

## Christmas Greetings from the Perspective of Inter-Religious Students and Academics in Medan

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### Abstract

The diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia often causes social problems, one of which is related to religious issues, such as giving Christmas greetings, which often cause differences of opinion among the community. This study aims to analyze how students and academics in Medan view Christmas greetings and to understand the influence of religion and social interaction on their attitudes. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with field research. We obtained primary data through in-depth interviews with key informants, including Muslim and Christian students and academics, using semi-structured interview techniques. We obtained secondary data from relevant literature studies. We carried out thematic data analysis to identify the main themes related to Christmas greetings. The results of the study show variations in views influenced by religion, personal understanding, and social interaction. Muslim students and academics are generally careful in giving Christmas greetings, while Christian students and academics are more open and see it as part of a social tradition. This study contributes to the understanding of interfaith dynamics in Indonesia and underlines the importance of dialogue and tolerance in a multicultural society.

**Keywords:** *Christmas Greetings, Interfaith Social Interaction, Interfaith Dialogue, Religious Influence, Multicultural.*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a country with a diverse population, both in terms of language and religion, often faces various social problems.<sup>1</sup> One of the important issues that continues

<sup>1</sup>Thobib Al-Asyhar, "Implementasi Moderasi Beragama (MB) Melalui Pendekatan Kognitif Berbasis Karakter," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 16, no. 1 (2023): 241–76.

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to be discussed is the issue of religion.<sup>2</sup> The theme of religion is very sensitive because it concerns individual beliefs. When someone has believed in the teachings of a particular religion, it is very difficult for him to accept the teachings of other religions. In fact, being objective in understanding and judging other religions is not an easy matter. At the same time, conflicts between religious communities sometimes arise, both in matters of faith and worship.<sup>3</sup> Interfaith harmony in Indonesia is a national agenda that continues to be pursued.<sup>4</sup> This is important because the harmony of interfaith relations more or less determines the future of the nation. If it fails to realize this harmony, the Indonesian nation is at risk of facing conflict that can cause division.<sup>5</sup>

For some people, wishing a Merry Christmas is seen as a form of tolerance and respect for people of other religions.<sup>6</sup> This view is in line with the values of pluralism and mutual respect, which are important in strengthening social relations amidst diversity.<sup>7</sup> However, others consider that wishing a Merry Christmas is contrary to Islamic religious beliefs. As stated by Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Shalih al-Uthaymeen, wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas, such as Christmas, is forbidden. This opinion is based on an interpretation of religious texts that prohibit forms of interaction that resemble support for other religious beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

This view differs from the fatwas issued by contemporary scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Quraish Shihab, who permit Christmas greetings. Yusuf al-Qaradawi emphasized that there is no prohibition for Muslims to give Christmas greetings, either individually or on behalf of an institution. *Dâr al-Iftâ' al-Misriyyah* (Egyptian Fatwa Institution) also stated that wishing Christians a Merry Christmas is permissible for Muslims.<sup>9</sup> This diversity of views is not only based on theological interpretations but is also influenced by local social, cultural, and traditional contexts.<sup>10</sup> For example, in some areas, Christmas greetings have become a widely accepted social practice, while in others,

<sup>2</sup>Alifah Murobiyatul Fatah, Haena Mawarda Emha, and Ismaiyyah, "Konflik Keagamaan Dan Toleransi Serta Tinjauan Psikologi Agama-Nya Dalam Konteks Multikulturalisme," *ARIMA : Jurnal Sosial Dan Humaniora* 1, no. 2 (2023): 224–33.

<sup>3</sup>Normand Edwin Elnizar, "Analisis Keabsahan Muslim Mengucapkan Selamat Hari Raya Natal Berdasarkan Kaidah Niat," *Misykat Al-Anwar Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Masyarakat* 6, no. 1 (2023): 13, <https://doi.org/10.24853/ma.6.1.13-34>.

<sup>4</sup>Sarbin Sehe, "Penguatan Harmonisasi Dan Kerukunan Umat Beragama" 1, no. 1 (2024): 2024.

<sup>5</sup>Juhra Muhammad Arib, "Ucapan Selamat Natal Menurut Quraish Shihab Dalam Tafsir Al Misbah Studi Analisis Terhadap Q.S. Maryam Ayat 33," n.d., 11–21, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30984/ajip.v1i2.502>.

