



The Concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* in the Theological View of Georg Kirchberger

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Abstract: This study examines Javanese wisdom about God in the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* from Georg Kirchberger's view of the human experience of God. In the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti*, God is a sublime and high reality. Still, at the same time, Gusti is close to the bearer of the mandate or human. The teaching of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* wants to show the dimension of relationality between the Divine and humans. Georg Kirchberger's view of God in the Christian tradition departs from various situations experienced by Christians. The Christian experience of God also shows that God is so great and sublime and so close and present in human life. The Jesus event indicates that God is both transcendent and immanent. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive research. We collect data by interviewing several sources. In addition, previous studies as references support the data. Finally, this research aims to show that the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* does not contradict the idea of monotheistic religions, one of which is Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the concept of "*manunggaling kawula gusti*" in Javanese society. For Javanese society, *manunggaling kawula gusti* is about the relationship between humans and God. Javanese culture believes that God or *Murbeng Dumadi* is very close to humans. This concept wants to show that Javanese wisdom realizes the existence of a high reality beyond humans. Javanese wisdom refers to God or the Lord by saying *Gusti* or *Pengeran*, which means the noble. The *manunggaling kawula Gusti* shows a close reality between the *bearer of the mandate (forma)*, namely humans, and *Gusti Pengeran* (God). The concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is the human experience of God.

The concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* in modern Javanese society has become problematic. Javanese society today has been living with various new "attributes." The most visible attribute is religion. Religion brings a new concept to the life of Javanese society. Religion brings new concepts often in line with or even contradictory to the concept of *kejawen* (Javanese philosophy). In Javanese society, the most accepted concept is monotheism. Monotheistic religions explain the existence of a Supreme Reality that has received less

attention in Javanese wisdom. In the view of some, the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is an attempt by humans to equate themselves with God. This concept leads people's minds to the idea that man can become One with God, or more extreme that man is God Himself.

Hasriyanto argues that the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is not in line with the views of Indonesian religions. Hasriyanto illustrates that this concept presupposes that *kawula* merges into one with *Gusti*. In philosophical language, the finite can merge with the infinite. So, in the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti*, humans can become one with God, as if they are like God. Hasriyanto's view shows a thought that opposes the teachings of Syeh Siti Jenar. But it seems that this view is not quite right. The unity between the *kawula lan Gusti* does not make human beings equal to God. The concept wants to say that humans will eventually return to *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* (the origin of life).

The focus of this research is the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. The interpretation of Javanese wisdom will avoid an inaccurate interpretation of the concept. Previous research that exists is research from Viktor Kristianto and Dominggus. Viktor Kristianto explains that the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* shows that God is high and unreachable; at the same time, God is close and present in human life. In Dicki Dominggus' writing, he sees the concept of Javanese society in the biblical perspective of the Gospel of John 15:7, which describes that God unites with humans but not unity but a response of faith from humans (Dominggus, 2019). Humans will unite with God in eternal abode when they respond to God's call.

METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative research. Qualitative research data collection is by interviewing several subjects described above. We developed the data by comparing it to several previous studies and literacy books. This research will involve believers of Javanese teachings and its leaders. We interviewed Mr. Winarno, the head of the "Daya Manunggal" philosophical Javanese group, and Ki Wandono, a Christian puppeteer and observer of Javanese culture. Their views form the background for the presentation of the research results. Kirchberger's view on the human experience of God will be a perspective in explaining the concept of Javanese wisdom. Through Kirchberger's description of the human experience of God in the Christian tradition, this paper will look at the extent to which the Javanese society's experience explains the experience of God.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

"*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*" has become familiar to most Javanese people. It is like an adage that is very deep and full of value when deciphered. Only a few people understand its importance. This terminology for Javanese wisdom has become a rich ancestral heritage. It gives a complex interpretation. Many people tend not to dare to 'think about' this terminology. This terminology is quite popular, but not many people understand it.

R.Ng. Ronggowarsito described the concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* and the narrative of Sheikh Siti Jenar. Etymologically, *manunggaling kawula Gusti* means *Manunggal*: unity, *Kawula*: me/human, *Gusti*: God, the union of man with God. The narrative about Sheikh Siti Jenar and the teaching of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* has many versions. The most common version is the story of Sheikh Siti Jenar's controversy in teaching *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. According to a famous story in the narrative of Sheikh Siti Jenar, the Muslims consider it as heretical. In the teachings of Sheikh Siti Jenar, when a human being is in touch with Gusti, this human being can become like Gusti or God. He does not need to perform worship services like other humans; he still worships God. God can't worship God.

