

The Idea of Religious Pluralism: Response from Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Semarang City and Demak, Central Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The problem of this research is the response of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency to the idea of religious pluralism. Meanwhile, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the notion of religious pluralism as an alternative solution for harmony and tolerance between religious communities is understood and addressed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency. The method used in this research is in-depth interviews, newspaper documentation, books, online media, and discourse analysis with an Islamic worldview perspective. The results showed that the majority of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency rejected the idea of religious pluralism as an alternative solution to the realization of harmony and tolerance between religious communities in Indonesia. They consider this understanding not from the Islamic tradition, which tends to contradict Islam and endanger the existence of Islam. Therefore, it is suggested that religious pluralism should not be discussed as an alternative solution for inter-religious harmony and tolerance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Pluralism, Harmony, Islamic Education Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an important theme that arouses serious attention, especially in humanistic, moral, ethical and aesthetic issues. On a macro level, religious issues will affect the formation of a worldview, especially those related to the ontological dimension. Religious reality shows that in every religion there are truth claims that lead to the exclusivity of the religion itself. That my religion is the most correct, other religions are false and misleading (other religions are false paths, that misled their followers). (Budi Munawar Rahman, 2002: 4).

This will be very obvious when religion is approached from a theological point of view. Amin Abdullah (1996:14) mentions that there are three fundamental structures of theological thought: First, the tendency to prioritize loyalty to one's own group is very strong. Second, there is personal involvement and a very thick appreciation for theological teachings that are believed to be true. Third, expressing feelings and thoughts by using the language of 'actor' (the actor and not the language of an observer).

This exclusivity is believed to be something that gets justification from the scriptures of each religion. Muslims use the proposition "Inna ad dina 'inda Allah al-Islam", Verily the only religion (pleased) with Allah is Islam" (Q.3:19). Christians will claim "Extra exclassiam nulla salus" (Catholic Dogma) (There is no salvation outside the church) "Extra Christos nulla salus" (Protestant Dogma) (There is no salvation outside of Christianity)

The problem of unity, integration and national harmony for the Indonesian nation, whose society is pluralistic, is very important in shaping the soul and personality of the nation. This means that the conditions and situations of religious life in Indonesia greatly influence and determine national stability and resilience.

Several figures argued that the theology of religions should be able to explain the theological reasons why a religious community needs to prepare theological leadership in realizing inter-religious harmony and tolerance. From here, the idea of religious pluralism emerged as an alternative solution to reconcile religious communities.

Religious pluralism actually cannot be understood in a simplistic manner as has been the case in the media. Most media consider that religious pluralism is considered the same as religious tolerance. Though these two terms are different entities. The difference is, if religious pluralism is recognizing other religions as valid or "valid and authentic". Valid and authentic is actually an acknowledgment that other religions outside one's religion are valid.

The solution of Islamic worldview to the existence of religious plurality is to acknowledge the differences and identity of each religion (*lakum dinukum waliyadin*). However, the solution offered by the understanding of religious pluralism tends to eliminate the differences and identities of existing religions.

What about Islamic Religious Education teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency? Do they have the right response to that understanding or vice versa. If PAI teachers have the wrong response about this, of course it will be very dangerous for the *aqidah* of students. Because after all, the worldview of PAI teachers will determine the style and output of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious pluralism is an understanding that teaches that all religions are the same and therefore the truth of each religion is relative. Therefore, every follower of a religion cannot claim that only his religion is right while other religions are wrong. Among the figures who support this understanding are: Masau Abe in Buddhism, Hasan Askari in Islam, Ramchandra Gandhi in Hinduism, Kushdeva Singh in Sikhism, Wilfred Cantwell Smith in Christianity, and Leo Trepp in Judaism.

From a historical perspective. Pluralism is an understanding that historically was not brought by Islam but from Christianity. Religious pluralism has no roots in Islamic history and tradition (Bahar Akase Teng, 2015: 67-75). The issue of religious pluralism is an important thing to know with religious people. In fact, it is a major factor in causing tensions and religious conflicts that often lead to brutality, cruelty, war, and even ethnic cleansing. (Fitriyani, 2011: 325-342)

Religious pluralism is one of the points of view in the philosophy of religion. Religious pluralism in the philosophy of religion is a perspective or attitude in dealing with religious diversity, and Karen Armstrong's concept of religious pluralism is a type of global ethical pluralism with the core teaching of compassion (Destriana Saraswati, 2013: 186-198).

