# Religious Happiness as Social Capital in Indonesia's Plural Society: A John Hickian Framework for Spiritual Formation and Interfaith Harmony

## David Ming*

Sekolah Tinggi Teologia Kadesi, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: davidmingming3@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This study examines religious happiness as social capital for fostering spirituality and harmony among people in a pluralistic Indonesian society. The research analysis unit includes 160 reputable articles on religious happiness, spirituality, and pluralism published between 2013 and 2023. The research uses a systematic literature review based on PRISMA 2020 with thematic analysis, which is then interpreted through John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. The results of the synthesis identified four main themes, namely transcendental meaning, moral integrity, spiritual practices (prayer and biblical engagement), and social service, which collectively function as social capital in fostering empathy, tolerance, and interfaith cooperation. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing religious happiness not only as individual well-being but also as a collective resource grounded in Hick's pluralism and the Pancasila framework. Theoretically, this research contributes to comparative theology and interfaith studies by developing contextual models of religious happiness that bridge personal spirituality and social cohesion, while offering practical implications for religious institutions, education, and public policy for strengthening inclusive spirituality and sustainable peace.

**Keywords**: Religious happiness; Social capital; Spiritual formation; Harmony between them; John Hick

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most plural countries in the world, with six official religions coexisting with hundreds of local expressions of belief. This diversity is a source of social wealth, but it can also create tensions if not managed constructively (Hoon, 2020). In this context, religious happiness plays a strategic role, as it not only shapes the individual's inner well-being but also affects the quality of interfaith social relations. Various studies show that religious involvement is positively correlated with life satisfaction, psychological resilience, and prosocial behavior (Kim, 2021; Hou et al., 2023). In Indonesia itself, the values of Pancasila and the guarantee of religious freedom in the 1945 Constitution provide a normative framework for interreligious harmony (Susanto et al., 2023). However, social reality shows that identity-based conflicts still arise frequently, indicating the need

for a spiritual foundation that is not only oriented towards personal piety but also social cohesion. Thus, religious happiness needs to be understood not just as a private experience, but as a social resource that can sustain coexistence in a pluralistic society.

Academic studies of the relationship between religiosity and happiness have flourished in psychology, sociology, and religious studies. Cross-cultural research shows that religiosity contributes significantly to subjective well-being by fostering meaning in life and emotional resilience ( Exline & Wilt, 2023). In Islamic tradition, happiness is understood as the central goal of religious life (Amiruddin et al., 2021), whereas in Christianity, prayer and closeness to God are seen as the foundation of spiritual formation (Aroney, 2023). Other studies emphasize the role of spiritual practices and social service in strengthening well-being and community solidarity (Büssing & Koenig, 2022; Hui et al., 2023). However, most of those studies focus on relatively homogeneous contexts or emphasize the psychological dimensions of the individual. There are still a few studies that systematically explain how religious happiness operates in a multireligious society as a mechanism for spiritual formation and harmony between religions, especially in the Indonesian context (Hoon, 2020; Susilawati & Christiani, 2023).

Departing from this gap, this study aims to examine religious happiness as social capital for spiritual formation and social cohesion in a plural Indonesian society. Specifically, this study synthesizes findings from 160 reputable articles published between 2013–2023 through a PRISMA-based systematic literature review 2020 (Patel, J.,2022). with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The goal is to identify multidimensional patterns of religious happiness—including transcendental meaning, moral integrity, spiritual practice, and social service—and interpret these findings through John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. This approach was chosen to address the research gap separating individual religious well-being from interfaith social dynamics. By positioning religious happiness within the framework of pluralism and Pancasila values, this research seeks to offer a conceptual model that bridges personal spirituality with social harmony, while expanding the study of religious happiness into the realm of comparative theology and interfaith studies.

