

## Church and State in Conflict Over The Establishment Protestant Church

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### Abstract

A series of incidents involving places of worship are still widespread in Indonesia. In recent years, the construction of places of worship has become an interesting problem not only in the social context of interaction between religious communities but also conflict resolution in Indonesia. Minority religious groups tend to have difficulty establishing or renovating their places of worship because they receive pressure and intervention from the majority group. This research explores the issue of residents' rejection and closing and stopping the process of building a house of worship for the HKBP Efrata Church in Gresik Regency, East Java. The aim of this research is to describe the things that trigger conflict and analyze the conflict resolution mechanism of the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik church. This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method, namely a research effort based on methodology in studying the phenomenon of conflict over places of worship at the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church. It is known that the church was prohibited from carrying out worship activities by local residents for approximately 6 (six) years due to problems with permits to carry out worship in the area. After receiving permission, disturbances often arise when the congregation performs their worship, such as noise coming from motorized vehicles and restrictions on the worship schedule given by local residents.

**Keywords:** *church founding conflicts, gereja HKBP Efrata Gresik, religious house building regulations, religious house conflicts*

### Abstrak

Sederet peristiwa mengenai rumah ibadah masih marak di Indonesia. Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, pembangunan rumah ibadah menjadi masalah yang menarik tidak hanya dalam konteks sosial interaksi antar umat beragama, namun juga resolusi konflik di Indonesia. Kelompok agama minoritas cenderung kesulitan mendirikan atau merenovasi rumah ibadahnya karena mendapatkan tekanan dan intervensi dari kelompok mayoritas. Penelitian ini mendalami persoalan penolakan warga dan penutupan serta menghentikan proses pembangunan rumah ibadah Gereja HKBP Efrata di Kabupaten Gresik Jawa Timur. Tujuan penelitian ini mendeskripsikan hal-hal yang menjadi pemicu konflik dan menganalisis mekanisme penyelesaian konflik gereja HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif, yaitu upaya penelitian yang berdasarkan pada metodologi dalam mengkaji fenomena konflik rumah ibadah Gereja HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik. Diketahui bahwa gereja tersebut mengalami pelarangan melakukan aktivitas peribadatan oleh warga sekitar kurang lebih selama 6 (enam) tahun lamanya karena masalah perizinan melakukan ibadah di lingkungan tersebut. Setelah mendapat izin, gangguan kerap muncul saat para jamaah melakukan peribadatan, seperti gangguan suara berisik yang berasal dari kendaraan bermotor dan pembatasan jadwal ibadah yang diberikan oleh warga sekitar.

**Kata Kunci:** *konflik pendirian Gereja, Gereja HKBP Efrata Gresik, peraturan pembangunan rumah keagamaan, konflik rumah keagamaan*

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## Introduction

Republic of Indonesia is known as a country that has differentiation and diversity in ethnicity, race, language, culture and religion, so it is categorized as a multicultural country (Sair, 2019). Through the diversity that exists, there is a national motto for life, *namely Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which has (although) different meanings but is still one (Indonesia), which the nation's founders hoped could be used as a foundation for appreciating and maintaining the unity of Indonesia even in the midst of diversity of ethnicity, race, language, culture and religion.

Religion is a crucial thing, proven by the first principle which reads "Belief in One Almighty God". There are 6 (six) religious groups recognized by the Indonesian Government, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Each religious adherent has a way of worshiping based on the teachings of their religion and the beliefs and beliefs of their respective groups, but still has the principle of living side by side. The differences in different procedures in existing religious life are not the cause of national disintegration, they should strengthen feelings and bonds of tolerance among religious communities.

The establishment of places of worship has become a viral issue and is almost always the background for conflict between religious communities in Indonesia. A house or place of worship is a substantial part of religious activities because it can be said to be a religion when it has a clear worship system and a permanent house/place of worship. Even though it is not a public space in Habermas' concept (Prasetyo, 2012), the worship ritual activities of a religious community are worthless if they do not follow or obey religious rules.

