The Role of Intersubjectivity Philosophy in the Disputive Group Relationship Era

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Abstract

In contemporary Indonesian society, religious groups face critical challenges in maintaining cohesive relationships amidst increasing individualism and political engagement opportunities. The tendency toward individuation—where members prioritize personal interests over collective goals—threatens to erode the foundational bonds of voluntarism and shared commitment that characterize these communities. This research aims to explore the concept of intersubjectivity, particularly Gabriel Marcel's philosophy of co-esse (being-with), as a restorative framework for addressing disputive relationships within religious groups, while synthesizing insights from Edmund Husserl's empathy and Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy. The study employs a qualitative method based on literature review with a descriptive-analytical philosophical-theological approach, utilizing hermeneutic interpretation and thematic content analysis of primary philosophical texts and contemporary empirical studies on Indonesian religious group dynamics. The analysis reveals that Husserlian empathy provides the foundation for recognizing shared reality through analogical apperception, Buberian dialogue distinguishes authentic I–Thou encounters from instrumental I–It relationships, and Marcelian intersubjectivity offers the most comprehensive framework by grounding human existence in relational ontology rather than isolated individualism. The research concludes that Marcel's intersubjectivity transforms relationships from strategic utility to existential co-existence, providing both diagnostic clarity and normative guidance for religious communities navigating political complexities. The implications extend theoretically by bridging existential phenomenology with empirical social analysis, practically by offering ethical frameworks for group governance and leadership formation, and policy-wise by suggesting governmental approaches that respect communal character rather than incentivizing instrumental participation, thereby strengthening both religious group integrity and broader social cohesion.

Keywords: Social Philosophy, Intersubjectivity, Disputive Relationship, Strengthening, Religious Group, Relationships within Groups

INTRODUCTION

This research addresses the critical challenges that religious groups face in fostering cohesive relationships in an era increasingly dominated by individualism. Today, there is a troubling trend where personal goals and self-interest frequently take precedence over collective aspirations, often leading to weakened group dynamics and eroded interpersonal connections (Twenge et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022). The phenomenon known as individuation presents serious obstacles for communities that rely on strong ties to achieve shared objectives (Neves, 2018; Brewer & Roccas, 2021). In response, this research proposes an exploration of intersubjectivity, a concept emphasizing the significance of shared experiences and mutual understanding as the cornerstone of social interaction and group relationship building (Koudenburg & Jans, 2023; Arslan, 2020; Fuchs, 2019).

Previous research demonstrates that in the current era, the dynamics of relationships among individuals within religious groups have shifted significantly due to the opening of political power spaces (Sumual et al., 2023). Specifically, Sumual and colleagues document how the reconfiguration of political opportunities fundamentally alters the organizational structure and internal dynamics of religious voluntary associations in Indonesia (Rusfiana &

Kurniasih, 2024). Recently, the government has afforded greater space for religious groups in the democratic process, enabling them to pursue collective interests (Oktaviarani & Maulia, 2024). Notably, the issue of mining permits for religious groups has become particularly prominent (Gumilar & Dirkareshza, 2024). However, this situation also creates new opportunities for individual interests within groups to dominate the process and take the spotlight (Hasbi et al., 2025).

While current studies have investigated the political engagement of religious groups (Oktaviarani & Maulia, 2024) and the mechanisms by which these organizations navigate power dynamics (Gumilar & Dirkareshza, 2024), a notable theoretical gap persists concerning the philosophical underpinnings of relational disruption (Kheirabadi & Izadi, 2021). Much of the scholarship to date has centered on structural and political aspects, largely overlooking the existential and intersubjective foundations that constitute communal religious life (Arslan, 2020; Fuchs, 2019). This research addresses this gap by employing Gabriel Marcel's philosophy of intersubjectivity as an analytical framework—an approach not systematically applied to contemporary Indonesian religious group dynamics in the literature (Delfgaauw, 2021). The novelty of this study lies in three main contributions: First, it offers a philosophical reinterpretation of the individuation phenomenon within religious groups through Marcel's concept of *co-esse* ("being-with"), bridging existential phenomenology with observations of religious community fragmentation (Verhoeven, 2022). Second, it synthesizes Marcel's intersubjectivity with Husserlian empathy and Buberian dialogue to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework tailored to address disputive relationships—a synthesis not previously attempted in Indonesian religious organization studies (Crossley, 2019). Third, the research proposes intersubjectivity not only as a descriptive concept but also as a normative and practical framework for restoring collective commitment amidst political instrumentalization, extending philosophical discourse into ethical guidelines for religious community leadership (Zhao, 2023).