<sup>6</sup>Fakhrur Rozi Gustin Dhea Amelia Br. Siahaan\*, Muhammad Alfikri, "Gudang Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Analisis Wacana Kritis Pada Video " Hukum & Sikap Kita Atas" 1, no. November (2023): 7–11.

<sup>7</sup>Aulia Desty Budieni and Istiqamah Salamah, "Pluralisme Agama : Memahami Keberagaman Dan Toleransi Dalam Konteks Islam Di Indonesia," *Journal Islamic Education* 1, no. 4 (2023): 482–97.

<sup>8</sup>Muhammad Ibn and Shaleh Al- Utsaimin, "Hukum Mengucapkan Selamat Natal Menurut Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi Dan Syaikh," *Al-Mazaahib: Jurnal Perbandingan Hukum* 7 (2019): 131–44, <https://doi.org/10.14421/al-mazaahib.v7i2.1880>.

<sup>9</sup>Teguh Triesna Dewa, *Hukum Ikut Serta Merayakan Natal Bagi Muslim Dalam Pandangan Ulama (Komparasi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Dâr Al-Iftâ' Al- Misriyyah Dan Komisi Tetap Urusan Riset Dan Fatwa Kerajaan Arab Saudi)* (Skripsi UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta., 2020).

<sup>10</sup>Zakiyah Zakiyah, "Moderasi Beragama Masyarakat Menengah Muslim: Studi Terhadap Majelis Taklim Perempuan Di Yogyakarta," *Harmoni* 18, no. 2 (2019): 28–50, <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v18i2.392>.

it is considered controversial. Social media also influences the spread of these views, often exacerbating differences of opinion in society. Research conducted by Heydari also shows that tolerance for uncertainty plays an important role in forming a better attitude of social tolerance in a pluralistic society.<sup>11</sup> In this context, students who are better able to deal with ambiguity in social situations can be more open to diversity and play a role in strengthening interfaith relations and reducing social conflict. This tolerance for ambiguity can also increase self-esteem and influence individuals to be more innovative in responding to differences in society.

Medan City, as one of the big cities in Indonesia, has a very diverse society, both in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion.<sup>12</sup> This diversity creates a unique dynamic of social interaction, especially among the younger generation, such as students who come from Islamic and Christian backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> In daily interactions, students often face diversity issues that require them to take a stand, one of which is related to giving Christmas greetings. Giving Christmas greetings is often a topic that raises differences of opinion among Muslim and Christian students in Medan City. Christian students generally consider the greeting as a form of respect and acceptance of religious diversity. However, for some Muslim students, giving Christmas greetings is often considered controversial. This is influenced by the theological understanding of religion in line with Syam's research as a form of tolerance that is permitted, while others consider it an act that violates the principles of Islamic faith.<sup>14</sup>

This issue is becoming increasingly complex in Medan City due to differences in educational background, religious understanding, and the influence of the social environment among students. For example, students who come from environments with strong pluralistic values tend to be more open to giving Christmas greetings. Conversely, students from conservative environments tend to be more careful or even reject this tradition. In addition, the development of social media has also increased the polarization of views, where debates related to this issue often arise in digital spaces accessed by students. This phenomenon reflects the existence of a major challenge in creating harmony amidst diversity, especially in an academic environment that should be an inclusive discussion space. The gap that emerged between Muslim and Christian students in responding to Christmas greetings shows the need for in-depth study to understand

<sup>11</sup>Hassan Heydari, Davood Madani, and Mehdi Rostami, "The Study of the Relationships Between Achievement Motive, Innovation, Ambiguity Tolerance, Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Actualization, with the Orientation of Entrepreneurship in the Islamic Azad University of Khomein Students," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 84 (2013): 820–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.654>.

<sup>12</sup>Fritz Hotman Syahmahita Damanik, "Kehidupan Multikultural Di Kota Medan: Dinamika, Tantangan, Dan Peluang," *MUKADIMAH: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sejarah, Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 8, no. 1 (2024): 60–67, <https://doi.org/10.30743/mkd.v8i1.8503>.

<sup>13</sup>Dewi Satria Ahmar et al., "Peran Ritual Keagamaan Dalam Pengembangan Karakter Mahasiswa : Kajian Latar Belakang Agama Dan Kearifan Lokal Suku Di Sulawesi Tengah The Role Of Religious Rituals In Student Character Development : A Study Of Religious Background And Tribal Local Wisdom" 18 (2024): 12–30, <https://doi.org/10.38075/tp.v18i1.383>.

