

Characteristics of religiousness in the slope of mount Prau: The perspective of inter-religious figures

Muhammad Zuhron Arofi¹, Eko Kurniasih Pratiwi^{1*}, Nasitotul Jannah¹, and Nurodin Usman¹

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang, Magelang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author's email: eko.kurniasih.pratiwi@unimma.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the religious characteristics of the people living on the slopes of Mount Prau through the perspectives of interfaith leaders. Using a field study method with a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to understand the community's religious experiences in depth as perceived and interpreted by religious leaders and figures from various traditions. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of local religious practices. The results indicate that the people of Mount Prau's slopes have five main characteristics in their religious life. First, they interpret religion as ageman and view all religions as equal, in other terms referred to as pluralism. Second, they demonstrate a very high level of tolerance in social and religious interactions, which results in public spaces not being segregated based on religious aspects. Third, there is a tradition of celebrating religious holidays together even though they originate from different religious beliefs. Fourth, the community provides full freedom for everyone to practice worship according to the teachings of their respective religions. Fifth, the practice of interfaith marriage is not considered taboo and is accepted as part of the deep-rooted social diversity. This finding confirms that the religious community of the slopes of Mount Prau is pluralistic, open, harmonious, and oriented towards interfaith harmony.

Keywords

Characteristics, Religiosity, Gunung Prau community, Interfaith figures

Introduction

Harmony is often a key word in academic studies when examining the phenomenon of religiosity in Indonesia. Moreover, Indonesia is known as a country with diverse ethnicities, languages, skin colors, customs, and religions. The sheer number of ethnicities, religions, and richness of languages are essentially its most valuable and rare assets. No other nation in the world possesses the complexity of diversity that Indonesia possesses.

Published:
May 04, 2026

This work is licensed
under a [Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0
International License](#)

Selection and Peer-
review under the
responsibility of the 7th
BIS-HSS 2025 Committee

The reality of this diversity inherently holds both positive and negative potential. The potential for diversity is positive because diverse beliefs are a source of values and local wisdom for the unity of this nation. The diversity of beliefs of its citizens serves as a glue and strengthens the fabric of this nation. The diversity of religions embraced by its citizens serves as an integrative factor for Indonesia. On the other hand, such religious diversity can be a factor in national disintegration due to the conflicts it creates (Syukron, 2017).

In its release, the Stara Institute explained that the state of religious freedom/belief in Indonesia in 2024 strongly indicates a regression in the protection and respect for freedom of religion/belief at the end of President Jokowi's administration and the beginning of President Prabowo's. Toward the end of his leadership, instead of leaving a significant mark of progress in advancing freedom of religion/belief, President Jokowi recorded a decade of stagnation in the state of freedom of religion/belief (SETARA Institute, 2025). If unaddressed, this situation could trigger broader impacts.

In fact, the state has attempted various efforts to safeguard religious freedom in order to create harmony. The state, through joint ministerial regulations, has created a policy on harmony known as the tri-religious harmony. This concept encompasses harmony within religions, harmony between religions, and harmony between religions and the government (Peraturan Bersama Menteri Agama dan Menteri Dalam Negeri nomor 9 tahun 2006).

This concept emerged as a response to the reality of the vulnerability of horizontal conflicts in the name of religion. It also represents a legally formal anticipatory measure taken by the state to prevent such conflicts. Indonesia has experienced social conflicts involving religious issues. One example is the conflict in Ambon in 1998. Numerous factors underpinned this conflict, including economic, political, and socio-cultural factors, fueled by tensions between Muslim and Christian communities following the 1998 Reformation. However, it cannot be denied that the conflict also involved religious identities (Ade et al. 2024).

In Indonesia's dark history, conflicts have occurred in other regions, such as the bloody conflict in Sampit (2001) between the Dayak and Madurese tribes. This conflict claimed many victims and forced tens of thousands of people to flee, leaving a dark mark on national history (Deni, 2014). A similar experience occurred in Poso, Central Sulawesi, which witnessed a series of religiously motivated riots between Muslims and Christians from 1998 to 2001. These events underscored the fact that diversity, if not properly managed, can become a source of division and conflict. Poorly managed multicultural societies within small communities are a source of horizontal conflict, including those seen in Indonesia in the cases mentioned above.