The main argument of this article is that religious happiness cannot be reduced to a purely subjective experience; rather, it serves as social capital that strengthens empathy, tolerance, and cooperation among religious communities. Based on John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which views world religions as an authentic response to the transcendent Real, this study hypothesizes that cross-tradition spiritual practices—such as prayer, scripture reading, moral living, and service—produce shared ethical values that underpin social cohesion. Previous findings suggest that religious engagement correlates with increased social trust and reduced prejudice (Berry & Grigoryev, 2022), while interfaith social service has been shown to strengthen community resilience (Escarbajal-Frutos et al., 2019). Thus, this article hypothesizes that religious happiness, when understood pluralistically and contextually, becomes a spiritual foundation that transforms diversity from potential conflict to a source of solidarity. This framework places religious happiness as a link between personal faith and social peace, while offering a theoretical foundation for the development of inclusive spirituality in multifaith societies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Religious Happiness and Well-Being

Religious happiness has become a focus of study in religious science and psychology because of its role in individuals' subjective well-being. Many studies show that religiosity is positively correlated with happiness and mental health, especially when religion provides a strong sense of meaning, sense of purpose, and social support. For example, studies by Diener and colleagues show that religiously active individuals tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being than non-religious, even after controlling for demographic and economic variables (Diener et al., 2011 – meta-analysis; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2012). Another study using the European and World Values Surveys found that belief in God was not only associated with higher happiness but also with greater mutual trust in nearby social groups, including neighbors (Lindström, 2011). This literature asserts that religiosity contributes to subjective well-being through psychological and social mechanisms, including the support of religious social networks, a sense of meaning in life, and coping with stress.

However, the relationship between religiosity and happiness is not universal; social context and religious structure have a significant influence on these outcomes. Cross-country research shows variations in the correlation between religiosity–happiness, depending on social norms, levels of secularization, and the role of religious institutions in society (Diener et al., 2011). For example, a study by Rojas and Watkins-Fassler in *the Journal of Happiness Studies* shows how religious practices, such as prayer and involvement in community life, relate to life satisfaction across several domains (Routley, 2023 & Watkins-Fassler, 2022). This research expands understanding of how religiosity not only provides a positive inner experience but also interacts with daily life factors such as social support, family roles, and community structure. The overall literature supports the idea that religiosity is an important component of subjective well-being, even though its effects are moderated by cultural and social contexts.

### 2.2. Religious Social Capital

The concept *of social capital* refers to resources that are manifested in social networks, shared values, and norms that facilitate coordination and cooperation in society. In the religious context, *religious social capital* refers to the social capital available through relationships and activities within religious communities, including beliefs, collective norms, and social support between members. The seminal article Maselko, Hughes & Cheney (2011) introduces this religious construct systematically and shows that religion-based social relations can be measured and relate to various aspects of social well-being and health (*Social Science & Medicine*). They show that people with high religious social capital—for example, through participation in religious community activities and high levels of belief—tend to have greater social resources, even though these relationships are complex and influenced by other factors such as environmental stress and secular social capital.

Other literature also supports the role of religion as a significant source of social capital in collective life. Putnam and colleagues show that social networks formed through religious activities, such as community gatherings or worship services, often yield both bonding and bridging social capital, both of which are associated with community involvement and prosocial behavior (Putnam,

2000; Maselko et al., 2011). Further research in a broader context shows that religious social capital can strengthen social cohesion, increase trust between individuals, and provide structural support during times of crisis or social uncertainty (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Thus, the empirical literature asserts that *religious social capital* is an important dimension that bridges individuals' religious experiences with broader collective social dynamics, including tolerance, citizen participation, and the overall quality of social life.

## 2.3. Religious Pluralism, Interfaith Harmony, dan Pluralistic Hypothesis

In the study of religion and pluralistic society, John Hick's thinking on *religious pluralism* has become a major reference point in explaining interreligious relationships and their impact on social harmony. Hick proposes that the various major religious traditions are not merely competing in claims of absolute truth, but are legitimate cultural responses to the Supreme Reality through their respective perspectives. This pluralistic hypothesis holds that transcendent experience is experienced differently yet equally across various religious traditions and is equally capable of bringing ethical and spiritual transformation to its adherents. Further development by Sugirtharajah in *John Hick's collection, Religious Pluralism in Global Perspective,* extends this discourse to non-Western cultural contexts, including Asia and Africa, reinforcing the relevance of pluralism in modern global dynamics.