Julita Lestari (2020:29-37) has conducted research with the title: "Religious Pluralism in Indonesia, Challenges and Opportunities for the Unity of the Nation". The results of this study indicate that religious diversity on the one hand tends to create

divisions among religious people. The plurality of religions in Indonesia has both challenges and opportunities for the integrity of the nation. The biggest challenge of this nation's plurality is the tendency of conflicts that originate from the truth claims of each religious group. While the opportunity for plurality is the attitude of tolerance of each religious adherent that supports the integrity of the nation.

The understanding of pluralism in Indonesia have always been the background for the emergence of social conflicts and others, when pluralism is interpreted the same as religious plurality (Fatonah Dzakie, 2014:79-94). Enggar Objantoro (2018:1-9) in an article entitled "Religious Pluralism and Christian Responses", stated that religious pluralism is a very serious challenge for Christianity, because it rejects the Bible truth which states that the Lord Jesus is the only Savior, happy human. Christianity must answer pluralist criticisms of biblical truths, by providing clear and unequivocal arguments. Evangelical theologians believe that biblical truths are something unique in Christianity, which is not the same as truths in other religions.

Harda Armayanto (2014: 326-340), in an article entitled "The Problem of Religious Pluralism", states that as part of liberal theology, religious pluralism offers tolerance between religious communities. However, this understanding turned out to be a new problem for religions. This is because religious pluralism contains the relativism of truth. With this understanding, each religion cannot claim to be the most correct, because all religions are true. The clergy do not agree with this understanding and think that this understanding is actually a new religion that wants to unite all religions.

The movement against religious pluralism from religious circles shows that this understanding is problematic, contains polemics and is very problematic if applied to existing religions. Every religion sees religious pluralism as just a cover to erode the beliefs of religious adherents which in turn gives rise to atheists. Over time, adherents of each religion will be sceptical of their religion.

From the description above, it can be understood that religious pluralism is not religious tolerance. The things that are echoed by its bearers, as a peacemaker and a solution to reconcile between religions, actually show the opposite, which will destroy other religions. Thus, religious pluralism is not a solution, but rather a threat to the existence of religions.

According to Adian Husaini, the term religious pluralism is a special term in the study of religions. As a 'special terminology', this term cannot be interpreted arbitrarily, for example it is equated with the meaning of the terms 'tolerance', 'mutual respect', and so on. As an understanding (ism), which discusses the perspective of existing religions, the term 'Religious Pluralism' has become a long discussion among scientists in the study of religions (religious studies).

The term pluralism actually comes from the Christian religious tradition. Alser said: "all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid paths to the same core of religious reality. In pluralism, no one religion is superior to any other; the many religions are considered equally valid ways to know God" (Alister, 1994:458-459). In the view of Religious Pluralism, no religion is seen as superior to other religions. All of them are considered as equally valid paths to God

Furthermore, John Hick stated that salvation can be defined as the transformation of human life from being self-centred to being centred on God (Self-centredness & Reality-centeredness). Thus, salvation is not the monopoly of one religion alone. For those who do not believe in Christianity but carry out God's will then he is a Christian, even though he is Muslim.

Hamid Fahmi Zarkayi (2008) provides a sharp critique of John Hick's thinking, as follows: First, the approach used by John Hick to arrive at the idea of religious pluralism is cultural and ideological. Second, Religion in Hick's view is a product of human understanding of the Reality of God. Third, John Hick's theory of religious pluralism overrides the transcendental values of religions, the sanctity of religions and fuses religious dogmas. Fourth, Hick's doctrine of religious pluralism is ideological and

authoritarian, meaning that it dictates the reader to follow it. Fifth Hick's doctrine of pluralism is only relevant to Western culture. Thoughts are more likely to represent a (Western) culture than trans-cultural. Sixth, Hick's religious pluralism is colored by the doctrine of postmodern relativism.