The narrative of the teachings of Sheikh Siti Jenar is a very popular story in the community until today. The story of Sheikh Siti Jenar's misguidance has been passed down from generation to generation. It happened because there are not many people trying to understand this teaching. Either they are afraid of becoming heretics like Sheikh Siti Jenar, or they are afraid of being declared heretics by most people who already believe that these teachings are heretical.

The wayang play entitled Bima Suci tells that Bima followed his teacher's instructions to find *banyu perwitasari* (*banyu*= water). To find *banyu perwitasari*, Bima must dive into the deep ocean. Thanks to the magic and strength given by the gods, Bima ventured into the ocean. On the way, a giant snake attacked Bima. With his strength and weapons, Bima managed to defeat the giant snake. After defeating the giant snake, Bima met someone very similar to himself. Bima thought the figure was a demon or an enemy who changed his form. But it was extraordinary that Bima could never use his strength to fight the figure. Then the figure said he was another him (Bima) bigger than him. The figure asked Bima to know who the figure was. Bima was shocked when, in his silence, he realized that in front of him was *Sang Linuwih* (the beyond all) or the universe.

Finally, Bima said he wanted to find *banyu perwitasari*, the incarnation of Dewa Ruci. He asked Bima to enter into him through the ear hole. Bima hesitated. How could he, who was so big, enter a figure that was physically much smaller than himself? God knows the doubts experienced by Bima. And finally, after a moment of silence, he can see the figure become many times bigger than himself. Bima found a very peaceful and calm atmosphere. Bima saw so many beautiful colors that he encountered.

The Lord explained that *banyu parwitasari* does not exist. *Banyu perwitasari* is human life. This life exists but is absent. Life exists but is invisible. That is how human beings are. Humans are part of life and this universe. Bima is *jagad cilik* (little world) that is shallow and within human consciousness. At the same time, this life is very high, sublime, and divine. Only humans who can realize it can understand this life. Life is never separated from humans, but humans never realize it. Meanwhile, Dewa Ruci is the *jagad gede* (world beyond), which is this universe. Bima's human is only a tiny part of the *immense universe*. This short story provides a small picture of the concept of man in Javanese wisdom. Human beings are the bearers of the mandate in this life; humans are part of this universe.

Man's awareness of *his being* makes him realize *Sangkan Paraning dumadi* (the origin of all that exists). In Javanese life, there is a realization that humans will return to their origin. So, in life, there is a saying that *urip iku kaya mung mampir ngombe* (life is like drinking a glass of water). It illustrates that human life in this world is concise. Life is like stopping to drink water.

Javanese wisdom explains that humans do not come into the world alone. There is the term *papat kiblata lima pancer*. Amniotic fluid, the placenta, *ari-ari*, and blood always precede a person's birth. It is all part of the human figure that is born (Winarno, 2021). *Pancer* is himself (human beings), while the four winds that are placenta, amniotic fluid, blood, and *ari - ari* are his brothers who will always accompany humans. These four brothers are united in the heart's voice and will always direct themselves to good things. As a bearer of life, the human should continue to direct himself to the giver of life.

Humans are mandate bearers in this life. Javanese wisdom is very aware that human existence in the world is only as a mandate bearer from the Creator. As a mandate bearer, humans live a life that God has outlined. Human awareness of their existence is inseparable from the awareness of the highest reality in life. The art of wayang performance clearly illustrates Javanese wisdom to call his existence in the world. There are many speculations about the philosophical meaning of wayang. But all speculations agree that *wayang* is a picture of human life aware of this universe. Wayang performances feature all the figures of life from *genderuwo*, *humans*, *sacred animals*, and *betara* as symbols of complex and mysterious life. In the art of wayang performance, it is evident that in addition to *ngudal piwulang* (describing teaching), which is full of value, wayang shows the position of humans in this universe.

In Javanese wisdom, the human body has seven earth elements. The *first bumi retina* is the human body. It is evident in humans. It can also be a signal that something is happening to someone. *Secondly*, the *bumi kalbu* is the place of true faith—the voice of the human heart that directs humans to act in the right direction. *Third*, the *earth of the heart* is the place of human knowledge. *Fourth*, *bumi budi* is where people remember God. It is where humans have the awareness to bow down to Him. *Fifth is the bumi jinem*, a place of compassion that makes humans feel compassion for others. If this feeling is never trained, selfishness will cover it. The *sixth* is *bumi sukma* (soul), the place of the science of life where humans understand life. This knowledge is trained by learning from every journey of life. The *Seventh* is *bumi rasa* (sense), a place of all views in life. The earth element in humans forms the condition of the human soul.