Notes from the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) Gadjah Mada University, in 2008 there were several conflicts related to places of worship ( Bagir, Hefner, and Fauzi 2014 ) including twelve cases of conflict surrounding places of worship (Bagir, 2014, p. 31). Meanwhile in 2009 there were eighteen cases and in 2010 there were thirty-nine cases (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2017, p. 38). It can be seen that the development of conflicts related to places of

worship is increasingly widespread and difficult to minimize.

The conflict with the majority of places of worship is caused by the rejection by a group of people (who have religious differences) of a house of worship which is considered disturbing (Anam & Mahmudi, 2022). This conflict can also be motivated by prejudice against certain groups, economic disparities, discrimination and ideological differences (Arifinsyah, & Sofian, 2021; Liliweri, 2018).

A series of incidents involving places of worship are still widespread in Indonesia. In this research, researchers want to explore the issue of rejection from the local community, closing access, and stopping the process of building a house of worship for the HKBP Efrata Church, Gresik Regency.

Gresik Regency is known as the "City of Santri" which is shown by the daily lives of its residents who uphold the spiritual values of santri. The southern part of Gresik Regency, which borders the city of Surabaya, has been developed by the government as an industrial region and area and residential/real estate development, which means it needs support from supporting infrastructure, one of which is the existence of a church as a place of worship in a residential residential area.

A residential area that is trying to meet social infrastructure needs in the form of a church house of worship is Perumnas Kota Baru Driyoreo. The housing complex is managed by the Fleet Command of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) East Region of Pangkalan Utama TNI-AL V (lima) which is non-service housing. In order to meet the needs for religious infrastructure, the role of community development, especially families of large TNI-AL members, the TNI-AL V Main Base Commander issued a permit to establish churches, including: 1) Jawi Wetan Christian Church – GKJW, 2) Indonesian Bethany Christian Church – GBI, 3) Pentecostal Church in Indonesia – GpdI, and 4) Santo Gabriel Catholic Church. After the permit for the house of worship was issued, a building was built and equipped with facilities and worship activities were held. However, the condition of the existence of these churches gave rise to protests and rejection from residents around the national housing complex, which led to demonstrations as a form of their disapproval.

Through circular letter from the Ministry of Religion number 460/777/473.108/2020 on December 28 2020 addressed to the Management of the Indonesian Bethany Christian Church and the Santo Gabriel Catholic Church (Surat Izin Tanggal 12 November 2009 Yang Ditujukan Kepada Empat Ketua Pembangunan Gereja Dengan Nomor Surat: 163-20/03/14/Lant V Untuk Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan, Dan Nomor: 165-20/03/14/Lant V Untuk Gereja Kristen Bethany, n.d.), the Gresik Regency Government (Pemkab Gresik) stopped all development activities, removed symbols, and stopped all forms of religious activity at the two churches. The Gresik Regency Government's decision was based on 14 documents containing Government Regulations and letters which deemed that the two churches did not fulfill the applicable administrative requirements. The termination letter was signed by the Deputy Regent of Gresik, Drs. H. Moh. Qosim, M.Si with copies to all relevant agencies, starting from the Chair of the Gresik DPRD, Muspimda Gresik and Lantamal V to the Head of Mulung Gresik Village.

## Methods

This study used qualitative research methods. Sugiono (Sugiyono, 2012, p. 29) defines that qualitative research is a research method that is based on positivist philosophy and is used to examine natural objects. Researchers in this study position themselves as key instruments whose role is to collect data and information. Data collection techniques were carried out in combination (triangulation). Data analysis is inductive, and the research results from this method emphasize meaning rather than macro generalizations.

The object of this research is the conflict over the establishment of the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church. The subjects of this research were religious leaders and residents around the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church.

Several data collection techniques to obtain research information. First, researchers carried out direct observations at the BKBP Efrata Gresik Church to directly observe the conditions and environment at the research location. Observations were carried out with the aim of systematically observing and recording the

symptoms studied in the field (Usman & Akbar, 2008, p. 58) with the context of this research being the BKBP Efrata Church. Second, researchers conducted interviews by interacting directly with informants to obtain information regarding opinions, stances and verbal statements (Nazir, 2003, p. 193) from religious leaders and residents around the church, including residents of the national housing complex and village residents.