<sup>14</sup>M. Basir Syam, "Faktor-Faktor Yang Mempengaruhi Kecenderungan Paham Teologi," *Aqidah-Ta : Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah* 2, no. 2 (2016): 87–98, <https://doi.org/10.24252/aqidahta.v2i2.3437>.

their views from theological, social, and cultural perspectives. This study is important to explore how Medan City students understand and respond to this issue and how these differences in views affect their social relationships amidst religious diversity.

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Prima<sup>15</sup> and Elnizar,<sup>16</sup> provide important notes regarding fatwas on Christmas greetings. Both are representative Islamic law experts. Amin, who once served as Chairman of the MUI Fatwa Commission, and Anwar, as Chairman of the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council, provide academic views that reflect diversity in Islamic law. In addition, research conducted by Febrianti—research that discusses the role of fatwas in social stability—also has important relevance.<sup>17</sup> Fatwas, as explained by Yusuf Qardawi and Al-Utsaimin, function as an instrument in creating social harmony by conveying clear da’wah messages. Social changes that occur due to cultural dynamics often cause friction, and fatwas as part of da’wah communication play a role in transforming views on contemporary issues, such as Christmas greetings to non-Muslims.

Furthermore, research by Khan et al. studied religious obedience and market interactions in different cultural contexts, focusing on the consumption rituals of dominant or minority religious groups.<sup>18</sup> However, this study has not explored how minority religious groups celebrate the holidays of the dominant religion. Then, Murtaza and Nasution’s research concluded that Arrazy Hasyim believes that wishing Christians a Merry Christmas is permissible because it does not reduce the value of Islamic faith, and his views are relevant to the current Indonesian context.<sup>19</sup> Kabanga’s research identified eleven keywords in Christmas messages that include linguistic diversity, such as repetition, imperative language, and persuasion, as well as socio-cultural issues such as identity politics, environmental conservation, the impact of globalization, and vigilance in social media. Previous studies have focused on the legal, social, and cultural aspects related to Christmas greetings, with some examining fatwas, the role of da’wah, and interfaith interactions, such as those conducted by Prima, Elnizar, Khan et al., and others.<sup>20</sup>

All of these studies highlight the Islamic view of Christmas greetings, social dynamics, and cultural influences in the celebration of dominant or minority religions.

<sup>15</sup>Daniel Prima, “Penafsiran Ucapan Selamat Natal Dan Prinsip-Prinsip Toleransi Beragama Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah,” *Analytica Islamica* 4, no. 1 (2015): 11–12.

<sup>16</sup>Elnizar, “Analisis Keabsahan Muslim Mengucapkan Selamat Hari Raya Natal Berdasarkan Kaidah Niat.”

<sup>17</sup>Rozmida Febrianti, “Fatwa Yusuf Qardawi Dan Al-Utsaimin Tentang Pengucapan Selamat Natal Perspektif Komunikasi Dakwah,” *Jurnal Al-Hikmah* 19, no. 2 (2021): 157–68, <https://doi.org/10.35719/alhikmah.v19i2.75>.

<sup>18</sup>Amna Khan, Andrew Lindridge, and Theeranuch Pusaksrikit, “Why Some South Asian Muslims Celebrate Christmas: Introducing ‘Acculturation Trade-Offs,’” *Journal of Business Research* 82, no. October 2017 (2018): 290–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.07.023>.

<sup>19</sup>Ahmad Murtaza MZ and Efridayanti Nasution, “Reading Arrazy Hasyim’s Oral Exegesis of The Law of Greetings Merry Christmas on Social Media,” *An-Nisa’: Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 15, no. 1 (2022): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v15i1.80>.

<sup>20</sup>Lewi Kabanga, “Ideology in Christmas Messages 2023: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach in Fairclough’s Perspective,” *Journal of Literature and Education* 1 (2024): 39–50, <https://doi.org/10.69815/jle.v2i1.23>.

Meanwhile, this study emphasizes the interfaith perspective on Christmas greetings, especially from the perspective of students and academics in Medan City, examining how these greetings are understood and accepted in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia. By understanding the concept of the views of various groups regarding Christmas greetings, this study is expected to contribute to enriching the discourse on tolerance, understanding the dynamics of interfaith relations, and offering a constructive perspective in responding to the issue of diversity in Indonesia.

## METHOD

This study uses a field research method with a qualitative descriptive approach.<sup>21</sup> This qualitative approach aims to understand the views of various groups regarding Christmas greetings in depth, especially among students and academics in Medan City. This study also uses a sociology of religion approach to analyze how social interaction and religious values influence views on the issue. The focus of the study is directed at exploring the experiences, understandings, and attitudes of individuals from various religious and professional backgrounds.