Consequently, the core values of voluntarism that underlie religious group existence have started to be displaced by individual agendas that exploit political opportunities for personal gain (Yilmaz & Sunar, 2022; Nurhasim, 2020). This trend exemplifies individuation, where loyalty to the collective weakens and is replaced by individual maneuvers for access to power (Suryahudaya, 2023; Campbell & Putnam, 2021). Thus, the main challenge is not solely political engagement, but the preservation of collective integrity in the face of individual ambitions (Rahman & Fauzi, 2024).

Intersubjectivity, as articulated by existentialist philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Buber, and Gabriel Marcel, offers crucial insights for transcending self-serving impulses in favor of meaningful connections with others. By examining this philosophical framework, the research seeks to show how intersubjectivity revitalizes group cohesion and interpersonal relationships within religious communities. This analysis is especially timely, given that shared beliefs and collective experiences are essential to the identity and functioning of these groups. Ultimately, the study highlights the transformative potential of intersubjectivity for overcoming the limitations of individualism and developing stronger, more meaningful relationships in both religious and broader social contexts.

This research aims to cultivate a philosophical understanding of intersubjectivity as an analytical and restorative framework for addressing disputant relations within religious groups.

It critically analyzes how Marcel's concept of intersubjectivity, informed by Husserl and Buber, provides conceptual resources for diagnosing the existential roots of relational fragmentation and articulating practical implications for group governance, leadership formation, and conflict resolution. The benefits include enriching philosophical dialogue by showing the applicability of intersubjectivity to contemporary social issues, thereby bridging the gap between abstract phenomenology and lived experience. Practically, the research provides religious leaders and members with a conceptual vocabulary and ethical framework to identify and remedy relational pathologies before they cause irreparable fragmentation. From a policy perspective, the study suggests implications for both government and non-governmental organizations: adopting approaches that respect and nurture the communal character of religious groups, rather than inadvertently encouraging instrumental participation that undermines collective values.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method based on literature with a descriptive-analytical philosophical-theological approach. It explored the concept of intersubjectivity as a framework to address the erosion of cohesive relationships in religious communities amid the rising influence of individuation. The study conducted conceptual inquiry by analyzing philosophical texts and interpretive theological reflections. Primary data sources included contemporary issues of individuation, social fragmentation, and challenges to communal identity in religious settings, alongside key concepts from the philosophy of intersubjectivity. The sources were selected based on their relevance to the main themes, academic credibility, and conceptual clarity, aiming to articulate the theoretical tension between individuation and collective reality. The analysis combined hermeneutic interpretation to uncover deeper meanings in philosophical and theological texts with thematic content analysis to identify key patterns related to self-other relationships, shared experiences, shared recognition, and dialogical presence, highlighting the role of intersubjectivity in the existential issues discussed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
The Disputive Religious Group Relationship Era

In Indonesia's social dynamics, religious groups play a crucial role in shaping collective identity and achieving shared goals—be they religious, social, or political (Suryahudaya, 2023). However, in this disruptive era marked by rapid social changes, globalization, and the development of digital technology, the relational patterns among members of religious groups are facing significant challenges. One of the main challenges is the tendency toward individuation, where group members prioritize individual interests over commitment to collective goals. In pluralistic Indonesia, which has various religious organizations, this phenomenon can lead to internal fragmentation, reduced participation in collective activities, and weakened group solidarity. Furthermore, excessive individuation can trigger polarization within religious groups, where members with different interpretations or interests become less involved in group cooperation. This has the potential to weaken social cohesion both within the group itself and in interactions with other religious groups (Tuomela).