Many Islamic thinkers misunderstand the term religious pluralism. They think that Islam is a religion that teaches religious pluralism. They consider that Islam not only accepts the validity of religious pluralism, but also views it as an important part of the belief system in Islam. Some even stated that "the philosophy of Islamic education which only justifies its own religion, without accepting other religions must be criticized for further reorientation" (AM Mulkhan, 2001: 17-25).

From the explanation above, there are two views. First, a view that agrees with the idea of religious pluralism, and sees it as an understanding that can be used to build harmony and tolerance between religious communities, especially in Indonesia. Second, a view that does not agree, because this understanding has no historical roots in Islam. Pluralism is more of a perspective that is built on secular and liberal Western civilization, which if developed in Indonesia will actually give birth to new problems. Religious pluralism can even trigger conflict between supporters of this understanding and adherents of religions in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This research is library research combined with case study type field research with a qualitative approach. This study seeks to reveal various discourses and differences about religious pluralism that are available in written form, either in the form of books, journals, magazines, or Internet sites. In addition, the researchers tried to explore the understanding of pluralism, harmony and tolerance of Islamic Religious Education teachers.

This research was carried out from July 1 to October 10, 2020, taking the object of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency by involving 28 people. The sampling technique used is Snow ball sampling which is part of non-probability sampling. Non-probability is a sampling technique that does not provide equal opportunities for each element or member of the population to be selected as a sample. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, newspaper documentation, and the internet.

The analytical method used is discourse analysis. This discourse analysis is used to interpret, interpret, and understand various narratives, debates, and discourses that are the subject of this research discussion. To a certain extent this research also uses hermeneutic methods to explain how the composition and disclosure of a discourse, what it says, and how the worldview or worldview of the discourse is.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the results of interviews on 1 July - 30 August 2020, it was found that all PAI teachers (28 people) stated that they had heard of the idea of religious pluralism, they understood what was meant by religious pluralism, and they did not agree with the idea of religious pluralism. However, from the research conducted by researchers, there are still some who accept some ideas related to religious pluralism. When viewed as a whole, of the 11 statement items regarding the idea of religious pluralism which were responded to by 28 PAI teachers, of the 308 responses given, 80 responses (26%) accepted the idea of religious pluralism, while 228 responses (74%) rejected it. Here is the full discussion.

The first idea, the initiators of religious pluralism understand the Qur'an Surah Ali Imran/3:19 *Inna al-diina 'indallahi al-Islam* is interpreted that "Indeed true religion is an attitude of submission to God". They interpret the word "Islam" only generically, which is derived from the root word "aslama" which means "submission", submitting, obeying, and submitting to God. So Islam is not a proper name (the name of the religion brought by the prophet Muhammad). So whatever their religion, if they submit, surrender and obey God, then they are Muslims.

Regarding the idea above, the majority of PAI teachers (23 people) disagreed (rejected), and a small portion (5 people) agreed (accepted). This first idea is supported by an eighth idea which reads: "Islam etymologically means submission to al-Haqq or Allah. Thus, whoever surrenders to the truth, then he has embraced the right deen. It doesn't matter whether the truth he believes in is Islam or other religions." To this idea, the majority of PAI teachers (26 people) rejected it, and some (2 people) accepted it.

The majority of PAI teachers understand that Islam is not just a word in Arabic which means "submission", but Islam is also the name of a religion. Although Islam is literally an activity of surrender to God, Islam here is also the name of a religion. So in Din al-Islam there is a meeting point between the musamma (nature) of surrender and the ism (name) given. The understanding of the majority of PAI teachers is in line with what Al-Attas said as follows. The test of true affirmation of the Unity of God, then, is the form of commitment to that God. It is only because the form of submission enacted by the religion that affirms the Unity of God is true to the verification of such affirmation that that particular religion is called Islam. Islam, then, is not merely a verbal noun signifying 'submission'; it also the name of a particular religion descriptive of true submission, as well as the definition of religion: submission to God. (al-Attas, 1985:12)

The second idea is still related to the first idea, namely "All religions are actually different paths to the same God". This statement is taken from the understanding of The transcendent theory of religion from Huston Smith or also known as transcendentalism.