Previously, researchers prepared interview guidelines. The interview guide functions as a tool to collect data in the form of draft interview questions which will be asked freely according to the situation and conditions during the research.

Data analysis is carried out interactively and continues continuously until the research is complete. The data analysis technique in this research was carried out as described by Miles and Huberman in the order of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Afrizal, 2014, p. 174). Data reduction is carried out by sorting the data that is needed from what is not. Data presentation is carried out by providing all information systematically. Conclusions are drawn by providing the results of the analysis and interpretation that have been carried out.

## Results and Disussion

### Findings of Conflict over the Establishment of the HKBP Efrata Gresik Church

Various phenomena and problems related to relations between religious communities often trigger various conflicts, for example political, economic, social problems and personal misunderstandings between religious adherents (Marshall, 2018). The conflict that occurred in Driyorejo, Gresik (Kabupaten Gresik), was a conflict that occurred because of the establishment of a place of worship or church.

The establishment of a place of worship certainly has various motivational or symbolic aspects. Crouch (2007) described for all religions, the existence of a house of worship in an area is a very important facility. Not only does it include facilities, the existence of a house of worship also functions as a symbol and place for its adherents to carry out activities, conditioning and broadcasting roles. Where places of worship are an important supporting aspect in carrying out worship activities for religious followers.

This can be seen from the many houses of worship that have been established in all corners of the region (Germain & Gagnon, 2003). However, behind the need to build a place of worship, there are many horizontal conflicts in Indonesia. These problems can consist of administrative difficulties in obtaining permits to build places of worship, and also arise in communities that refuse to build houses of worship, especially houses of worship for religious minorities (Rosidin, 2015; Sirait, 2019). So, from the background of the conflict that emerged, our group chose the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church as an interesting case study to research. This research will focus on aspects of the conflict that occurred as well as the resolution of the conflict regarding the establishment of the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church.

In general, Gresik Regency is very closely known as the City of Santri, the City of Guardians, and the City Decorated with Faith in its daily society and culture. Gresik and its society sociologically (Mustolehudin, 2014, p. 25) are known to be very accommodating and have good tolerance towards various societies, communities and even religious adherents who have different cultural identities, ethnicities, religions and beliefs. However, behind this attitude of tolerance, the Gresik people are not pessimistic about very substantial issues such as norms and religion (Al-Bari'i, 2019). In daily life with a very strong religious habit, it turns out that his sensitivity to social situations is very high. The deliberation mechanism remains the main way to resolve problems and disputes that occur, especially problems based on religious issues. This condition can be seen from the efforts to reduce the conflict that occurred in the establishment of the HKBP Efrata Gresik Church house of worship.

Many disputes arose over the establishment of this house of worship. From the data that researchers managed to obtain through interviewing several sources, there were several conflicts that arose from residents around the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church house of worship. It was said that the church was prohibited from carrying out worship activities by local residents for approximately 6 (six) years. This was based on the problem of permits to carry out worship in the area. But the

disturbances did not stop with licensing issues, after six years the church stopped operating, the church managed to get permission to build a house of worship. However, disturbances still arise when the congregation is praying, such as noise coming from motorized vehicles and restrictions on worship schedules by local residents.

In the opinion of local residents, the ban on worship activities for 6 years was not only based on the lack of a building permit, but also because several residents felt disturbed by the noise from the congregation after the service had finished. They often chatted in front of the church for a very long time which ultimately made local people ask for the church to be closed because it was very disturbing. When church closures were still in effect, several times the congregation tried to carry out worship services, because they felt it was impossible to continue joining other churches, even though there were churches in their own neighborhood that could be used as places of worship.

