

Study of Islam in Religious Moderation (Study of Moderate Islamic Thoughts in Indonesia)

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Abstract: The Islamic teachings refer to Al-Qur'an and al-Hadith. However, current phenomena show that there are many types of Islamic teaching implementations. Many Islamic groups sometimes have their characteristics in religious practices. The differences have become natural, *sunatullah*, and even a blessing. Quraish Shihab noted that "diversity in life is a necessity that Allah SWT wills. This includes differences and diversity of opinions in the scientific fields. There are even different human responses regarding the truth of the holy books (Quran), the interpretation of their contents, and the form of their practices" (Quraish Shihab, 2007: 52). Of the various kinds of diversity that Indonesia has, the religious one is the strongest in triggering radicalism in Indonesia. The existence of extremist groups that are increasingly expanding their wings is generated in by many factors like sensitivity to religious life, an influx of foreign extremist groups, and even political and government problems. Amid the hustle and bustle of this radicalism problem, there is a term called "religious moderation". The problem is whether those who practice the religion can respect each other, and are willing to have a dialogue to solve any issue. If it becomes a foothold in charity and religion, it is the meaning of the concept of "moderate Islam." This research is a qualitative research using descriptive method. The reason for using qualitative research is because this research is related to data that needs to be analyzed descriptively and efforts to solve the research problem have three stages: (1) providing data, (2) analyzing data and (3) assessing the results of data analysis

Keywords: Religious Moderation and Islamic Thoughts

A. Introduction

The Islamic teachings refer to Al-Qur'an and al-Hadith. However, current phenomena show that there are many types of Islamic practices. Various Islamic groups sometimes have their characteristics in religious practices. The differences have become natural, *sunatullah*, and even a blessing. Quraish Shihab noted that "diversity in life is a necessity that Allah wills. This includes differences and diversity of opinion in the scientific fields, even the diversity of human responses regarding the truth of the holy books (Quran), the interpretation of their contents, and the form of their practices (Quraish Shihab, 2007: 52).

Indonesia has a lot of diversity in terms of ethnicity, traditional language, customs, and religions. This diversity is often hit by the issue of radicalism. Movements acting on behalf of certain groups are growing day by day and openly voicing their ideology. Acts of terror, kidnappings, attacks, and even bombings have become common things that happen in some regions.

Of the various types of diversity that Indonesia has, religious teaching is the strongest in triggering radicalism. The emergence of extremist groups that are increasingly expanding their wings is supported in by many factors like sensitivity to religious life, an influx of foreign extremist groups, and even political and government problems. Amid the hustle and bustle of this radicalism problem, there is a term called "religious moderation."

B. Method

This research is a qualitative research using descriptive method. The reason for using qualitative research is because this research is related to data that needs to be analyzed descriptively and efforts to solve the research problem have three stages: (1) providing data, (2) analyzing data and (3) assessing the results of data analysis (Sudaryanto, 1993: 5).

After the data is obtained, it will then be analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques, which are obtained from interviews and observations, which are then described as a narrative and then pay attention to the sides of the data that must or do require further analysis (Noeng Muhajir, 1989: 68 - 69).

Whereas qualitative researchers do with the following considerations: Adjusting qualitative methods is easier when dealing with existing facts, this method directly draws closer to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the respondent. Qualitative is more sensitive to a lot of sharpening the joint influence and to the value patterns faced (Muleong 1995: 5)

C. Discussions.

The only thing to discuss is whether those who practice the religion can respect each other and are willing to have a dialogue to make the differences become a blessing. If it is used as a foothold in charity and religion, it is the meaning of the concept of "moderate Islam." It means that any religious person can act according to these criteria or called moderate Islam. Although in Islam itself the concept of "moderate Islam" does not have a definite reference. However, to build a polite Muslim who is willing to understand other groups, without compromising the actual principles of Islam, there must be an actualization of the concept of "moderate Islam" (Syafi'i Ma'arif, with "Islam in the Indonesian Frame"; See book of Ahmad Syafi'i, 2009) Azyumardi Azra also often explained that moderate Islam is the original character of Muslim diversity in this state. This is what attracted a lot of sympathy from the Indonesian people to follow Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, Walisongo is a reliable architect in establishing Islam in Indonesia (Abdurrahman Mas'ud, 2006: 54-58)

Walisongo were unique Javanese agents in the XV-XVI centuries that combined spiritual and secular aspects in spreading the teachings of Islam. Their position in sociocultural and religious life in Java was so attractive that Islam might never become the most dominant religion of Java if the Sufism developed by Walisongo did not take root in society. The reference to these characteristics shows that the Islamic teachings were introduced by Walisongo on Java Island peacefully. Although running slowly, the results were convincing. Based on historical facts, tolerating local traditions and modifying them into Islamic teachings according to Islamic principles could make many people convert their belief to be a Muslim, especially those living in the northern coastal areas of Java.

The Islamic transmission pioneered by Walisongo is a brilliant struggle implemented in simple ways. They showed new ways and alternatives that did not disrupt local traditions and customs. The ways they taught Islam were understandable by ordinary people because their approaches were concrete, realistic, and integrated with people's lives. This model shows the uniqueness of Javanese Sufis. When they have come to the discourse of civilizational dialogue, tolerance, and harmony, the teachings that hold and accept these are more accurately referred to as moderate. Therefore, the teachings oriented towards peace and harmonious life in diversity can be accurately called moderate. It is because the movement emphasizes respect and tolerance for others. The term 'moderate' means that Islam hates violence because it will give birth to new acts of violence. Islam was revealed by Allah as *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy for all the people of the world).

The Roots of Moderate Islam in Indonesia

The process of Islam spreading as a religion and cultural power has shown its friendliness. In this context, Islam is propagated peacefully. It does not force other believers to convert to Islam. It respects the current culture and even accommodates it into the local culture without losing its identity.