In relation to this idea, the majority of PAI teachers (22 people) said they refused, while a small percentage (6 people) said they accepted. Those who refuse are based on an understanding and belief that transcendentalism is wrong. For PAI teachers, each religion is a different path to a different God. Because in the concept of Islam there is a true God and there is a false God. Islam is the only way to the true God (Allah). While other religions are paths that lead to a vanity God.

The third idea is an affirmation of the second idea, "As a Muslim I believe that there is only one God, but the way to worship Him can be done in various ways according to each religion". Against this statement, the majority of PAI teachers (20 people) rejected the idea, while (8 people) said they accepted. This third idea is strengthened by the sixth idea which reads: "I believe that every religion is actually an expression of faith in the same God. Like a wheel, the center of the wheel is God, and the spokes are the paths of various religions", where the majority of PAI teachers (22 people) refused and some (6 people) accepted.

Those who reject this idea argue that the real proof of monotheism includes a way of surrendering to God that is pure from Revelation, not from a tradition that is made up and mixed up with a certain culture. It is the way that also shows the truth. In other words, the way of surrendering oneself to God also shows the true nature of surrender.

The fourth idea is related to the meaning of the word "kafir". For supporters of religious pluralism, they believe that "Not all non-Muslims are infidels. Kafir is not synonymous with non-Muslims. The proponents of pluralism are of the opinion that the word infidel and its derivation in the Qur'an is always defined based on the criteria of bad morals. In the Qur'an, the word infidel is never defined as a non-Muslim. The definition of infidel as a non-Muslim only occurs in Indonesia.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat, for example, gave an example of the meaning of infidel in the editorial of the Qur'an. It is said that the disbeliever is the opposite of the grateful

person. In the Qur'an, another mention is *syakartum la'aziidannakum walain kafartum inna 'adzabillasyadiid* (if you are grateful, I will add my favors, if you deny (favors) my punishment will be very painful). Here the word *infidel* is always associated with ethical issues, one's attitude towards God or towards other humans. So, the word *infidel* is a moral label, not a belief or belief label, as we know (Adian Husaini, 2003).

Against this idea, the majority of PAI teachers (20 people) rejected this understanding, while some (8 people) accepted it. For the majority of PAI teachers, the understanding of "the concept of *infidel* in Islam for supporters of pluralism feels strange and odd. Indeed, etymologically, people who are not grateful can be called *infidels*. Allah says, if a person is grateful, Allah will increase His favors, and if he disbelieves, then Allah's punishment is very painful. However, in other verses, the Qur'an also uses the word *kufur* for non-Muslims and people who deviate from their *aqidah*. For example, Surah al-Bayyinah explains, that in fact the disbelievers, from among the people of the Book and the polytheists, they will go to hell. Surah al-Maidah verses 72-75 also explains, "Indeed, those who claim that Allah is one of the three have disbelieved; or who states, that Allah SWT is the same as Isa Ibn Maryam "

In fact, the Koran also contains a special letter, namely the letter Al-Kafirun, which clearly states, "O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship." So, this verse is clearly related to *aqidah*, namely the aspect of worship. Therefore, it is very strange, Jalaluddin Rakhmat stated: "So, the word *infidel* is a moral label, not a label of *aqidah* or belief, as we know it." Moreover, he said: "In the Qur'an, the word *infidel* is never defined as a non-Muslim. The definition of a *kafir* as a non-Muslim only occurs in Indonesia." What Liberal Islam groups do by deconstructing the term "*kafir*" will have a serious impact on Islamic *aqidah*. This is a decades-old project of Western orientalis.

The fifth idea, is still related to the fourth idea above, namely: "I believe that all religious adherents have the same opportunity to obtain salvation and enter heaven". Related to the fifth idea is the seventh idea which states that: "I imagine that in the afterlife there will be different "chambers of heaven", according to the method, media and religious understanding of each person and his social class. Against these two ideas, the majority of PAI teachers (27 people) said they refused while 1 person accepted.