In the midst of conditions in society that are less conducive and unable to accept the worship activities of church congregations, it turns out that the local community themselves are the provocateurs and oppose worship. Therefore, every time there is a church activity later than 21.00, residents rush to report it to local community leaders and ask for a reprimand from the church because local residents feel disturbed. Limiting worship schedules and the number of worshippers who come is something that should not be done because we are in Indonesia, a country that has various religions, so the tolerance of citizens should be high. Not all local residents prohibit worship, there are some communities that have modern and advanced thinking that can accept the existence of the church as a place of worship for other people. They argue that church for their people is a necessity. Apart from that, it is also used to maintain the unity of the people according to their beliefs and carry out mental and spiritual development. The current era is modern, if worship is currently limited and hindered then children who still need religious guidance will have the potential to become morally uncontrolled, therefore the existence of the church as their place of worship as well as a place to gather and be fortified with religion.

Apart from being a place of worship, the church also has a social function, where the congregation sees or is observed from the social, cultural, economic, political, even aesthetic and environmental sustainability of the community. The utilization and use of churches as places of worship will show that we are a nation or citizens who are harmonious and have high tolerance, there is freedom of worship for religious people in accordance with their respective beliefs and teachings. If viewed from an economic perspective, the presence of the church will have a significant impact on economic growth in the surrounding community, around the church there will be parking attendants and food and drink sellers. Meanwhile, if viewed from a social perspective, the church has a role as a symbol and enthusiasm for encouraging the progress of the congregation and giving birth to educational activities.

### **Conflict Resolution on the Establishment of the HKBP Efrata Gresik Church**

Talking about resolutions means aiming at solutions for peace which can be carried out in various ways. The definition of a solution according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) is solving or resolving a problem so that it is hoped that it can produce a solution later. In other words, a solution can be a solution to a problem, a responsibility to be carried out, and even a desire to be achieved.

Both resolutions and solutions should be able to coexist. Resolution can be used to create a target (Sufaidi, et al., 2023). Meanwhile, solutions can be a step towards achieving a successful resolution. The resolution solves problems related to clashes between individuals and individuals who adhere to religious ideals and clashes between religious communities in Indonesia. In terms of resolutions that are religious, this means we have to look for or identify and pursue the solutions offered regarding the problem.

Conflict management or resolution is the process of developing a conflict strategy as a plan for conflict management. Conflicts or disputes that occur between humans are quite broad in dimension and scope (Putri, 2019). Conflicts in the public domain are closely related to public interests, where the state has an interest in defending the interests of its citizens. Crimes and

violations committed by someone must be resolved through legal channels (Sufaidi, et al., 2023). In criminal cases, perpetrators of crimes or violations cannot bargain with the state as a form of state protection for its citizens. In this dimension, a criminal is in conflict or dispute with the state and he cannot resolve the dispute through agreement or compensation to the state. Conflict resolution at the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church uses various resolution methods, namely through mediation, negotiation and communication.

Garry Goopaster defines mediation as a problem-solving negotiation process in which an impartial external party collaborates with the disputing parties to help them obtain a satisfactory agreement. Goopaster clearly emphasizes that mediation is a negotiation process, where a third party carries out a dialogue with the disputing party and tries to find a possible resolution of the dispute. The existence of a third party is intended to help parties in a dispute find a way to resolve it, thereby leading to an agreement or agreement that satisfies both parties. It is hoped that the mediation process can overcome the problem of case buildup.

In principle, mediation is a way of resolving disputes outside of court through negotiations involving a third party who is neutral (non-interventionist) and impartial (impartial) and whose presence is accepted by the parties to the dispute. A third party, called a mediator or middleman, has the task of assisting the disputing parties in resolving the problem, but does not have the authority to make decisions. In mediation, a mediator's role is to help the disputing parties by identifying the issues in dispute, developing options, and considering alternatives that can be offered to the parties to reach an agreement. The mediator, in carrying out his role, only has the authority to provide advice or determine the mediation process in seeking to resolve the dispute. The mediator does not have the authority and determining role in relation to the content of the dispute, he only monitors how the mediation process can run, so as to produce an agreement from the parties.

The mediation carried out to resolve the conflict over the closure of the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik Church involved several parties, including the pastor of the HKBP Efrata

Driyorejo Gresik Church, community leaders and the local community as well as third parties, namely the police.