Nevertheless, Hick's pluralistic thought also faces significant theoretical criticism that is important to consider in the study of interfaith harmony. The main criticism comes from theologians such as D'Costa, who argue that Hick's pluralistic claims can undermine the doctrinal commitments of certain traditions and that they are difficult to maintain epistemological coherence (Dickie, J. 2023). In addition, some scholars underscore that the equivalence of Hick's proposed religious claims could pose normative challenges when applied in a plural context fraught with sharp doctrinal differences. Nevertheless, contemporary literature suggests that the pluralistic hypothesis remains relevant as an analytical tool for understanding interreligious harmony and cross-tradition dialogue, especially in a multireligious society such as Indonesia. This approach facilitates understanding that plural relationships need not be competitive but can be shaped by shared values such as respect for human dignity and social cooperation, thereby encouraging stronger contextual tolerance practices.

## 3.  Methods

### 3.1. Material Objects

The material object of this research is academic literature on religious happiness, spiritual formation, and harmony, among others, in a pluralistic society, especially that which is relevant to the Indonesian context. The study focuses on how religious happiness is conceptualized and operationalized as a spiritual and social resource. Thus, the unit of analysis includes theoretical constructions, empirical findings, and conceptual models that have emerged in previous studies ( Kim, 2021). This approach allows for a cross-disciplinary synthesis to understand the dynamics of religiosity in multireligious societies.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative systematic literature review design that follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability of the study selection process (Patel, J.,2022). This design was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive mapping of the thematic patterns of religious happiness and their relevance to social cohesion. In addition, John Hick's pluralistic framework is used as an interpretive lens to link findings across traditions into comparative theological perspectives to honour God (Harianto, G. P., Metekohy, B., Sahertian, N., & Ming, D. ,2022)

### 3.3. Data Sources

Data sources are obtained from major academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Thesearchislimitedtopublications from 2013–2023 toensurerelevance. Of the 287 initial articles identified, 160 met the inclusion criteria after the title and abstract screening and deduplication. These criteria include an explicit focus on religious happiness or spirituality and its relevance to the context of pluralism or interfaith (Kim, 2021; Hoon, 2020).

### 3.4. Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search using the keywords "religious happiness," "spiritual formation," "pluralism," "interfaith harmony," and "Indonesia." Articles that pass the initial stage are then fully reviewed to ensure thematic suitability. Two researchers conducted independent screening, accompanied by *peer debriefing* to improve selection consistency and minimize bias (Noël Bonneuil., 2016). This procedure ensures that the data corpus represents a relevant spectrum of views.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Technique

Dataanalysiswas conductedusing athematic analysis approach asoutlinedby Braun and Clarke (2021). The coding process was carried out iteratively to identify key themes, which were then mapped against John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. The validity of the findings was strengthened through *cross-checking* between researchers and re-tracing the context of each theme. This approach allows for a conceptual synthesis that positions religious happiness as social capital in the formation of spirituality and harmony.

## 4.   Result

### 4.1 Empirical Patterns of Religious Happiness

Religious happiness appears in the literature as a pattern of religious well-being rooted in personal spiritual experience and sustained religious engagement. A synthesis of 160 articles shows that religious happiness is consistently understood as an inner state characterized by peace, gratitude, meaning in life, and existential satisfaction. Cross-cultural studies report that individuals with active religious involvement—through collective worship, personal prayer, and spiritual reflection—show higher levels of subjective well-being than those without a clear spiritual orientation (Kim, 2021; Hou et al., 2023). These findings are also reinforced by Pew Research Center data (2022),which shows that regular participation in religious practices is positively correlated with

life satisfaction and emotional stability. In the context of positive psychology, religious happiness reportedly serves as an internal resource that helps individuals cope with life's stresses, strengthen hope, and maintain emotional balance (Exline & Wilt, 2023; Yonker et al., 2022). In Indonesia, several studies confirm that internalized religiosity, through daily practice, is associated with a greater sense of meaning in life and inner peace (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023). Overall, this empirical pattern suggests that religious happiness is a multidimensional phenomenon that is consistently present in religious experiences across cultural contexts.

The cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions are the main components of the pattern of religious happiness. Cognitively, individuals report believing that life has a purpose, grounded in spiritual values and a relationship with the Divine (Routley, 2023). In the affective dimension, positive emotions such as peace, hope, and gratitude recur across empirical reports, even in the midst of difficult situations (Kim, 2021). The behavioral dimension is reflected in active engagement in religious practices such as prayer, scripture reading, and social service, which reinforces a sense of community and spiritual identity (Achour & Mohd, 2023). World Values Survey data (2022) shows that individuals who regularly participate in collective worship are more likely to engage in social activities that support community well-being. Similar findings were reported by Dwyer et al. (2017) and Hou et al. (2023), who identified a positive relationship between religious commitment, subjective well-being, and psychological resilience. In Indonesia, religious involvement is also associated with increased social trust and community solidarity (Hoon, 2020; Susilawati & Christiani, 2023). Thus, religious happiness is empirically manifested through the interaction between beliefs, emotions, and social-religious practices.

Apart from being a personal experience, religious happiness is also recorded to have a significant social dimension. A number of studies report that individuals with high levels of religious happiness tend to show prosocial attitudes, empathy, and openness to other groups (Berry & Grigoryev, 2022; Hui et al., 2023). In pluralistic societies, including Indonesia, religious happiness is often associated with increased tolerance and willingness to interact across faiths (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2023) also noted a decrease in the potential for interreligious conflict in regions that actively implement community-based religious moderation programs. Descriptively, these findings suggest that religious happiness not only impacts individual well-being but also correlates with the quality of social relations in pluralistic societies. Thus, the identified empirical patterns place religious happiness as a phenomenon that transcends the private realm and is directly connected to broader social dynamics.

## 4.2 Religious Happiness in Spiritual Formation Practices

The practice of spiritual formation is the main context in which religious happiness is concretely manifested. A synthesis of literature shows that closeness to God is a central element in the experience of religious happiness across traditions. Individuals who report deep spiritual relationships also show higher levels of inner peace and meaning in life ( Exline & Wilt, 2023). In Christianity, the practice of prayer, meditation, and surrender to God's will is reported to strengthen a sense of peace and spiritual trust (Aroney, 2023). In Islam, the implementation of ṣalāt and dhikr is consistently associated with emotional stability and life satisfaction (Amiruddin et al., 2021). These cross-tradition findings are reinforced by the study of Yonker et al. (2022), which showed that regular spiritual engagement is associated with a decrease in symptoms of anxiety and depression. In

Indonesia, thepracticeofpersonaland collectivedevotion is alsoreportedasasourceofpsychological resilience and life balance. Overall, empirical data show that closeness to God through spiritual practice is the main foundation of religious happiness in the process of spiritual formation.

Another dimension that consistently emerges is moral life and ethical integrity as part of spiritual formation. Studies show that individuals who internalize religious moral values—such as honesty, justice, and caring—report higher levels of inner satisfaction (Park, 2023). A godly life is also associated with avoiding destructive behavior and improving the quality of interpersonal relationships (Boaheng, 2023). Research by Wibawa and Awaliah (2023) in Indonesia found that the application of religious moral values correlates with increased social beliefs in local communities. These findings align with Kim (2021), who reports that faith-based moral integrity contributes to emotional stability and healthier social relationships. Thus, ethical practices rooted in religious teachings empirically become an integral part of religious happiness while strengthening the social dimension of spiritual formation.

Prayer, engagement with the scriptures, and social service are also recorded as the main practices that underpin religious happiness. The study of Büssing and Koenig (2022) shows that prayer functions as a means of emotional regulation and a source of spiritual security. Engagement with sacred texts provides moral guidance and strengthens individual resilience in the face of adversity (Kruse, 2020). In addition, various studies have found that participation in social services increases life satisfaction by providing a sense of meaning and a sense of contributing to others' well-being (Thoits, 2012; Hui et al., 2023). In Indonesia, involvement in community-based religious activities is reported to expand social networks and strengthen solidarity (Haryono, 2021). Cross-contextual data also show that interfaith ministry initiatives correlate with decreased prejudice and increased trust between groups (Berry & Grigoryev, 2022; Patel, 2022). Descriptively, these findings confirm that spiritual practice and social service are empirical manifestations of religious happiness in the process of spiritual formation.

