active service to humanity), and holy (affirmation of divine/religious identity). In Indonesia, religious adherents practiced social service theology through mutual assistance, warm greetings, and cooperation among religious adherents during significant events like religious celebrations.

The data reveals compelling trends. Firstly, the shift from religious teachings to social, humanitarian services signifies a significant theological dialogue transformation. Secondly, the visible form of interfaith social humanitarian activities, where diverse groups collaborate, demonstrates a dedicated effort to foster harmony. Thirdly, the shift from emphasizing the superiority of religious groups to collaborating to address common humanity challenges like poverty, backwardness, and ignorance is an inspiring testament to transformative theology.

These impactful activities highlight the significance of Leonard Swidler's transformative theology in shaping a theological perspective focused on serving humanity at large. This insight enlightens and informs the audience, providing a deeper understanding of how transformative theology is put into practice in Indonesia to promote harmonious interfaith relations.

5. Discussion

This study highlights the profound impact of Leonard Swidler's transformative theological concepts on interreligious relations in Indonesia. These concepts have led to the embracing of dialogical theological ideas that value diversity, the transformation of Western/European Christian theology, and a significant shift towards social services for humanity in theological dialogue.

Religious individual's interconnected needs and aspirations focus on transparency, receptiveness, and mutual understanding. These initiatives are rooted in the historical development of each religious community. According to Keith Ward (2008), the period of religious individuals consists of four phases: local, canonical, critical, and global (Ward 2008). Individuals engage with their community in the local phase, incorporating religious teachings. The canonical phase organizes these teachings into a structured foundation. The critical phase involves reflective assessment and constructive criticism to ensure adaptability. Finally, in the global phase, individuals establish connections across cultures, promoting universal understanding and unity (Evolvi 2022; Porcu 2022; Siswantara et al. 2022).

In the global context, sociocultural diversity and plurality facilitate interreligious connections. Global interaction among religious individuals necessitates the recognition and appreciation of diversity (Michaelides

2009). John Hick posits that diversity leads to a unified consciousness, precisely the awareness of God (Hick 1993). Philosophically, understanding the singular essence fosters an appreciation for diversity (Paradies and Joyce 2024; Strube 2023). Diversity is an intrinsic asset in interfaith relations, enabling mutual understanding and learning among religious groups (Bano et al. 2022; Hutabarat 2023; Lengauer 2023).). Hans Kung (2007) identifies this awareness as a global ethic fundamental to interreligious dialogue (Hans and Swidler 1987; Kung 1998). This discourse underscores the essential nature of religious diversity, advocating for appreciation and tolerance. Consequently, this dialogical theological framework evidences a transformation beyond traditional interreligious relations focused solely on doctrines.

A shift in religious perspective is an imperative issue. It reflects the adaptability of theology to the ever-changing world. Existing research confirms that the evolution of theological systems is vital to align interpretations with the rapid progress of our times (Capucio 2021; Kay 2024; Samarina 2022). A significant shift has occurred as religious believers now reinterpret theological teachings from theo-centrism to anthropocentrism and even biocentrism, all with the paramount aim of preserving and nurturing life (Bourdeau 2004; Strelow 2023). This transformation of theological views is based on a religious obligation to establish positive relationships between fellow and other believers. This is particularly crucial as they face shared challenges, highlighting the common ground and the need for unity.

Nurit Bird-David, in his book *Us, Relatives: Scaling and Plural Life in a Forager World* (2017), emphasizes that the relationship between humans and other creatures is connected to the concept of "Us" (Bird-David 2017). The concept of Us has implications for the reciprocal relationship between humans and other creatures in a positive and mutually protective manner. In maintaining this kind of positive relationship, John Hick also emphasized specifically this concept in the context of interreligious relations. By developing Martin Buber's thinking about I-Thou (Pope 2022; White 2022), Hick argues that relationships between religious communities, when faced with a common challenge such as complex social change, need to develop an awareness of "I-Thou" or "We-Thou" (all of us) rather than "I-You" (us) (Hick 1993). The I-Thou relationship, when cultivated, becomes a powerful tool for addressing common challenges. It fosters a profound awareness and offers opportunities to share, greet, learn, and collectively address these challenges, thereby uniting us in a universal humanitarian bond (Yuen and Leung 2022; Leahy and Bobo 2023).

Thus, relational relationships between fellow religious believers are the basis for transforming theological perspectives into the form of social services for humanity in general. This transformation model is a powerful

implementation of transformative theological ideas. The theological view focuses on building the future of religious people and collaborating to face the challenges of religious life, which is a form of commitment to religion. This commitment is a tangible manifestation of religious life's consequences, including the profound impact of religious beliefs and practices on individuals and communities and the resulting social services and actions. In their work, "American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment" (1968), Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock assert that among the five religious commitments, the consequences aspect is the final estuary of the commitment of belief, ritual, experiential, and knowledge (Kelly, Stark, and Glock 1968). Consequences in religion involve applying theological awareness to build a better future through social activities that serve other human beings (Hu, Cheng, and Lai 2022; Khumalo, Selvam, and Wilson Fadji 2023).

Service to universal humanity is a form of theological transformation, which is the internal development of religious orientation. Religious believers propagate this intrinsic orientation through universal humanitarian services, such as overcoming the LGBT+ phenomenon (Rich, Eliassen, and Einhorn 2021; Coley 2017), abuse of illicit drugs (Lopes and Costa 2018), human trafficking (Hounmenou 2023; Wetangterah 2023), deforestation and climate change (Mazaheri 2024; Thuesen 2023), and poverty alleviation (Ababio, Osei-Fosu, and Buabeng 2021). Gordon Allport highlighted the profound notion that serving others is a divine commandment, reflecting an inherent religious orientation (Allport and Ross 1967; Allport 1966). This awareness is also a manifestation of Global Ethics in religion (Twiss 2011; Kokobili 2022).

This insightful discussion underscores the notion that addressing universal humanitarian issues signifies the transformation of faith into tangible social engagement. It emphasizes the tangible presence of transformative theological concepts in the daily lives of religious practitioners, particularly in Indonesia. This study conclusively affirms that the subject under scrutiny is compelling evidence of the successful application of Leonard Swidler's transformative theological ideas within Indonesian religious dialogue communities, demonstrating their practical impact. Furthermore, it illuminates the need for future research to expand the scope and delve deeper into the practical implementation of Swidler's ideas of dialogue and action within a broader context.

6. Conclusion

After thorough analysis, it is evident that interreligious dialogue has the potential to evolve into a transformative force for fostering positive relationships that can collectively address the challenges of our rapidly

changing world. This transformation, with its promise of navigating the complexities of contemporary times by embracing a universal ethical awareness of humanity, is crucial. The foundation of this transformative potential lies in appreciating diversity, accommodating other cultures and traditions, and shifting the focus from religious teachings to impactful social service activities.

This study significantly enriches existing research by expanding theoretical perspectives, offering a fresh and comprehensive view. Where previous studies have predominantly concentrated on theological aspects, this research extends Leonard Swidler's transformative dialogue principles to encompass socio-cultural dynamics and highlight the importance of universal humanitarian services, thereby broadening the intellectual horizon of the field.

However, it is important to note that this study's focus on implementing transformative theology within the socio-cultural context of Indonesia limits the scope of analysis. Other significant concepts related to interreligious dialogue require further exploration, and future research must urgently and specifically address these limitations from the perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge, underscoring the necessity of continuous academic inquiry.

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