In daily life, Javanese wisdom states, "*Wes pancen kersaning Gusti Tuhan*" (It is God's wisdom). The simple phrase has a deep meaning. This sentence shows that Javanese wisdom contains the surrender of life to God. There is an impression that life has been 'arranged' by *Gusti Pangeran* (Endraswara, 2003). Javanese wisdom sees the existence of a supreme reality. So, in the Javanese wisdom perspective, life is a planned journey with the divine.

Javanese wisdom relates to the ultimate reality through expressions in daily life. In life events, *beja cilaka*, *lara kepenak*, *sugih mlarat* (safe and wretched, happy and healthy, rich and poor) is God's will. Humans are only human beings who are *simply doing*. Javanese wisdom

encourages everyone to have a *sumeleh* (surrender to God) attitude. *Serat Centini* states, "*Ana tangis layu - layu, tangise wong wedi mati, tangise alara - lara, maras atine yen mati, gedhangana kuncenana, yen pesthi tan wurung mati*" (Endraswara, 2018). The above text means, "Let it be cried over; let it be hidden in a locked house; if it is time to die, it cannot be rejected." The *sumeleh* (resigned) is a simple life. It is an attitude of belief. It shows the ultimate reality in the course of human life. No matter how humans resist or avoid God's will, it will happen.

The human attitude in dealing with the divine will is *nrima ing pandum*, which is an awareness that humans are only mandated bearers from the Almighty. Everything humans have while living in the world is only a means for humans. When God takes it, humans have no right to refuse. This awareness also emphasizes that God's will is very fair. To get something from God, humans must do something that pleases God.

Javanese wisdom views God's existence as mysterious. God is "the one who exists," but his existence is not human. So, humans will try to keep searching. This behavior of seeking God is called the essence of human life. Humans are aware of God's existence, but only people who will continue to search will be able to be aware of God's existence. The story of the "Bima Suci" searching for the water of life is a picture that expresses man's continuous search for the source of life. God is the source of life for humans. Man realizes that his life is part of God, who created the universe.

Javanese wisdom sees God as a reality *beyond* humans but also near. God is the joint of life. God is everything in life. So, the most appropriate attitude for humans to God is to surrender and do something good. Javanese wisdom believes that humans cannot meet God. Even spiritual figures who exceed humans have never touched God's existence. Humans can only approach God without ever being able to touch God. According to Javanese wisdom, true life is a conscious life searching for God. Javanese wisdom believes that God is life; uniting with God is uniting with real life.

Javanese wisdom believes in a destiny that comes from God. Thus, in Javanese daily conversation, there is the term *urip manungsa iku ana ing cakupane Sing Gawe Urip* (human life is only within the grasp of the Giver of Life). In one of the excerpts from *Serat Centini*, it says, "*luwih kersane Pangeran, yem wes pasthi tan kena owah gingsir. . .*" (God's will cannot change).

Javanese wisdom refers to God as "Gusti Pangeran." This title is the same as that of a king. It reveals the Javanese royal system has a politics of "Dewaraja." Dewaraja politics is that the king is considered a god who carries the voice of God. The term *sabda pandhita ratu tan kena owah* (the king's orders are absolute) refers to this concept.

People believe that God is an existence that is so great and sublime. However, God is also a person who is very close to humans. Humans have an awareness of God, who is close to the universe. Javanese wisdom believes that God is present and resides in this universe. The mountain is a place that is close to the existence of God. The word close does not mean a physical distance but rather a relationality. No wonder many people meditate or meditate by

climbing a mountain. Mountains are sacred, holy, and peaceful places. Not many people dare to behave without respect when climbing a mountain.

The concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* is a relational expression between the human and the divine. In that relationship, it does not mean that the human becomes the divine when the two become one. Instead, the human radiates the divine. *Manunggaling kawula Gusti* does not mean that the human becomes God. This concept is wildly inaccurate. The soul that is one with Gusti is the soul that is always *eling* (remembering). Kawula will always remember Gusti Pangeran so that every action will always lead to what God desires.

The character of humans who strive to maintain unity with Gusti is that they will continue to search. This journey of searching for the life builds the concept of *manunggal mring Gusti*. When this man has the awareness of unity with Gusti, he is a person who never worries about his life. He firmly believes that God will always provide a way for his life.

The unity of *kawula* and *Gusti* encourages humans to take care of the universe. The concept of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* provides awareness that humans recognize *Gusti Prince* through the universe. When humans destroy the universe, humans also refuse to unite with God. Javanese wisdom sees that everything that happens is always related to the divine; for example, a natural disaster expresses God's wrath. Thus, traditions such as "clean village" emerge. The clean village tradition is a reminder for humans always to remember to protect the universe.