Cemoro Village is a village on the slopes of Mount Prau in Temanggung Regency, Central Java Province, which has a multicultural community structure. Therefore, this research strategically seeks to gain a broader understanding by offering an in-depth

phenomenological study of harmonious religious patterns at the level of remote rural communities. Interfaith harmony in this village is not an isolated incident, but has become a communal norm that has been passed down through generations. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that this phenomenon occurs in a rural area relatively far from urban centers and mature academic discourse on pluralism. Specifically, this study aims to determine the characteristics of the diversity of the Cemoro Village community from the perspective of religious leaders in Cemoro Village. Religious leaders generally have an exclusive character in maintaining their religious beliefs, so understanding the perspectives of various religious leaders on the religious life of the Cemoro community is interesting.

Method

This research employs a field study method with a phenomenological approach. This approach, in the context of this research, attempts to view socio-religious reality as an objective world of meaning and values within the consciousness of individuals or community groups. The primary goal is to deeply understand the community's religious experiences as perceived and interpreted by religious figures and leaders from various traditions. The analysis utilizes John Hick's theory of pluralism. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of local religious practices. The phenomenological approach was deliberately chosen to capture the research subjects in a natural setting. The researcher did not intervene in the behavior of the community members being researched. In this way, the data obtained maintained its objectivity.

Results and discussion

Overview of multicultural society in Cemoro Village

Cemoro Village, located in Wonoboyo District, Temanggung Regency, is situated on the slopes of Mount Prau. According to village demographic data, the total population is 2,418 (*Dinas Kependudukan dan Catatan Sipil Kabupaten Temanggung, 2023*). Most of the population is Muslim, followed by Catholics and Buddhists. This pattern of religious diversity did not emerge overnight, but rather through a demographic shift that took decades, from a predominantly Catholic population to a predominantly Muslim population today.

Catholicism first developed in Cemoro Village, marked by the establishment of a church in 1987. The church's existence was supported by missionaries from outside Cemoro Village. Several years later, in 1993, a mosque was built with government assistance at the time. Meanwhile, Buddhism only began to develop and establish a place of worship in the early 2000s (*Kristianto, 2025*). Throughout the long development of the three religions, there are no historical records of conflict or missionary narratives that sparked

tension. Following **Figure 1** illustrates the percentage of religions practiced by the people of Cemoro Village.

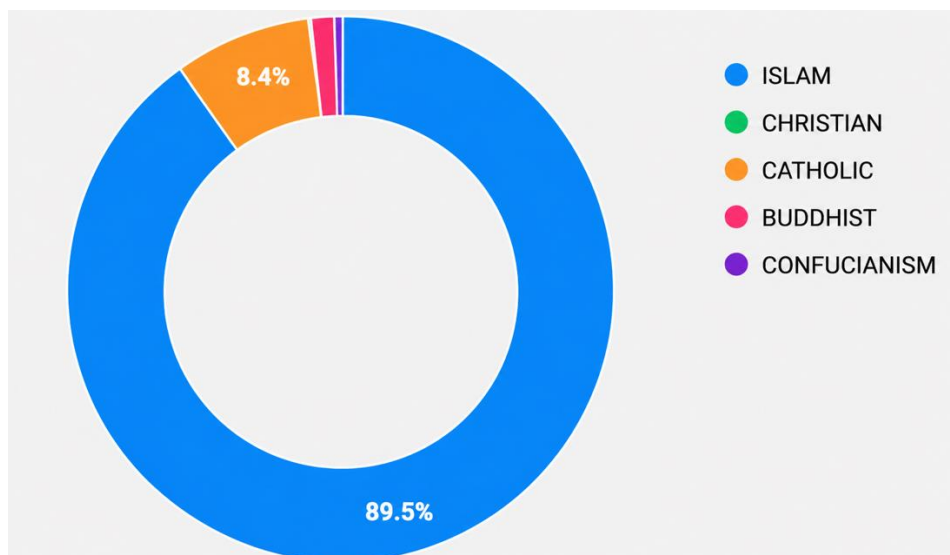


Figure 1. Religious chart

Religion in the view of the Cemoro Village community

The definition of religion according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary is a teaching, a system that regulates the system of faith (belief) and worship of Almighty God as well as the rules related to human interaction with humans and their environment (<https://kbbi.co.id/arti-kata/agama>, Accessed December 2025)

Religion is a system of values that governs good and bad, right and wrong, life in this world and the afterlife, and the concept of the relationship between humans and God. In practice, there is a kind of fanaticism among religious adherents, which then gives rise to attitudes of truth-claiming and salvation-claiming. This attitude continues to develop collectively and from generation to generation.