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data.<sup>22</sup> Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, namely Fathur Rahman as a Muslim student, Ahmad Parwis Siregar, M.Ag., as a Muslim academic, Dr. Sulidar, M.A., and Valdo as Christian students, Albert and Valdo from Christian circles. Secondary data were obtained through literature reviews, such as literature, scientific journals, and articles that are relevant to the research theme. This information is used to provide a theoretical context that supports the analysis of primary data, as well as enrich understanding of the issues being studied.

Data collection was carried out using a semi-structured interview technique, where researchers gave informants the freedom to express their views openly but still focused on the research theme.<sup>23</sup> In addition, documentation techniques are used to collect secondary data in the form of documents, articles, and related books.<sup>24</sup> Data analysis is carried out thematically, namely by identifying the main themes that emerge from the data that has been collected.<sup>25</sup> The data is then interpreted descriptively to explain the views, experiences, and social interactions related to Christmas greetings among students and academics in Medan City. This process is carried out repeatedly to ensure the validity and consistency of the research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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<sup>21</sup>Wina Sanjaya, *Penelitian Pendidikan: Jenis, Metode Dan Prosedur* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group, 2013).

<sup>22</sup>Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik*. (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2013).

<sup>23</sup>Meleong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT. Remaja, 2019).

<sup>24</sup>Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: CV. Alfabeta, 2017).

<sup>25</sup>Heriyanto Heriyanto, "Thematic Analysis Sebagai Metode Menganalisa Data Untuk Penelitian Kualitatif," *Anuva: Jurnal Kajian Budaya, Perpustakaan Dan Informasi* 2, no. 3 (2018): 317, <https://doi.org/10.14710/anuva.2.3.317-324>.

### **Views of Muslim and Christian Students in Medan Regarding Christmas Greetings**

The views of Muslim and Christian students in Medan City toward Christmas greetings reflect the complexity of social interactions in a multicultural society. As a city with religious and cultural diversity, Medan is a meeting place for various views influenced by religious backgrounds, theological understanding, and social values. In the context of students, this dynamic becomes even more intriguing because they are in the phase of searching for identity and are often involved in critical discussions on religious issues. Some students view Christmas greetings as a form of tolerance and respect between religious communities, while others consider it contrary to their religious beliefs. As Rizkiyah's research shows,<sup>26</sup> these diverse perspectives reflect how religion and culture play a role in shaping the perspectives of the younger generation on religious issues amidst the diversity of society. As the results of an interview with Mr. Ahmad Parwis Siregar, M.Ag, as an academic and a Muslim, explained:

*"He extended both verbal and written Christmas greetings to non-Muslims. According to him, although there is no prohibition in Islam regarding such greetings, he chose not to say them. Mr. Ahmaduser emphasized that every individual has the right to decide whether to give such greetings or not, and for him, the celebration of Christmas is a right for Christians to celebrate, as well as Muslims who celebrate Eid al-Fitr or Eid al-Adha. For Mr. Ahmaduser, his non-involvement in saying Christmas greetings does not mean that he rejects or is frustrated with the celebration, but is simply a personal choice in respecting other religions. Regarding the view of tolerance, Mr. Ahmaduser is of the opinion that Christmas greetings can be a form of tolerance between religious communities, but it is more appropriate if viewed in the context of the state. For example, the Ministry of Religion, which oversees various religions in Indonesia, is required to give greetings as a form of respect for all religions. However, personally, there is no compulsion for individuals to say it. He also added that Christmas greetings do not violate Islamic beliefs because, in Islam, there is a principle of "for me, my religion, for you, your religion," which shows respect for other religious beliefs without having to get involved in the celebration. Mr. Ahmaduser also does not feel uncomfortable when non-Muslims wish Muslims a joyful Eid, because it is a form of mutual respect and appreciation between religious communities."*

In line with Fathur Rahman's statement as a Muslim student, he explained that,

*"Christmas greetings are a sensitive issue because they relate to the beliefs and faith of Muslims. According to him, these greetings contain an acknowledgment of the birth of Jesus Christ, which is believed by Christians, so for a Muslim, saying Merry Christmas can be contrary to the principles of Islamic faith. In Fathur's view, tolerance between religious communities should not be carried out in a way that touches on the realm of faith. He emphasized that tolerance in Islam focuses more on aspects of social relations that do not involve acknowledging the*

<sup>26</sup>Fifin Naili Rizkiyah, "Majelis Taklim Rumah Moderasi Beragama KUA Kecamatan Tongas Sebagai Upaya Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama," *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2023): 170–85, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aljadwa.v2i2.961>.