The experience of God is a perception that arises when humans encounter the sublime and noble in daily life. An experience is an object that becomes a source of 'learning.' Encounters teach lessons. From the encounter, the experiencing subject will recognize and gain knowledge of the objects. It is the encounter in experience that makes it knowledge. Experience is sometimes impure because the object merely reveals itself to the experiencing subject. Someone who experiences the object will interpret the object according to his experience. Because in experience, the object reveals itself to the object, then the subject interprets the experience of the object according to his insight and knowledge. So that each subject always has a different experience in one event.

The different interpretations of an experience depend on the insights each subject has. Kichberger gives an example of the difference in views between local residents and botanists. Local residents and botanists see a pristine forest. Humans have never touched the forest. When in the forest, they have different attitudes. The locals were afraid because they believed in the existence of spirits. The spirit of the forest is the ruler of the place. Humans should not behave carelessly. Botanists, on the other hand, were amazed. Botanists think they will find many species of animals or plants. One event has two interpretations.

An experience always has two aspects: the object experienced and the subject experienced. Both aspects exert influence. The degree of influence from both is very different. There are times when the subject's ideology is so strong that he cannot see and read the reality that is happening. Just like someone who wears sunglasses at dusk, he thinks it is already night when it is still afternoon.

On the other hand, the influence of the experienced object is so clear, solid, and challenging that the experiencing subject feels compelled to change their views and insights. They may experience a “conversion” because of a reality that has opened their eyes. The subject will have a new insight or a new view because the subject is in an experience.

Experience has complex content. In that experience, the subject or the object can influence each other and form a particular perspective or insight. The explanation shows the nature of human experience to see an inevitable reality. How is the human experience of God? If, in the explanation above, experience is a meeting between subject and object. The experience of God, in a certain sense, cannot be because God is not an object or reality for the subject. God is so transcendent in experience indirectly, as a horizon implicitly present in the object experienced. The experience of God is an experience that has a mediator.

There are four areas of human experience in which humans can experience God. Every human being will be aware of the world or nature around which he was born into a human being who has reason. In that awareness, there are various kinds of judgments, opinions, or something he feels from the situation around him. A person who previously lived in an urban area where the air pollution was so suffocating to breathe, the smell of waterways that were pitch black, or so hot the air outside and inside the house, would feel very happy when in a place that was still cool, many trees, the air was so fresh. The river water was still clear and cold. That person will realize how beautiful nature is. How great is the one who created this universe? When a group of scientists find a system of climate change that is so neatly moving following the state of nature, they will say how a system that is so natural is so neat and sophisticated created. Who has the idea to create a natural cycle that is so balanced? A human experience that marvels at the universe created in an orderly manner according to its cycles.

Through this experience, each person will be open and sensitive to experiencing the natural world as a gift that supports their life. The natural cycles are so organized that humans can live and feel happiness. Through this universe, humans can live and develop. Humans think that all of this is created and moved. There is an extraordinary power that creates and organizes it. So, the awareness of the existence of this supreme reality makes humans indirectly realize the existence of God.

History is a series of events experienced, performed, organized, and accounted for by humans. History is remembered because of the events that occurred because they differed from ordinary events. Happiness, achievement, progress, or sad, frightening events often lead to death in historical events. Often, in historical events, there is an occurrence beyond reason. These events enter the human consciousness after they have happened or passed.

As long as history is in progress, one can never realize that what is happening is extraordinary. Nor do people know where things are going or what will happen. In such events, people have all kinds of unique and out-of-the-ordinary experiences. The event becomes history, and speculation arises. Speculation often leads to roles. Javanese people often say, “If God is not pleased, there is no telling what will happen . . .” or “Maybe it was God’s will that people remember . . .”

History brings people to experience God's presence and role in life. In a life struggle, God is present and involved in the event so that humans realize that God plays a role in every event of human life. In a historical event, humans faced an equal reality outside themselves, namely friendship with others. Relationality is a fact of life. Humans are social creatures, as sociologists say. He cannot live in solitude. Since coming into this world, humans have established a relationship. In the next human experience, he will find various kinds of relationships. But in the end, man will realize that there is a profound and eternal relationship with God.

In the early stages of life, humans find relationships with the closest people, such as parents and siblings. After establishing relationships with the closest people, humans begin to establish relationships with people outside the broader scope. At this stage, they will feel a sense in themselves to build a togetherness that needs each other. At this stage, there is also a sense of mutual need. Humans begin to build a friendship relationship. At this stage, humans feel that friends become their other selves. Then, humans experience a more intimate relationship, and at this stage, humans recognize love. But love has also grown since the beginning. At this stage, it is so binding. Through these interpersonal relationships, humans begin to realize that there is a power to support each other.