In contrast to the definition above, for the people of Cemoro Village, religion is defined as “ageman” (like clothes with many color choices), meaning a person is free to choose their religion; they can choose whichever is most comfortable. We believe that God is fundamentally one and the same, only with different names. In Islam, it is Allah, Catholics refer to him as “Jesus” and “Tuhan” (God), while in Buddhism, he is called “Gusti” (Kadus, 2025).

This definition aligns with John Hick’s analogy of blind men and an elephant. Hick wanted to explain the distinction between the Real or Ultimate Reality (The Real as sich), which is inaccessible directly, and the Real as experienced or perceived by humans through the lens of different cultures and religious traditions. In this analogy, each blind man holds a different part of the elephant (trunk, tusk, ear) and believes his description of “elephant” to be the most accurate. However, they are all touching the same elephant without realizing it.

The old parable of the blind men and the elephant. Each of them touches a different part of the animal's body: the one touching the leg mistakes the elephant for a tree, the one touching the trunk identifies it as a snake, and so on. The parable suggests that different religious traditions have mistakenly developed dogmatic definitions of the divine, assuming that their partial experiences are as complete and sufficient as the blind men's handling of various parts of the elephant. When a Muslim speaks of God as the revealer of the Qur'an, a Hindu speaks of Brahman as the infinite transpersonal consciousness, they are not referring to two parts of reality but to two ways in which that infinite divine reality has been thought of and experienced by different people (Hick, 1996). With this perspective, communities are given the freedom to choose their religion. In Cemoro Village, religious differences between husband and wife, parents, and children are commonplace. Differences in belief are openly accepted as part of local life (Susanto, 2025).

Opinions of religious leaders regarding the religiousness of the Cemoro Village community

As shown in the Table 1 and Table 2, there are three religions practiced in Cemoro Village: Islam, Catholicism, and Buddhism. To understand the views of religious leaders in Cemoro Village regarding religious life in the village, the following is a tabulation of the data obtained.

Table 1. Public opinion in religious

Informant	Religion	Important Quotes	Views on Religiosity
Informant A	Islam	"People here always attend the religious celebrations of other faiths."	Inclusive religiosity
Informant B	Catholic	"There is no prohibition against worship even though people have different religions."	Tolerance as a core value
Informant C	Buddhist	"We allow children to choose their religion according to their own beliefs."	Religion as a matter of personal belief
Informant D	Islam	"Religion is like clothing, with many color choices."	Freedom to determine religious choice
Informant E	Islam	"Basically, God is one and the same; only the names are different."	All religions are essentially the same
Informant F	Catholic	"Religious differences are not a problem."	Religion as a choice of belief

Table 2. Informants' Religious Practices and Indicators of Religious Tolerance in Society

Informant	Religion	Real practice in society	Indicator
Informant A	Islam	Present at interfaith celebrations	Tolerance
Informant B	Catholic	Interfaith mutual cooperation	Freedom of Worship
Informant C	Buddha	In one family there are many religions	Freedom of religion
Informant D	Islam	Society is given the freedom to determine their religious choices.	Freedom of religion
Informant E	Islam	Putting all religions on an equal footing	Pluralist
Informant F	Catholic	In one family there are many religions	Tolerance

Data analysis

1. Factors in the birth of the ideology of religious pluralism and the stages of its formation

Phenomenologically, religious pluralism is a fact related to the plurality of traditions in religious history. Philosophically, religious pluralism relates to a theory that relates to various conceptions, perceptions, and responses regarding the reality of divinity. Pluralism is an effort to create social relations between religious communities to foster interfaith harmony (Ismail et al. 2024). The simple key to pluralism is the emergence of an attitude of tolerance for diversity of thought, civilization, religion, and culture. It not only tolerates the diversity of understandings and opinions, but also acknowledges the truth of each understanding derived from different religious choices. The existence of differences of opinion among humans is a logical consequence of the creation of humans with different intellectual potential and desires.