In addition, the digital era and social media accelerate the process of individuation, where members have broad access to information that often reinforces their perspectives, frequently

beyond the control of group authorities (Hall et al., 2015). As a result, there is a growing tendency toward exclusivist attitudes and declining commitment to group norms and collective values. This study identifies the current period as an era of contested religious group relations. This term refers to a phase in which interactions among individuals within the group are increasingly marked by tension and fragmentation—particularly as the government has recently opened significant space for religious groups to engage in power (Todd et al., 2020). This issue can escalate due to various factors, including individuals prioritizing personal interests over collective goals. Consequently, the sense of ownership toward the group weakens, leading to a decline in group cohesion.

Many members of religious groups today no longer base their involvement on collective objectives but rather on how well the group accommodates their individual preferences. As a result, relationships among members tend to be pragmatic and transactional rather than relational and commitment-based. This condition creates a situation in which group membership is no longer viewed as an existential essence but as a means to gain social legitimacy, access to resources, or even political advantage (Tuomela). This shift in orientation renders religious groups vulnerable to power co-optation. When political actors perceive electoral potential in religious groups, they tend to use them as tools of mobilization rather than as partners in dialogue. Ultimately, this blurs the boundary between religious interests and political interests. When religious groups become too deeply involved in political agendas without sufficient reflection, transcendent religious values risk being replaced by pragmatic and short-term values. This not only endangers public morality but also erodes public trust in religious groups as moral institutions.

In such circumstances, religious groups need to strengthen their collective identity not through uniformity but through recognition of their members' diversity. A healthy collective identity is inclusive, providing space for differences while remaining grounded in shared values. For this, there must be a fundamental reconstruction in how religious groups manage the process of togetherness toward achieving common goals. This process must begin with a willingness to listen and acknowledge the presence of the other as an essential part of shared existence. One key step in strengthening group cohesion is constructing a collective narrative that can unite its members' commitments. This narrative must be participatory so that it remains relevant to the dynamics of the times. Furthermore, it is important to create group structures that encourage horizontal participation, not just top-down. When members feel they have space to contribute and be heard, they tend to be more emotionally and ideologically attached to the group.

Internal education within the group also needs to be directed toward strengthening collective ethics. The philosophical value of intersubjectivity must become an integral part of the religious group process. Religious groups must move away from exclusive models. Instead, a model that emphasizes togetherness can be a healthier alternative in facing the challenges of individuation. In the long run, religious groups' sustainability greatly depends on their ability to build adaptive communities that remain rooted in deep spiritual values. Adaptivity does not mean surrendering to the currents of time but the ability to stay relevant without losing one's identity.

Aside from internal factors, external environments such as economic pressure, political situations, and popular culture also influence group members' orientation. Therefore, group

strategies must include responses to external realities, not just internal reforms. The development of social cohesion within religious groups also cannot be separated from the development of intergroup relations. Genuine and continuous interreligious dialogue will strengthen the understanding that collective challenges can only be overcome together, not by retreating into exclusivity. Ultimately, the role of religious groups in Indonesian society must emphasize their cohesive strength so that interpersonal relationships remain rooted in shared goals—not disputative factors that are merely supplementary

Philosophers Views The Problem With Each Intersubjectivity Notion

Philosophy, as a critical study of human existence and relationships, has provided various perspectives for understanding and responding to disputative issues in the context of religious groups. Philosophers, especially from the existentialist school of thought, offer deep insights into how religious groups can mitigate the disputative era they face. One of the key concepts in existentialism that is relevant to this phenomenon is intersubjectivity, the idea that human existence is always related to the existence of others. Existentialist philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Buber, and Gabriel Marcel discuss how humans cannot fully understand themselves without being connected to others.

This study seeks to develop an understanding of intersubjectivity by referring to the thoughts of Gabriel Marcel while placing them in philosophical dialogue with two other major figures, Edmund Husserl and Martin Buber. All three offer unique perspectives on how humans understand their existence through the presence of others. In this sense, intersubjectivity is not merely a meeting between two consciousnesses but also the relational foundation of human existence itself. Specifically, this will be elaborated descriptively and critically in relation to the disputative issues within religious groups.