In the mediation process there is negotiation. Negotiation can simply be interpreted as a further process when two or more parties reach an agreement that can meet the satisfaction of all interested parties. Negotiations in the process always involve two parties, namely the first party as the negotiator or initiator of the negotiations. Negotiation is an important part of everyday life in order to survive in business or other fields. In carrying out negotiations, it is not uncommon for conflicts to occur which bring their own problems from simple to complex levels, thus disrupting the progress of negotiations. Conflict always arises if one party's view differs from the opposing party's view. So that conflict can provide optimal benefits in negotiations and reduce its negative effects, conflict can be managed by preventing and handling conflict so that the goals and objectives in negotiations can be achieved. If negotiations reach an impasse, a postponement can be proposed to provide time for both parties to think and reflect when the situation becomes difficult. Suspension does not mean postponing negotiations but to provide a chance to breathe when tensions begin to increase and the suspension time must be utilized as well as possible by both parties and is not intended to avoid the conflict that is occurring. But the contribution of the second pastor's struggle was the greatest because he was the one who fought for the church to remain open and worship to be held. Negotiations carried out between the church and local residents reached an agreement for mutual comfort. Negotiations carried out include, for example, limiting worship hours. Such as limiting the curfew to 21.00, then Sunday worship which is only held from 07.30-09.00. Not only that, the reduction in sound volume for church activities is also limited so as not to disturb the surrounding community. Church activities which generally include public worship, Sunday school for children, and youth worship are also limited. Public worship and Sunday school are held simultaneously on Sundays, while youth worship is only held twice a month. This negotiation process was agreed so that at least church activities could continue

without interference from the surrounding community.

Preventive efforts are efforts to prevent problems in the form of social control measures to prevent or reduce the possibility of undesirable things occurring in the future. These preventive or precautionary actions are carried out both individually and in groups. Preventive actions are taken because people are aware of the potential for conflict to occur if it is not anticipated. The aim of efforts to resolve conflict preventively is to condition the situation in such a way. So that it can prevent problems from arising between the two parties. The preventive efforts carried out by the church are to build good communication, for example greeting local residents, the church also donates to Eid al-Adha activities, and distributes Christmas parcels to local residents. Apart from that, the church and local residents build a sense of togetherness in diversity by participating in the August 17 event held in the area so that a sense of tolerance and mutual respect can be established. It can also build good relations between the church and local residents so that it will reduce and prevent various kinds of conflicts.

Conflict resolution leads to a style of thinking about solutions to find peace that can be done in various ways that are logical and not impossible. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the definition of a solution is solving or resolving a problem so that it is hoped that it will be able to provide a solution to the problem and a way out. The form of a solution can be in the form of a resolution or solution to a problem, accountability that must be given, and can even be in the form of opportunities for interests or desires and goals to be achieved.

Ideally, solutions and resolutions can work side by side in solving problems, especially conflicts. Resolutions can be used as achievement targets. Meanwhile, solutions are positioned as steps or techniques for successful resolution. The resolution solves problems related to clashes between individuals and individuals who adhere to religious ideals and clashes between religious communities in Indonesia. In terms of resolutions that are religious, this means we have to look for or identify and pursue the solutions offered regarding the problem.

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## Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that resolving conflicts within society requires various approaches including negotiation, preventive measures, dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect. The case study on the conflict surrounding the existence of the HKBP Efrata Driyorejo Gresik church demonstrates that with limitations on worship hours, reduction of disruptive church activities, and efforts to build good communication among the involved parties, a conflict that was initially complex and tense can be resolved in a more humane manner that respects the diversity of society.

The agreement reached in this context emphasizes the importance of dialogue and cooperation among different parties to achieve solutions that benefit everyone. Additionally, the cultural negotiation approach, as explained by Sair and Yelly (2021), is also an effective way to resolve conflicts in a gentler and fairer manner.

This indicates that conflicts, despite their complexity, can be addressed with more dynamic and adaptive methods that uphold human values, diversity, and principles of dialogue and tolerance. Therefore, it is important to continue developing and implementing inclusive and just approaches to resolving conflicts within society, in order to create a more harmonious and peaceful environment for all parties involved.

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