*beliefs of other religions. Therefore, he chose not to give Christmas greetings to Christians because he felt that it could interfere with the purity of his beliefs as a Muslim. In addition, Fathur also highlighted the phenomenon where many parties, including certain institutions, give Christmas greetings openly. He considered that this action could cause confusion among the Muslim community regarding the limits of tolerance that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. According to him, Muslims should understand and maintain their faith by not being influenced by social pressure to give such greetings. Fathur emphasized that tolerance is not a reason to violate the principles of faith, and he advised fellow Muslims to remind each other not to say Merry Christmas if it is contrary to their beliefs."*

Based on the interviews conducted, although Islam does not prohibit saying Merry Christmas, some choose not to say it. Giving such greetings is considered a personal right of each individual and does not mean rejecting the celebration, but rather a choice to respect the beliefs of other religions. Tolerance, according to this view, can be reflected through the greeting of Merry Christmas by state institutions such as the Ministry of Religion, which is required to respect all religions, but there is no individual compulsion to say it. The greeting of Merry Christmas does not violate Islam's "to me my religion, to you your religion," and not celebrating does not mean opposing or being angry with other religions. Tolerance between religious communities must be maintained by respecting and honoring each other.

However, there is a view that states that the greeting of Merry Christmas for Muslims is a sensitive issue because it is related to faith. For this view, the greeting could contain an acknowledgment of the birth of the Lord Jesus, which is believed by Christians, which is contrary to the principles of Islamic faith. Tolerance in Islam must prioritize social relations without touching on the realm of faith. Therefore, not saying Merry Christmas is chosen as a way to maintain the purity of belief. In this case, there is a relevant verse of the Qur'an, namely in Surah Al-Kafirun (109:6), which reads:

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

Meaning: "For you your religion, and for me my religion." (Q.S Al-Kafirun: 6)

This verse emphasizes mutual respect without interfering with each other's beliefs. This view also criticizes those who give Christmas greetings, which can cause confusion for Muslims about the limits of tolerance in Islam. Tolerance should not sacrifice the principles of faith, and Muslims need to remind each other to maintain their beliefs without being influenced by social pressure.

As the results of an interview with Mr. Albert, a Christian academic, explained that,

*"Christmas greetings can differ depending on each individual's beliefs. Mr. Albert said that for Christians, Christmas greetings are a form of expressing happiness and respect for the birth of Jesus Christ. For them, celebrating*

*Christmas is a meaningful moment, not only as a religious celebration but also as a moment to share love and appreciate others. Therefore, saying Merry Christmas is considered a form of tolerance, affection, and appreciation for others, even though they have different beliefs. On the other hand, Mr. Albert also realized that there were different views among Muslim students in Medan regarding Christmas greetings. Some of them felt that giving greetings to Christians could be contrary to the principles of Islamic belief because they could contain recognition of the birth of the Lord Jesus, who is considered God by Christians. According to this view, Christmas greetings could be a sensitive issue for Muslims because it is related to their faith and beliefs. However, Mr. Albert emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting these different views while maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities. On the one hand, Christmas greetings can be seen as a form of respect for Christians, but on the other hand, for Muslims, maintaining the purity of their faith and beliefs is more important. Therefore, both Christians and Muslims need to respect and understand each other's positions without imposing their views on others. Tolerance and mutual respect are the keys to maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society like Medan City."*

As the results of the interview with Valdo as a Christian student explained that,

*"Christmas greetings can be considered a form of tolerance between religious communities. According to him, saying Merry Christmas is not just an expression but also a form of mutual respect between fellow religious communities. Valdo sees that these greetings can be a means to strengthen relationships between individuals from various religious backgrounds. He also noted that on other religious holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, Christians also congratulate Muslims, which for Valdo is a form of mutual respect. Therefore, he believes that Christmas greetings are not only limited to Christians but can be a form of togetherness in the diversity that exists. However, Valdo also acknowledged that there are pros and cons regarding Christmas greetings among Muslims. Some people feel that saying Merry Christmas is contrary to the teachings of Islam, while others argue that it is part of social tolerance that can strengthen relationships between religious communities. Valdo added that this view is very dependent on each individual, but the most important thing is to respect each other's beliefs without imposing opinions or actions. In this context, Valdo emphasized the importance of maintaining an attitude of mutual respect and living side by side despite differences in religion."*

Based on the interview results above, the researcher concluded that views on Christmas greetings can vary depending on the beliefs of each individual. For Christians, Christmas greetings are a form of expressing happiness and respect for the birth of Jesus Christ. For them, Christmas celebrations are not only a religious celebration but also a moment to share love and respect for others. Therefore, Christmas greetings are considered a form of tolerance, affection, and respect for others even though they have different beliefs.