Husserl's Intersubjectivity

Edmund Husserl, as a major figure in the phenomenological tradition, made an important contribution to the understanding of intersubjectivity through some his existetialistic notion. In his main work, Cartesian Meditations, he raised a fundamental question: How can someone know that another person also has a consciousness like himself? This question is not only epistemological but also touches on the ontological issue of the existence of another consciousness. One of Husserl's answers to this question lies in the concept of empathy or Einfühlung. For Husserl, empathy is not just an emotional response but an intuitive act that allows someone to imagine and realize the existence of another person as an autonomous subject. Through empathy, individuals not only realize the presence of others but also recognize that others have their own experiences and inner worlds (Hutcheson).

Empathy plays an important role in forming intersubjective validation. This means that the experiences of someone can be linked to the experiences of others, creating a shared recognition of the reality being faced. This makes the world not only belong to the individual but a world formed together by many interacting consciousnesses. This process is made possible through what Husserl calls analogical apperception (Kern, 2018). In other words, a person intuitively perceives that the body and behaviour of another person are similar to his

own, thus enabling the understanding of the existence of a subject who also experiences the world. This is what then enables the emergence of a shared reality—an intersubjective world.

In addition, Husserl also links empathy with time awareness. He distinguishes between passive (pre-reflective) empathy and active (reflective) empathy. Both are the basis for understanding the structure of time experienced together. Here, time is not understood as something objective like a clock but rather as time experienced together in everyday experiences that occur in harmony (Rosen, 2021). This shared temporal structure between subjects is important because it allows for understanding and coordination of actions. With the shared experience of time, a person can interpret the actions of others harmoniously, thus creating a deeper understanding between individuals. This is one of the keys to the sustainability of meaningful social interactions.

This idea of intersubjectivity is then concretely realized in the concept of Lebenswelt or "lifeworld". The lifeworld is a world that is not only presented through observation but also formed through relationships between individuals in everyday experience. This world becomes a shared space that continues to be formed from interactions between subjects who have their own experiences (Rosen, 2021). Husserl explains that the formation of this lifeworld involves a universal correlation between the subject and the world. In this process, the role of "I can" (Ich-kann) is very important, namely the subject's capacity to act and relate to the world actively. This also contains an ethical dimension because relationships between subjects in the lifeworld always contain pre-predicative and preparative responsibilities.

However, Husserl's thinking is not free from criticism. Some thinkers accuse his approach of being too solipsistic—too focused on individual consciousness—and not yet fully able to explain the existence of others. The problem of alterity or "the other-as-really-other" is also challenging since empathy may only capture similarities, not radical differences (Taylor, 2019). Nevertheless, Husserl's contribution to the discourse of intersubjectivity remains invaluable. He paved the way for the understanding that the world is not just the result of individual consciousness but of relations between many consciousnesses. In this context, intersubjectivity becomes the basis for intersubjective understanding that makes communication and the exchange of meaning possible.

Buber's Intersubjectivity

In his seminal work I and Thou (Ich und Du), Martin Buber offers a profound understanding of intersubjectivity in the context of how humans relate to one another. He distinguishes between two fundamental forms of relationship: the I-Thou and the I-It relation. These two forms are not merely types of communication; they reflect how a person is present and how they treat the other in the lived world (Junglos, 2017). The I-Thou relationship is marked by authenticity and openness. In this relation, one acknowledges the other as a whole person—not merely an object or social role. Involvement in this relationship is deep and respectful, creating space for a meaningful and genuine encounter between human beings.

A defining feature of the I-Thou relationship is genuine reciprocity. Both parties are fully present, not hiding behind masks or particular interests. This relationship is not just a social meeting but an existential encounter that engages one's inner depth and opens the possibility for personal transformation. Buber emphasizes that the I-Thou relationship is not merely interpersonal communication but an existential experience that brings a person into unity with

others and the world (Kovalchuk & Shypunov, 2021). Within it, one experiences a connection that cannot be reduced to function or utility—a form of experience that shapes the meaning of life.