It is at this stage that humans begin to personify this ultimate reality. Humans realize that God, who is this extraordinary power, is personally and humanly present. Compassion for others and friends experiencing distress shows God is present and helps. In life experience, humans often realize the existence of a power that exceeds their abilities. And if people want to be honest, they will say that this is the power of God. Because there is no way a human being would be able to do such a thing, for example, financial difficulties because they have to pay off debts; if the debt has not been paid off, they cannot live there. But often, without anyone expecting it, help suddenly comes. Or when someone almost gets into an accident, that person is saved because God has another will.

There is a personal inner experience of an inner voice that tries to direct humans to choose better things over less good things. An example is the story of someone with a strategic position in an institution. In that position, he could have committed corruption without the institution knowing. However, he felt that there was a whisper saying that he should not do that. This kind of experience shows a power beyond human ability that moves people.

Kichberger places the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* from Javanese wisdom on the concept of Javanese human consciousness in realizing its relationship with a Supreme Reality or God. Kirchberger's concept will be the point of view in perceiving Javanese wisdom about God in *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. Kichberger believes that the human experience of God occurs because of the awareness of the surrounding nature. In the surrounding nature, humans are grateful that nature gives life to humans. Humans are amazed by the orderliness of nature. Humans realize that this orderly nature exists because there is a Reality that creates and regulates nature.

Javanese wisdom unites man, nature, and God. Javanese wisdom recognizes the presence of God in the existence of nature. Traditional ceremonies such as *clean villages*, *send dawuhan*, *earth alms*, *sea alms*, or *wiwit* ceremonies show it. These ceremonies remind everyone to care for nature to sustain their relationship with God. Javanese wisdom emphasizes harmony with nature. Human actions should not damage nature. Javanese wisdom believes that when nature is damaged, God will be angry and destroy humans, as in the tradition of “sedekah bumi” (almsgiving) of the people on the slopes of Mount Kelud. Every year, they hold a carnival with offerings of crops. Apart from being an expression of gratitude, they also ask for safety. When the mountain is about to erupt, they will bring offerings of one ox as a sacrifice to appease God.

Javanese wisdom places beautiful nature as something sacred. For example, when there is a large spring, they will protect it. The place is *wingit* (mysterious). The purpose is so everyone who visits the water source does not do something wrong or damage it. The relationship with nature places God in the consciousness of the Javanese person. God unites Himself in the universe. Taking care of nature means that man merges with nature. When man has merged with nature, he will not damage himself and nature. That is the experience of *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. It is an experience of a human being who is one with nature.

Kichberger also highlights the issue of human relations in his view of the human experience of God. In human relations, humans realize compassion for others. A sense of love arises when humans support each other in the struggle for life. This experience makes humans realize that I and others are the same creation of God. The awareness of compassion from others also makes humans realize that there is a power that helps them when they are going through a difficult time.

The gospel also places the awareness of God present in others. Matt. 25:31-46 explains that God is in the lives of suffering people. Often, people do not realize others are God’s dwelling place, so they see others as enemies. When a man can realize God’s presence through others, he will feel a great power that brings him to a peaceful situation. God is the source of peace. Being with others is a manifestation of that peace.

Javanese wisdom places importance on the presence of others. Javanese wisdom reminds us that humans cannot afford to live in solitude, except those who are ascetic or away from the crowd for a specific purpose. But in general, Javanese wisdom views the social climate as necessary. Life together with others is a life of its own. Javanese wisdom teaches that everyone should always involve many people. They must have a spirit of togetherness, for example, the activity of *sambatan*. When a family wants to build a house, neighbors will help without pay during the start and end of construction. Or, when a family has a party to marry off their child, neighbors will help with various things such as cooking, cleaning and decorating the house, and even taking care of guests.

The awareness of God in the human experience of the presence of others is a real thing for Javanese wisdom. Javanese wisdom places togetherness as a source of appreciating God’s presence. The presence of others is the existence of God, who “exists.” Javanese wisdom

believes that everyone has a *pamomong*. *Pamomong* is a spiritual person who will accompany everyone. *Pamomong* is in charge of advising and guiding people.

CONCLUSION

Manunggaling Kawula Gusti teaches that humans must realize this world manifests God's will. The teaching of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* does not teach that humans will become like God, who rules over everything. Instead, it teaches that humans should never forget the existence of God. When humans are aware of being *one* with *God*, they will not destroy nature or harm their fellow humans. The teaching of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* is a guideline for humans to remember God.

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