## 4.3 Religious Happiness as Social Capital in Indonesia's Plural Society

In a pluralistic Indonesian society, religious happiness is empirically connected to the dynamics of social cohesion and interpersonal relations. The literature shows that individuals with high spiritual well-being tend to exhibit greater tolerance and openness toward adherents of other religions ( Hou et al., 2023). Indonesia, with its six official religions and diverse expressions of belief, provides a social context in which religious practices interact directly with public life (Susilawati & Christiani, 2023). The study by Setiawan  found that internalized religious values strengthen mutual respect in multicultural communities. In addition, the report by Susanto et al. (2023) shows that constitutional guarantees of religious freedom foster a more open environment for interfaith interaction. Descriptively, these findings show that religious happiness is associated with higher-quality social relationships in the context of religious diversity.

At the community level, religious happiness is also reflected in the formation of inclusive social networks and interfaith collaboration. Research by Berry and Grigoryev (2022) shows that communities that practice religious values positively are more likely to build a shared identity and reduce distance between groups. The study by Escarbajal-Frutos et al. (2019) found that collective

involvement in cross-cultural and religious social programs increases trust and community resilience. In Indonesia, interfaith joint service initiatives are reported to strengthen local solidarity and reduce the potential for conflict (Haryono, 2021). Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2023) also showed that regions that actively implement religious moderation programs exhibit a significant decrease in indicators of conflict vulnerability. These findings empirically demonstrate that religious happiness serves as a social resource that supports cooperation and community stability.

The role of religious institutions and the state also shapes religious happiness as social capital. The religious moderation program developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs emphasizes spiritual balance, empathy, and openness as public values (Khotimah & Sukron, 2023). Patel's research (2022) shows that inclusive spiritual education from an early age correlates with increased social beliefs and prosocial attitudes in the younger generation. In addition, Ricci (2022) reported that structured interfaith dialogue in Southeast Asia contributes to strengthening interfaith relations. In the Indonesian context, the integration of religious values into public policy and education is reported to expand the space for community collaboration (Susanto et al., 2023). Overall, this empirical evidence suggests that religious happiness is not only an individual experience but is also institutionalized through community policy, education, and practice, thereby serving as social capital to sustain interpersonal harmony in pluralistic societies.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that religious happiness is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes inner well-being, spiritual practice, moral integrity, and social engagement. The synthesis results showed that individuals with active religious involvement experienced higher levels of peace, meaning in life, and existential satisfaction, while exhibiting strong prosocial tendencies (Kim, 2021; Hou et al., 2023). Spiritually formative practices such as prayer, scriptural engagement, and social service are also correlated with emotional stability and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Büssing & Koenig, 2022; Yonker et al., 2022). At the community level, religious happiness is associated with increased tolerance, social belief, and interfaith cooperation in Indonesia (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023; Susilawati & Christiani, 2023). Overall, these results show that religious happiness operates simultaneously in the personal and social realms, strengthening both individual well-being and plural community cohesion.

Reflections on these findings suggest that religious happiness does not develop solely in private spaces but is shaped by the continuous interaction between personal spiritual experiences and community structures. The involvement in devotional practices, moral life, and ministry activities identified in the Results demonstrates how spirituality manifests in concrete social actions (Aroney, 2023; Amiruddin et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the integration of religious values into communal life is evident in strengthened local solidarity and interfaith participation, as reported in studies on religious moderation and community resilience (Haryono, 2021; Khotimah & Sukron, 2023). In addition, a report from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2023) shows that areas with community-based moderation programs have lower potential for conflict. This reflection affirms that religious happiness acquires social meaning when expressed through relationships, cooperation, and concern for others, thereby linking personal spirituality with collective life.