In contrast, the I-It relationship is a form of interaction that reduces the other to an object. In this context, the other person is seen as something to be used, utilized, or controlled. This relationship ignores the subjectivity of the other, eliminating the possibility of genuine engagement or empathy. In an I-It relationship, there is no real reciprocity. Interactions tend to be shallow and instrumental—aimed at achieving a result or benefit. As a result, this type of relationship leads to alienation and undermines the sense of authentic human connection (Jirin, 2024).

Buber sees the dominance of I-It relationships in modern society as a cause for the decline in meaning and fullness of life. When people too often treat others as tools or objects, the quality of their existential experience diminishes. Relationships that should be spaces for personal growth instead become dry, meaningless mechanisms. From an ethical perspective, this distinction has significant implications (Chai, 2023). The I-Thou relationship creates room for true dialogue, empathy, and deep understanding. It becomes the foundation for a more humane and loving life, inviting us to value others not for their usefulness but for their authentic being.

Buber also suggests that the I-Thou relationship opens the door to the spiritual dimension. In a true encounter with the other, one confronts the mystery of existence and may even experience a trace of the divine presence. In other words, in every authentic human encounter, there is the possibility of an encounter with the transcendent. Through his thought, Buber urges a reevaluation of how individuals relate. By directing relationships toward the more authentic, a deeper understanding of life itself is revealed.

Martin Buber's conceptualization of the I-Thou and I-It distinction is more than just a philosophical analysis of relational types—it is a radical critique of modern alienation and a call to recover the depth of human presence. From an intersubjective perspective, this distinction highlights the way subjectivity is not formed in isolation but in relation—with the Thou as the mirror and counterpart of the I. Buber breaks from Cartesian individualism by asserting that the self is not a solipsistic entity but a being shaped and deepened through dialogue and presence (Rustin).

The I-Thou mode of relation illustrates the full acknowledgment of the other's subjectivity—what phenomenologists might call the full intentional encounter with another consciousness. Ultimately, Buber offers a vision of relational wholeness. This vision anchors the self in dialogue and grounds ethics and spirituality in everyday encounters. Buber's concept of I-Thou emphasizes that intersubjectivity can only occur when individuals open themselves to each other existentially and ethically.

Marcel's Intersubjectivity

Gabriel Marcel developed his understanding of intersubjectivity from concrete life experiences. He was influenced by Husserl's idea of empathy and the shared world and Buber's dialogical approach, which emphasizes whole-person relationships. However, Marcel offers a more existential and holistic relational perspective (Hanley). He uses the phrase Esse est Co-

Esse—to be is to be with—as a central principle in his relational philosophy. This means that human existence can never be understood in isolation but always in relation to others (Haryadi).

In Marcel's framework, intersubjectivity manifests in relationships with others, which is not just about the physical presence of someone in the same space. The relationship includes openness of heart, self-giving, and a willingness to listen to the other without objectifying them. An existential relationship is not born out of social transactions or normative contracts but from an existential recognition that the other matters in my presence. Intersubjectivity is not an instrumental or transactional relationship.

By its nature, intersubjectivity can become the foundation for forming collective commitment. Collective commitment here is not merely the result of shared goals but of intersubjective relationships built through the experience of sharing life. Togetherness, in Marcel's view, does not imply uniformity (Slytto). On the contrary, he emphasizes the importance of difference in forming authentic relationships. Only by acknowledging the differences of the other can one truly be ethically present. In this context, intersubjectivity does not negate individual identity but affirms it within relational interconnectedness (Chukwuma, 2019).

Marcel rejects the modern tendency to objectify fellow human beings. In a world marked by individualism, efficiency, and technology, human relationships often become cold and impersonal. Through his approach, Marcel invites individuals back to the deep values of human relationships, where shared commitment becomes the core of social relations (Mullan, 2021). Intersubjectivity as a shared commitment makes interaction not merely an exchange of information but a meaningful event that brings existential transformation. When interaction is genuine, it fosters a sense of belonging to the group. This strengthens cohesion without normative coercion and avoids passive tolerance. Interaction in intersubjective relationships demands active involvement, where individuals not only allow others to exist but celebrate their presence in the shared journey toward common goals. This builds a foundation for genuine inclusivity, which is highly relevant in diverse individual identities.