However, among Muslim students in Medan City, there are different views on



Christmas greetings. Some of them feel that giving greetings to Christians can be contrary to the principles of Islamic belief because the greeting can contain recognition of the birth of the Lord Jesus, who is considered God by Christians. This is considered a sensitive issue related to the beliefs of Muslims. However, it is important to understand and appreciate these different views while maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities.

Overall, Christmas greetings can be seen as a form of respect for Christians, but for Muslims, maintaining the purity of their beliefs and faith is more important. Therefore, both Christians and Muslims need to respect and understand each other's positions without imposing their views on others. Tolerance and mutual respect are the keys to maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society like Medan.

### **Social Interaction and Religious Values Influence the Attitudes of Muslim and Christian Students in Medan in Responding to Christmas Greetings**

In the context of pluralistic social life in Medan City, social interaction between religious communities, especially between Muslim and Christian students, plays an important role in shaping their attitudes and views towards various religious celebrations, including Christmas. Christmas greetings are one of the topics that often give rise to differences of opinion, both among Muslim and Christian students. As the results of the interview with Mr. Sulindar, a Muslim academic, explained that,

*“Mr. Sulindar gave a message to the public to be wiser in responding to existing traditions. According to him, not all traditions are relevant to Islamic teachings. Traditions that are in line with Islamic values, such as the Hijri New Year, can be used as a momentum to increase worship and gratitude to Allah. He emphasized that the Hijri New Year is special because the months in the Hijri calendar, such as Muharram, Safar, and so on, function as a guide in carrying out worship, such as fasting on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of each month, Ramadan, and performing the Hajj. Meanwhile, the Gregorian calendar does not have the same function in the context of worship. According to Mr. Sulindar, the celebration of the Gregorian New Year is often colored by activities that are not beneficial or even contrary to Islamic values, such as fireworks parties, firecrackers, or other traditions that originate from foreign cultural influences. Mr. Sulindar invited the public to stay away from these traditions and focus more on Islamic traditions, such as takbiran, tahlilan, reciting salawat, or dhikr. He also added that there is nothing wrong if the momentum of the New Year holiday is used for useful activities, such as holding muhasabah, self-reflection, or other religious events. However, it should be emphasized that these activities are not carried out because of celebrating the New Year, but rather as a form of spiritual development and self-introspection. In closing, he suggested that people take advantage of Islamic traditions that have clear guidance to create peace in life. In this way, people can maintain their Islamic identity without being influenced by irrelevant external traditions.”*

Based on the interview results above, it can be concluded that Mr. Sulindar emphasized the importance of society being wise in responding to existing traditions. Not

all traditions are relevant to Islamic teachings, so society needs to be more selective. Traditions that are in line with Islamic values, such as the Hijri New Year, can be used as a momentum to increase worship and gratitude to Allah.

He explained the specialness of the Hijri calendar as a guide in carrying out various worships, such as fasting on the *ayatul bidh*, Ramadan, and hajj, which are not available in the Gregorian calendar. Therefore, the celebration of the Gregorian New Year, which is often colored by useless activities, such as fireworks and firecrackers, should be avoided because it is contrary to Islamic values. Instead, he encouraged society to focus more on Islamic traditions that have clear guidance, such as *takbiran*, *tahlilan*, giving *salawat*, or *dhikr*. The momentum of the Gregorian New Year holiday can also be used for useful activities such as *muhasabah*, self-reflection, or other religious activities, but not in order to celebrate the Gregorian New Year itself. In closing, Mr. Sulindar reminded the importance of utilizing Islamic traditions to create peace in life and maintain Islamic identity without being influenced by inappropriate external traditions. As the results of the interview with Valdo as a Christian student explained that,