Religious pluralism, in reality, is not intended to undermine, demean, or confuse one religion with another, but rather to foster mutual respect, mutual recognition, and cooperation. Therefore, religious pluralism is recognized as the basis for recognizing the existential plurality of religions in seeking common ground between religions based on similarities through universal human values in each religion (Fitriani, 2020).

The inclusive, pluralistic attitude reflected in the Cemoro Village community was formed through a long process. It didn't manifest itself suddenly in the current situation. There were stages in the formation of a deeply rooted pluralism in Cemoro Village. These stages can be divided into three important phases.

First, there is education about openness and respect for those with different beliefs. This education begins within the family. "Here, from childhood, we are taught about harmony. If anyone questions religious differences, they are considered strange by society" (Suwanti, 2025). This acceptance of those with different beliefs is the manifestation of a long educational process that begins within the family. More deeply, this acceptance extends beyond sociology to theology.

Second, pluralism is a living culture that has been preserved by the community for generations. At this stage, the community inherently views religious symbols and rituals as a unified entity that needs no distinction, let alone questioning. Thus, the resulting awareness is collective and binding. This is a unique and very different pattern of religious relations compared to the model of inter-religious relations that exist in other places.

The impact of this attitude is the creation of authentic harmony within society. This harmony refers to a situation where adherents of various religions can live together in peace, with mutual respect and tolerance of differences in belief. This concept is based on the principles of dialogue, respect for religious freedom, and cooperation between religious communities without conflict or discrimination (Kurniawan et al. 2024).

Furthermore, the principle of interdependence or interdependence among communities is crucial in social life. This principle, as the foundation of social life, will strengthen religious harmony. When facing difficult situations, religious principles can help improve the psychological, sociological, and materialistic aspects of each religious community. These principles can also help address problems faced by religious communities, such as building a more civilized and humanistic value system (Chudzaifah et al. 2024).

Third, creating a massive protection system to ensure the persistence of established religious patterns. The people of Cemoro Village are highly sensitive to those who attempt to question the established model of religious life. For example, if a religious figure conveys a religious message that offends the established establishment, that figure will be restricted and not invited again. Or, those who question interfaith marriage will be countered with various convincing arguments.

2. Forms of social interaction

The deeply rooted harmony in Cemoro Village is supported by three main dimensions: tolerance, cooperation, and equality. These three dimensions are internalized in the daily lives of the local community. Religious tolerance is a fundamental foundation in a pluralistic society; even the progress of a nation depends on tolerance. Harmony is the desire and hope of all, enabling everyone to exercise their rights and obligations safely and joyfully without any lingering anxiety. Historically, religion has not only served as spiritual capital within society but has also emerged as social capital for building a better foundation for a shared life (Martino 2024).

Tolerance in Cemoro Village is rooted in a deeply personal and intuitive view of religion. The Cemoro community intuitively understands that spirituality is one essence, while religion is a distinct cultural manifestation that can be chosen according to individual convenience, as it is private and free from interference from others.

This manifestation of tolerance is evident in various forms, from the freedom to choose one's beliefs without intimidation to respect for the ritual symbols of other religions. The village government's vision and mission explicitly include a commitment to building a tolerant and religious culture and ensuring the safety of all religious groups in carrying out their activities. [<http://cemoro-wonobojo.temanggungkab.go.id/frontend/profil/77>].

For the people of Cemoro Village, tolerance is not merely academic discourse; it is practiced concretely and transcends theological boundaries. The long-standing practice of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) serves as a catalyst that transforms plurality into solidarity. A concrete example of this is the communal funeral procession of followers of three religions (Islam, Catholicism, and Buddhism) in the same place (Kristianto, 2025). For example, if a Muslim dies, their entire family and community of different faiths will pray for them. They gather in one place but pray in different ways and with different

beliefs. This is due to the collective belief that every good deed performed by adherents of each religion will surely reach God.

Beyond tolerance, interfaith cooperation is a prominent feature of the Cemoro community. This is evident in the deeply rooted tradition of social activities. Communities of various faiths work together to build mosques and other places of worship, such as churches and temples, with committee members from diverse religious backgrounds. A concrete example is the treasurer for mosque construction, even appointed from among non-Muslim residents, namely Buddhists (Kadus, 2025). When collecting funds for the construction of mosques and other religious houses of worship, all religious adherents, including children, are involved (Suwanti, 2025).