The two ideas that support pluralism stem from the deconstruction of the concept of "*kafir*" which is understood not to be synonymous with non-Muslims, and a Muslim can also be called an *infidel* if he has bad character, then the logical consequence is that both non-Muslims and Muslims have the same opportunity to enter the same heaven.

The tenth idea is related to religious relativism, which reads: "Religion is the relative perception of an absolute God. Therefore, because of its relative nature, every religious believer may not claim or believe that his own religion is correct and better than other religions." Against this idea, the majority of PAI teachers (18 people rejected) and some (10 people) accepted it.

Religious Pluralism is based on the assumption that all religions are equally valid paths to the same God. Religion is a relative perception of an absolute God. So because of its relativity, every follower of a religion may not claim or believe that his own religion is correct and better than other religions. Even according to Charles Kimball (When Religion Becomes Evil) "One of the characteristics of religion

Failure to develop a spirit of tolerance and religious pluralism will awaken the radical wing of Islam, according to the logic built by supporters of religious pluralism.

For the majority of PAI teachers, religious truth is absolute, while human understanding of religion can be absolute and can also be relative, so not everything is relative. The understanding that Allah is One is absolute. That is, humans with their minds can find absolute religious truth. Thus the issue of truth claims that exist in every religion is a natural thing, as long as it is expressed in the right situation and context, namely when it is in the territory of each religion.

The eleventh idea is related to the understanding of the Qur'anic verse which has been claimed to be a pluralism verse, namely: "Indeed, the believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Shabi'in, whoever believes to Allah and the Last Day, and do good deeds, they will get their reward from their Lord, there is no fear of them, and they do not grieve." The verse is understood by supporters of religious pluralism that Allah swt will accept all those who do good, regardless of that person's religion. So that all religious adherents will enter heaven and live side by side there. Against this idea, 13 PAI teachers said they accepted and 15 people rejected it.

For the majority of PAI teachers, to obtain an honest and clear understanding of the 'verse of pluralism', one should not ignore the context of the *siyaq*, *sibaq*, and *lihaq* of the verse. First, the verses that precede it must be considered, at least starting from verses 41 to 68. God explicitly condemns the attitudes and behavior of the *Ahlul Kitab* who disbelieve and are 'other in their mouths in their hearts', like to twist the truth, indulge their passions, play with religion and cause hostility. Next, let's look at the verses that follow, especially verses 78 to 86 of Surah Al Maidah which are the context of this 'verse pluralism'.

It is stated there that those who disbelieve from among the Children of Israel have been cursed for always being disobedient and transgressing, allowing evil to happen, taking non-believers as their protectors. If they had believed in Allah, in the Prophet (Moses) and in what was revealed to him, they would not have asked for protection from these people, but the majority of them are ungodly.

You will find that the people who are most hostile to the believers are the Jews and the polytheists. While the closest and closest are the Christians, because among them there are priests and monks, also because they are not arrogant. When they heard what was revealed to the Messenger of Allah, their eyes filled with tears, touched by the truth they had known, and said: "O Lord, we have believed, so include us in the list of those who are witnesses.

From this it is clear that Jews and Christians are praised if they want to believe in the Prophet Muhammad and the teachings he brought, but are condemned if they do not believe, are disobedient, and act beyond limits. People of the Book who believe in converting to Islam are promised a double reward, said the Prophet in a valid hadith. On the other hand, those who are called to believe and embrace Islam but are reluctant to accept it, it is difficult for him to avoid the fire of hell (HR Muslim No. 153).

From the description above, it can be understood that the PAI teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency who were selected as the majority sample rejected the idea of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is considered as an understanding that is contrary to Islam, because it should not be discussed as an alternative solution for inter-religious harmony and tolerance in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that: First, the majority of PAI teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency reject the idea of religious pluralism (with a rejection rate of 74%) as an alternative solution for the realization of inter-religious harmony and tolerance in Indonesia. They think that this understanding does not come from the Islamic tradition which tends to conflict with Islam and endangers the existence of religions. Therefore, it is not appropriate to discuss it as an alternative solution for tolerance and inter-religious harmony in Indonesia. Second, although the majority refused, PAI teachers in Semarang City and Demak Regency still accepted some ideas of religious pluralism (with an acceptance rate of 26%).

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