*“As the results of the interview with Valdo as a Christian student explained, social interaction and religious values play an important role in shaping the attitudes of Muslim and Christian students in Medan City in responding to Christmas greetings. According to Valdo, the diversity of religions in Medan is a challenge as well as an opportunity to strengthen relations between religious communities. Valdo emphasized that mutual respect and understanding of each other’s beliefs are the keys to creating social harmony. In terms of Christmas greetings, he explained that most Christian students see this as a form of appreciation, not recognition of their religious beliefs. Valdo also revealed that intense social interaction between students from various religious backgrounds often helps reduce misunderstandings and strengthen relationships. However, he realized that some Muslim students may feel hesitant or worried about giving greetings because of their religious beliefs. In his view, it is important to support interfaith dialogue so that each party can better understand different points of view. In closing, Valdo hopes that students from various religions can continue to strengthen social relations while still respecting the values of each other’s religions. According to him, mutual respect not only creates a harmonious environment but also shows maturity in dealing with differences.”*

Based on the interview results above, the researcher concluded that social interaction and religious values play an important role in shaping the attitudes of Muslim and Christian students in Medan City in responding to Christmas greetings. Valdo, a Christian student, explained that religious diversity in Medan is both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen relations between religious communities. He emphasized that mutual respect and understanding of each other’s beliefs are the keys to creating social harmony. In the context of Christmas greetings, Valdo said that most Christian students see it as a form of appreciation, not recognition of their beliefs. Intense social interaction between students from various religious backgrounds helps reduce misunderstandings and strengthens relationships. However, he also understands that some Muslim students

feel hesitant or worried about giving greetings because of their religious beliefs.

Valdo emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue to broaden our understanding of different perspectives. He hopes that students from various religions can continue to strengthen social relations while still respecting each other's religious values, because mutual respect not only creates a harmonious environment but also reflects maturity in dealing with differences.

Social interaction and religious values play a very important role in shaping the attitudes of Muslim and Christian students in Medan City in responding to Christmas greetings. For some Muslim students, Christmas greetings are considered an act that could be contrary to Islamic teachings, especially because of the recognition of the birth of Jesus as God, which is not in accordance with the basic beliefs of Islam. Therefore, social interactions between Muslims and Christians in Medan City are often colored by differences in views regarding the limits of respecting each other's religious celebrations. More devout Muslim students tend to keep their distance by giving Christmas greetings, although they still uphold the principle of tolerance in interacting.

On the other hand, some Christian students see Christmas greetings as a form of respect for their beliefs and consider them a form of tolerance and affection. For them, Christmas is not only a religious celebration but also a moment to share happiness. Despite the differences in views, he emphasized that healthy social interactions can be built by respecting the position of each religion. Therefore, despite the differences in views regarding Christmas greetings, it is important to maintain harmonious relations between students of both religions by continuing to pay attention to the principles of tolerance and mutual respect. In this context, the verse in the Qur'an that can be used as a guide is Surah Al-Baqarah (2:256), which reads:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى  
لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Meaning: "Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing hand-hold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing." (Q.S Al-Baqarah: 256)

This verse emphasizes that in Islam, there is no compulsion to follow the beliefs of others. Every individual is free to choose and practice their beliefs, and by respecting these differences, harmony between religious communities can be maintained.

There are different views on Christmas greetings among Muslims and Christians, where some consider it to be contrary to the principles of faith, while others see it as a form of tolerance and respect without theological involvement. This view reflects the dynamics that need to be understood in a multicultural society. The importance of tolerance in diversity to maintain social harmony must be realized through an attitude of mutual respect for each other's beliefs without coercion. Interfaith dialogue and education are important keys to strengthening relations between religious communities and

fostering peace amidst cultural and religious diversity. According to Bahri,<sup>27</sup> in his research, the views of scholars regarding the law of giving Christmas greetings to non-Muslims are divided into two. Classical scholars such as Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Qayyim, and Sheikh Rasyid Ridha tend to prohibit such greetings because they are considered to be able to damage the faith. However, the majority of contemporary scholars, especially those from multicultural countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Indonesia, allow Christmas greetings as a form of respect and to maintain social harmony. This is also supported by Quraish Shihab, who emphasized that giving Christmas greetings is permissible on the condition that one understands the limits of faith, is only done when necessary, and aims to create social peace.

On the other hand, Adji emphasized that as Muslims,<sup>28</sup> it is important to maintain the identity of faith in the face of dominant cultures such as Christmas celebrations. The Qur'an clearly opposes the concept of shirk, so Muslims need to be wise in their attitudes, maintain their faith, and still show a friendly attitude and respect for others. Alternatively, Muslims can convey greetings in a language that does not conflict with their beliefs, such as praying for happiness for non-Muslim friends without compromising the theological principles of Islam. This illustrates the balance between maintaining faith and building harmony in a pluralistic society.