Another example is the celebration of certain religious holidays. When Muslims slaughter sacrificial animals during Eid al-Adha, the meat is distributed to all residents regardless of religion, and non-Muslim communities do the same during community service activities (Kristianto, 2025). This active model of mutual cooperation demonstrates that harmony and cooperation in Cemoro are not merely passive narratives about respecting differences, but rather proactive, practical collaboration.

The principle of equality in Cemoro Village is concretely implemented in village government policies. Their vision and mission statement includes a commitment to support the construction of places of worship and the provision of facilities for all religions [<http://cemoro-wonobojo.temanggungkab.go.id/frontend/profil/77>].

This demonstrates that the village government plays an active role in facilitating and legitimizing existing cultural harmony. This role contrasts with the top-down approach often implemented by the central government, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs' "Harmony Aware Village" program, which is sometimes merely ceremonial, formal, and procedural, lacking a strong fiscal or cross-sectoral foundation. In contrast, in Cemoro Village, the synergy between community initiative and proactivity and structural village support has created a more authentic and sustainable model of harmony.

3. Relevance to John Hick's concept of pluralism

The description of the religious character of the Cemoro Village community when analyzed using John Hick's perspective will find its relevance. One of his interesting insights is, "In a broader sense, we can say that both Christianity and these other religions are paths to salvation. The world's great religions, therefore, are paths to salvation. Each claim to constitute an effective context in which the transformation of human existence can and does occur from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness (Hick, 1988).

John Hick uses the term "pluralistic hypothesis" to describe his theory. This theory posits that the world's great religions are distinct and authentic ways of understanding and responding to the same Real (God), with each tradition offering an equal path to spiritual transformation and liberation from self-centeredness. Thus, Hick proposes his

pluralistic hypothesis, in which each world faith is viewed as a separate, culturally influenced way in which the Ultimate Reality can be experienced (Hick, 1988).

To strengthen his argument, John Hicks also requires a shift in orientation from “religion,” which has traditionally been its primary orbit and center, to “God” as its primary center, as he views it: “Pluralism is the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is a process of transformation from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness.” Self-centeredness in Reality occurs in different ways in the context of all major religious traditions. There is not just one but many paths to salvation or liberation (Hick, 1984).

Hick’s argument that the path to salvation exists in every religion demonstrates that, despite differences in certain principles, religion is fundamentally capable of leading to the ultimate goal of a saved life. This way of thinking allows religious adherents to avoid exclusively and selfishly monopolizing truth and salvation. They simply choose one path from among many.

The term “religion” (ageman), as explained by a community leader in Cemoro Village, refers to the practice of religious pluralism that manifests beyond a theoretical framework. Pluralism here is interpreted as an understanding that all religions carry a mission of salvation. People are given the freedom to choose what clothes to wear. This is how people determine their religious choice. Converting from one religion to another is seen as a logical choice and should not be disputed.

Religious fanaticism that monopolizes truth (truth claims) and the path to salvation (salvation claims) does not occur in Cemoro Village. In fact, truth claims typically emerge as something commonly understood. The generally agreed view regarding truth claims in religion states that as religious adherents, it is important to recognize the close relationship between belief and truth claims. A religion without truth claims is like a tree without fruit. This truth claim is what Alfred N. Whitehead later called dogma or Fazlur Rahman called the transcendent aspect. Without this, religion, which should be a distinctive form of life, will lose its distinctive symbolic power (Baqi, 2024).

The people of Cemoro Village are very open to the presence of new religions. They even adhere to the principle of “as many religions as possible, and as few political parties as possible.” Their reasoning is simple: religion has proven itself to be a tool for uniting communities, while political parties have the potential to create divisions within them (Kadus & Lurah, 2025).

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that John Hick’s theory of the Pluralistic Hypothesis is a sufficient tool to describe the religious conditions of the local community. The community still adheres to the principle that humans must have a religion. On the other hand, they view religion as a shared spiritual entity, and everyone is given the freedom to choose according to their beliefs.