In an era of disputation in interpersonal relationships, intersubjectivity serves as a counterbalance that resists totalization. Suppose disputation occurs due to the objectifying tendencies of power; intersubjectivity re-humanizes. When groups practice these values, they are better able to avoid domination and open spaces for equal participation in a disputative era. Marcel also emphasizes the importance of "mystery" in relationships. A mystery cannot be solved but must be lived. In intersubjectivity, the other is not a puzzle to be solved but a presence to be honoured. This attitude brings a deep respect for the other's autonomy and reinforces the purpose of their existence within the group. It may also strengthen social resilience. When interpersonal relationships are not merely functional but existential, groups become more resilient to internal conflict.

Marcel's thought is especially relevant in an increasingly digitalized world. Amid algorithms and virtual communication, intersubjectivity reminds us that human relationships require emotional involvement. Without this, we are easily trapped in the illusion of connectivity without closeness. Finally, Marcel's concept of "co-being" is not only philosophically relevant but also practically significant. By reestablishing intersubjectivity as the foundation of communal life, groups can become spaces for self-formation and mutual growth alongside their pursuit of common goals. Relationships are no longer seen as burdens

but as a path toward self-discovery and a more meaningful world. Overall, Marcel's version of intersubjectivity offers an alternative paradigm for building collective commitment within groups so that groups not only share goals but also share existence. In this context, each individual becomes both the centre and a part of a web of existence that mutually enriches one another.

Marcel's Intersubjectivity and It's Role Within Disputive Religious Group Relationship

In recent times, the dynamics of inter-member relationships within "groups" in Indonesia have experienced significant disruption. This phenomenon has become particularly apparent in the context of religious groups, which are now undergoing social and political transformations as the government increasingly opens up spaces for engagement in power. On one hand, this openness by the government is an opportunity for religious groups to advocate for the values they believe in. However, this opportunity also brings the temptation for individuals within these voluntary groups to focus more intently on their interests.

When individuals in the group begin to concentrate more on themselves—both in terms of intentions and in the pursuit of position—a tendency toward individuation arises. This refers to situations or behaviours in which individuals assert their identity and autonomy, which at times runs contrary to the collective spirit of the group. Individuation is not inherently negative. Within certain limits, it can encourage creativity, innovation, and moral autonomy. However, when individuation proceeds without being balanced by a commitment to the common good, it can become a factor that undermines social integration within the group.

In religious groups, uncontrolled individuation is often accompanied by internal competition for influence, positions, or access to opportunities offered by power. This process displaces the sense of collectivity—which should be the foundation of the group—with the dynamics of competing interests. This phenomenon becomes even more complex when power is no longer merely symbolic or spiritual but also involves material and political aspects. Individuals within religious groups begin to view power as a strategic resource to be possessed rather than simply a means to achieve collective goals.

This tendency weakens interpersonal relationships within the group. Once open and mutually supportive communication turns into interactions characterized by suspicion, competition, and strategic maneuvering. Relationships that should be based on shared goals become transactional. Thus, the group's social cohesion is threatened. Cohesion—which reflects the strength of the bonds among members in pursuing common goals—becomes fragile when each individual is more focused on how they can use the group for their own benefit.

In such a situation, the common purpose no longer becomes the driving force of collective action. Instead, the collective goal begins to be reinterpreted to align with the personal agendas of its members. Collectivity loses its meaning as a willingness to work together for something greater than oneself. When individuals try to adapt to the available power spaces, they tend to develop pragmatic adaptive tactics and strategies. This further distances the group from the ideal values on which it was originally built.

Spiritual idealism and moral values should be the primary guides in religious groups' decision-making and action. However, with the rise of instrumental individuation, these values often become mere rhetoric, no longer rooted in actual practice. The tension between collective

values and individual aspirations creates a complex dynamic. On the one hand, the group attempts to preserve its collective identity. At the same time, individuals continue to push the boundaries of their autonomy—often at the expense of togetherness.