Social interactions between Muslim and Christian students in Medan City show harmonious relationships despite religious differences. As conveyed by Faridah,<sup>29</sup> tolerance that exists between religious communities, including Islam and Christianity, is not only seen in their respective religious activities but also in daily social activities, such as community service and mutual cooperation. Likewise, in the celebration of religious holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr and Christmas, there is an attitude of mutual respect, with Muslims congratulating Christians and vice versa. This indicates that social interactions based on religious values that teach respect and cooperation can reduce the potential for conflict and increase mutual respect between religious communities. The importance of maintaining grammar, as conveyed by Ridwan,<sup>30</sup> is the key to creating harmonious communication between religious communities. By using polite and respectful language, the potential for conflict can be minimized, and relations between religious communities can be maintained.

The attitude of students in responding to Christmas greetings, both from Muslim and Christian students, is greatly influenced by the religious values they adhere to and the

<sup>27</sup>Syamsul Bahri, "Mengucapkan Selamat Natal Dan Selamat Hari Raya Agama Lain," *Kalam: Jurnal Agama Dan Sosial Humaniora* 4, no. 2 (2020): 52–55.

<sup>28</sup>Kumara Adji, "Selamat Natal Atau Tidak? Perspektif Islam Tentang Toleransi," 2024, <https://umsida.ac.id/selamat-natal-atau-tidak-perspektif-islam/>.

<sup>29</sup>Ika Fatmawati Faridah, "Toleransi Antarumat Beragama Masyarakat Perumahan," *Komunitas: International Journal of Indonesian Society and Culture* 5, no. 1 (2013): 14–25, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v5i1.2368>.

<sup>30</sup>Ridwan Ritonga and Izati Munawaroh, "Kesantunan Berbahasa Kisah Nabi Yusuf Dalam Al-Qur'an: Pendekatan Brown Dan Levinson," *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 3, no. 2 (2024): 120–29, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aljadwa.v3i2.1459>.

social interactions that have been built.<sup>31</sup> In Medan City, inclusive and respectful social interactions allow students from both religions to congratulate each other without sacrificing their respective beliefs. As explained by Ilham in his article,<sup>32</sup> social activities involving various elements of society, both Muslim and Christian, create an atmosphere of deep tolerance. In this context, even though there are differences in Christmas celebrations, students can respect each other and uphold the values of brotherhood and peace, which are the basis for maintaining harmony between religious communities.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the views of Muslim and Christian students in Medan City regarding Christmas greetings are greatly influenced by their religious backgrounds and social values. For Christian students, Christmas greetings are seen as a form of appreciation and happiness for the birth of Jesus Christ, which is also a means to build social relations between religious communities. In contrast, Muslim students have a more sensitive view of the greeting because it is related to their beliefs, especially their recognition of the Lord Jesus, who is believed to be God by Christians. Although there is no explicit prohibition in Islam regarding Christmas greetings, many Muslim students choose not to say it in order to maintain the purity of their beliefs. This view reflects the importance of differences in the application of tolerance; some individuals see Christmas greetings as a form of tolerance, while others consider them detrimental to their principles of faith. Furthermore, social interaction and religious values play an important role in shaping the attitudes of Muslim and Christian students in responding to Christmas greetings. In a pluralistic society like Medan City, understanding of religion and social tolerance is greatly influenced by the experience of living with people of other religions. Most students realize that, despite differences in views regarding Christmas greetings, it is important to maintain harmonious relationships and mutual respect among religious communities. Tolerance, in this context, must be maintained by maintaining the principles of personal beliefs, but without sacrificing mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, the people of Medan City are expected to be wiser in responding to these differences, with a focus on respecting each individual's beliefs.

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<sup>31</sup>Muhammad Noor Ridani Fuad Luthfi, M. Sanusi Helmi, "2 3 123," *Artikel Ilmiah Nurul* 5, no. 2 (2023): 25–33.

<sup>32</sup>Novriyal Ilham, Irwansyah Irwansyah, and Ismail Ismail, "Interaksi Sosial Masyarakat Islam Dan Kristen Di Kecamatan Rantau Utara Kabupaten Labuhanbatu," *SEMAR: Jurnal Sosial Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat* 2, no. 1 (2024): 76–92, <https://doi.org/10.59966/semar.v2i1.634>.

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