Conclusion

The research findings yield several conclusions: First, they believe that all religions ultimately lead to the same God and lead to salvation. Second, they demonstrate a high level of tolerance in social and religious interactions, which prevents public spaces from being segregated based on religion. One of the pillars that strengthens social interactions is the strong kinship network. The people of Cemoro Village do not recognize class divisions that create distance between communities. Third, there is a tradition of celebrating religious holidays together, despite having different religious beliefs. Celebrating three different religions has become a routine annual event that has been carried out for generations. Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, and Vesak symbolize the shared celebration of all religions in the area. Fourth, the community allows every individual complete freedom to practice their religion according to their respective teachings. Fifth, the practice of interfaith marriage is not considered taboo and is even accepted as part of the deep-rooted social diversity. Local religious leaders do not object to the practice of interfaith marriage. Therefore, the community has positioned this type of marriage as a local tradition that continues to be preserved.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the Directorate of Research and Community Service (DPPM), Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemdiktisaintek) for the financial support provided so that this research can be carried out properly.

References

1. Deni JA. (2014). *Menjadi Indonesia Tanpa Diskriminasi: Data, Teori, dan Solusi*. Jakarta: Yayasan Denny JA dan LSI Community.
2. Chudzaifah, Ibnu, Sangkot Sirait, Mahmud Arif, and Afroh Nailil Hikmah. 2024. "Membangun Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama: Peran Strategis PAI Dalam Meningkatkan Dialog, Toleransi Dan Keharmonisan Di Indonesia." *Al-Fikr : Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10(1):1–12.
3. Fitriani, Shofiah. 2020. "Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman Keberagaman Dan Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama." *Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 20(2):179–92. doi:10.24042/ajsk.
4. Hick, John. 1988. "Religious Pluralism and Salvation." *Faith and Philosophy* 5(4):365–77. doi:10.5840/faithphil19885441.
5. Kurniawan, Dwi, Syafrida Aslami, Hazri Sakinah Hutagalung, M. Yuda Prayoga, Muhammad Fauzan Azhima, and Parlaungan Harahap. 2024. "Pandangan Islam Dan Kristen Tentang Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama." *Jurnal Multidisiplin Inovatif* 8(10):2246–6110.
6. Lukman Ismail, Yulfa Lumbaa, Novia Damayanti, Fauziah Ainun Jariah, Dahniar Nur, and Fahiratun Afiat Muizunzilah. 2024. "Meretas Jalan Damai Pandangan Terhadap Penyelesaian Konflik Antar Agama." *Aksiologi : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial*. doi:10.47134/aksiologi.v5i1.187.
7. Rahmat Ade, Pinto, M. Abdullah Amin, Prilla Marsingga, and Sebab-Sebab Utama dan Sebab-Sebab Pemicu Faktor Sosial Budaya Dalam Konflik Etnis di Maluku. 2024. "Sebab-Sebab Utama Dan Sebab-Sebab Pemicu Faktor Sosial Budaya Dalam Konflik Etnis Di Maluku." *Politics and Humanism* 3(1):2024.
8. SETARA Institute. 2025. "Regresi Di Tengah Transisi." *Kondisi Kebebasan Beragama/Berkeyakinan (Kbb)* 2024 (73):1–6.
9. Sutrisno, Edy Sutrisno, Marsidi, and Martino. 2024. "Potret Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama Dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama: Studi Kasus Di Desa Sidodadi, Malang." *Harmoni* 23(2):291–310. doi:10.32488/harmoni.v23i2.699.

10. Syukron, Buyung, Agama dalam Pusaran Konflik (Studi Analisis Resolusi Terhadap Munculnya Kekerasan Sosial Berbasis Agama di Indonesia), RI'AYAH, Vol. 02, No. 01 Januari-Juni 2017
11. Moh. Shofan, (2011), Pluralisme Menyelamatkan Agama-agama, (Yogyakarta: Samudra Biru)
12. <https://kbbi.co.id/arti-kata/agama>, Akses Desember 2025
13. <http://cemoro-wonoboyo.temanggungkab.go.id/frontend/profil/77>
14. Peraturan Bersama Menteri Agama dan Menteri Dalam Negeri nomor 9 tahun 2006 tentang
15. Pedoman Pelaksanaan Tugas Kepala Daerah dalam Pemeliharaan Kerukunan Umat Beragama, Pemberdayaan Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), dan Pendirian Rumah Ibadat