The study's results showthat religious happiness can be understood as social capital that fosters empathy, tolerance, and cross-group belief. Findings on closeness to God, moral integrity, spiritual practice, and social service indicate that these elements foster shared ethical values, thereby strengthening interfaith relationships ( Park, 2023). In John Hick's pluralistic framework, this pattern reflects a diverse spiritual response but leads to similar ethical transformations (Daliman et.al,2023). Empirical evidence regarding increased openness to other groups and decreased prejudice in religiously active communities supports this understanding (Berry & Grigoryev, 2022; Hui et al., 2023). Thus, religious happiness functions not only as an individual psychological condition but also as a collective resource that enables the formation of a space for interpersonal encounter in a pluralistic society.

Compared with previous studies, this study extends findings on the relationship between religiosity and individual well-being by adding a more explicit social dimension. Cross-cultural studies generally highlight life satisfaction and mental health as the primary outcomes of religiosity (Exline & Wilt, 2023; Yonker et al., 2022), while this study shows that religious happiness is also correlated with social beliefs, tolerance, andinterfaith cooperation. In addition, unlike muchresearch conducted in the context of a relatively homogeneous society, this synthesis departs from the literature on multireligious societies, especially Indonesia (Hoon, 2020; Menchik, 2016). Thus, this study complements the literature by showing that religious happiness can function as social capital in the context of pluralism, while enriching interdisciplinary studies of religion and social cohesion.

The findings of this study open up opportunities for follow-up, both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, further empirical testing of the model of religious happiness as social capital through surveys and case studies across various Indonesian communities is needed, as is the development of valid measurement instruments to assess its impact on social attitudes and beliefs (Robles et al., 2024). Practically, religious institutions, educational institutions, and policymakers can leverage these findings by strengthening spiritually formative practices that emphasize empathy, moral integrity, and interfaith ministry (Patel, 2022). Religious moderation programs and inclusive spiritual education can be used as an initial implementation space (Susanto et al., 2023). With these measures, religious happiness has the potential to become a sustainable foundation for social cohesion and peace in a pluralistic society.

## 6. Conclusion

This study confirms that religious happiness is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes inner well-being, spiritual formation practices, moral integrity, and social involvement in Indonesia's plural society. Asynthesisofresultsshowedthatclosenessto God, the practice ofprayer andscripture reflection, and participation in social service correlated with increased meaning of life, emotional stability, and prosocial tendencies. In addition, individuals and communities with high levels of religious happiness also show increased tolerance, social trust, and interfaith cooperation. Empirical evidence from various studies analyzed shows that internalized religiosity not only strengthens individual well-being but also sustains social cohesion by fostering solidarity networks and interfaith meeting spaces. Thus, the main findings of this study place religious happiness as a personal and social resource relevant to harmony in a pluralistic society.

Scientifically, this research makes a conceptual contribution by positioning religious happiness as a form of social capital that bridges personal spirituality and interpersonal harmony, especially in the Indonesian context. By integrating John Hick's pluralistic framework with empirical findings on the practice of spiritual formation and social relations, the study expands on the literature that previously focused more on the relationship between religiosity and individual well-being. In addition, this research offers an interdisciplinary perspective that connects the study of theology, religious psychology, and sociology, thereby enriching the understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere. Evidence linking religious happiness, tolerance, and social beliefs strengthens the argument that spiritual experiences can be translated into shared ethical values. Thus, this article contributes to developing a theoretical model that positions religious happiness as an important foundation for social cohesion in plural societies.

In the future, further research is needed to empirically test the model of religious happiness as social capital using quantitative and qualitative methods across various regions of Indonesia. A more comprehensive measurement instrument is also needed to assess the impact of religious happiness on attitudes, social beliefs, and citizen participation. In addition, cross-country comparative studies with similar plural contexts can help generalize these findings. Early evidence from the literature synthesis indicates the great potential of spiritual formation practices and religious moderation programs to strengthen social harmony, but their effectiveness still needs to be systematically evaluated. Therefore, future research is expected to integrate field data, policy analysis, and community perspectives to develop evidence-based strategies that make religious happiness a sustainable foundation for interfaith peace and cooperation.

## Acknowledgements

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