Ultimately, this process disrupts the group's unity. The previously stable structure begins to fragment. Subgroups with differing agendas and orientations begin to emerge, creating internal polarization that undermines the group's overall effectiveness. One of the serious consequences of this situation is the weakening of the sense of belonging within the group. When members feel that the group no longer reflects their aspirations or fails to meet their expectations, loyalty begins to diminish.

In the long term, this can lead to group disintegration or a transformation of its core values. A group initially built upon shared values can evolve into an entity filled with conflicting interests. To address this issue, there needs to be a critical awareness among both the leaders and members of the group to realign their collective orientation. A process of shared reflection is necessary to reaffirm the common goals and foundational values of the group.

One approach is to strengthen intersubjective ethics—that is, relationships based on mutual recognition, mutual respect, and openness to dialogue. In this way, individuation is no longer perceived as a threat but integrated within a robust framework of collective commitment. Within this, it is also necessary to build equitable spaces for participation, where individuals do not feel the need to compete opportunistically but can contribute according to their capacities in a mutually supportive environment. Amidst the government's openness to the participation of religious groups in power, such groups carry an even greater moral responsibility to maintain their internal integrity. Power should be a means of achieving collective goals, not a pursuit of individual ambitions. Only by strengthening awareness of shared goals and fostering healthy relationships among members can the group remain intact and relevant amid ever-changing social dynamics.

Gabriel Marcel's philosophy of intersubjectivity offers a rich framework for addressing relational disruptions in Indonesian religious groups facing new opportunities for promising political engagement and political gain. It challenges its members to reject the objectification of one another, to move beyond strategic alliances, and to restore collectivity. In this way, religious groups re-ground everything in the collectivity that is the basis for individuals' being in the group.

Marcel emphasizes intersubjectivity not as a cognitive or functional relationship but as an existential one. For Marcel, human beings are not isolated entities but people in relationships. At the heart of Marcel's thinking is the idea of "being together" that to live is, in essence, to live side by side (esse est co-esse). This idea implies a profound interdependence and vulnerability, where individuals open themselves not only to cooperation but also to collective commitment to achieving shared goals.

In recent years, many religious groups in Indonesia—once tightly bound by shared identities and spiritual commitments—have begun to show signs of internal fragmentation, especially as new opportunities for political influence and public visibility emerge. The state's willingness to engage religious groups risks instrumentalizing them, tempting individuals to shift from being together to using the group as a means to achieve their common interests. If religious groups are interested in this, they must first reorient their shared goals in relation to the space provided by the government.

From a Marcelian perspective, this fragmentation occurs when members of a group no longer see each other as mysteries to be confronted but as instruments or obstacles. In this shift, intersubjectivity gives way to functional association. This results in what Marcel calls "disconnected interaction"—a break in the availability and presence that makes collective life meaningful. Members may still be structurally part of the same group, attend the same meetings, or share the same goals on paper—but existentially, they are disconnected, shifting to what Marcel critiques as an instrumental mindset, where power overrides relational integrity.

One of Marcel's most enduring critiques is directed at the "spirit of abstraction," where human relationships are depersonalized and represented. In religious groups where individuals are maneuvering to pursue government-granted political participation, this spirit may manifest itself in strategic planning. The focus subtly shifts from "How do we get along?" to "How do we get out of this?" Moreover, individual interests—unbalanced by collective commitment—can harden into self-interested projects, where group affiliation becomes a means to the fulfilment of individual intentions rather than a space for shared goals. Marcel's response is not to retreat from the space given but to engage with it and make it a shared goal first. He advocates a return to availability—a readiness to be there for others, not merely to respond, but to "be there" in a way that honours the collective dignity of the group.

CONCLUSION

Gabriel Marcel's notion of intersubjectivity provides a restorative framework for mending relational ruptures within contemporary religious groups increasingly entangled in political pursuits. By emphasizing being with (co-esse), Marcel redirects relationships from instrumental utility toward authentic co-existence grounded in mutual commitment and shared humanity. This approach helps preserve group integrity beyond strategic interests, restoring the existential depth of communal bonds in complex socio-political settings. Future research could explore how Marcel's intersubjective ethics can be practically applied in contemporary interfaith or politically active religious communities to strengthen cohesion and authenticity in collective life.

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