It turned out that this tolerant attitude attracted a lot of sympathy from the Indonesian people to follow and embrace Islamic beliefs. Meanwhile, Walisongo is a reliable architect in establishing Islam in Indonesia. The process of Islamic struggle with local culture was most intensively seen in the Walisongo era. This was a period of great transition from Hindu-Javanese towards the dawn of the Islamic era. The hospitality towards local traditions and culture was combined into the basic character of Islamic boarding school

culture. This kind of situation made Islam so easily accepted by many ethnic groups in the country. There was a match between the new religion (Islam) and the old beliefs. At least, the presence of Islam did not disrupt the old religions, instead, they were appreciated and then integrated into Islamic doctrine and culture (Badrus Sholeh (ed.), 2007: 41).

Walisongo is aware of how Islam should be grounded in Indonesia. They understand that Islam must be contextualized without losing its principles and essence. It must be based on the conditions of the region or area where Islam would be spread. This is known as the concept of "indigenization of Islam". This idea aims to dilute the pattern and character of Islam as a normative and religious practice into something contextual. In the "indigenization of Islam", it is illustrated how Islam as a normative teaching originating from Allah is accommodated into a culture that comes from humans without losing their respective identities. More concretely, contextual Islam means the teachings related to the context of time and place. Changes in time and regional differences are the keys to works of interpretation and *ijtihad*.

Thus, Islam can continuously renew itself and be dynamic in responding to changing times. Also, Islam is flexible and respectful of different conditions of society from one region to another. This critical adaptability can make Islam truly *shalih li kulli era wa makan* (suitable for every era and place) (M. Imdadun Rahmat (et al.), 2003:xx-xxi). The question is whether the practices of Islam as taught by Walisongo and practiced by most Javanese people can be called Islam *kaffah* or true Islam. There have been many views regarding this matter, both from several groups within Islam itself as well as from foreign and domestic observers. For example, Geertz is one of the figures who doubt the Muslim majority of Javanese people, because the phenomenon of syncretism is so real among them (Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, 2009: 60-61).

Clifford Geertz is an important figure in Javanese Islamic studies who stated that Javanese religious practices are mixed with elements of non-Islamic traditions. According to him, the *priyayi* and *abangan* groups reflect the slight influence of Islam in Javanese life. In fact, in his view, the group that is considered the most Islamic, namely the *santri*, cannot be separated from the influence of pre-Islamic traditions. Javanese Islamic identity is likely the same as "nominal Islam" (See Hendro Prasetyo, *Islamika* No.3, January-March 1994: 75). On the other hand, other observers stated it may be true that Islam in Southeast Asia is geographically peripheral, nominal, or Islam that is far from the "original" form that exists and develops at its center (Middle East region).

However, Islam in peripheral Southeast Asia must be critically examined from a teaching point of view. It does not mean that the intellectual tradition that developed in Southeast Asia since its early days was separated from the "great tradition" of Islam. Especially since the 17th century, the increasing intensity and religious intellectual contacts between the Middle East and the Archipelago aimed to bring the "local traditions" of Islam in Southeast Asia closer to the "great traditions" (normative and idealistic traditions) as stated in the main sources of Islamic teachings, al-Qur'an and Sunnah (Azyumardi Azra, 2000: 8)

Similarly, Mark Woodward examined in depth and viewed a broad Islamic perspective. He found that almost all teachings, traditions, and spiritual emphases that have developed in Javanese society originate from the teachings of Islam in the Middle East. What is known in Javanese religious ceremonies, such as *grebeg*, *salametan*, and *kalimasodo*, are a part of Islamic teaching. Besides, the doctrine of Kawula Gusti Martabat Tujuh and the wayang tradition, which is known and preserved in Javanese society, can be traced to its origins from the Islamic Sufism tradition (Alwi Shihab, 1997: 314).

In line with Woodward and Azra's statement, it can be justified that no culture in this world is not cyclical. It is because all cultures must have historical aspects that are not singular and syncretic. (Alwi Shihab, 1997: 79) Neither religion nor culture can circumvent the inevitable process (changes). Indeed, religious teachings as written textually in the holy book, word for word remain as they were before. However, religious teachings must be understood, interpreted, and translated into real actions in a certain cultural, political, and economic setting. Then, the understanding based on religious teachings has turned into culture (Bambang Pranowo, 1999). : 20) According to Fazlur Rahman, historically the main source of Islam is divine revelation contained in a book called Al-Qur'an. However, this book did not come down all at once in the same period. It came down little by little and was only collected after several decades.

Therefore, it is a reaction to the historical social conditions that took place at that time. The relationship between the adherents and the revealed text is made possible by the normative aspect of the revelation. Meanwhile, the pattern that goes on runs through the way of interpretation. Texts never speak for

themselves, and they will be meaningful if they are related to humans. What the Apostle did, agreed, and said was the result of his efforts (*ijtihad*) to understand the normative dimension of revelation. Meanwhile, the efforts to interpret the text are influenced by the particular historical situation at that time. The Apostle himself often changed his interpretation of Al-Qur'an if necessary (see Hendro Prasetyo, *Islamika* Nu.3, January-March 1994: 80) The cultural plurality of adherents of the same religion cannot be avoided when the religion has spread to much wider areas with different cultural backgrounds.

The interaction and dialogue between religious teachings and local culture are more local in nature. The strength or weakness of pre-existing cultural roots will naturally determine how deep and strong universal religious teachings reach the local socio-cultural reality. The plurality of religious faces can also be due to different responses from the adherents of the same religion to the social, cultural, and economic conditions they face. From this perspective, it can be explained why, for example, the Islamic movement which has been known as "modernist" namely Muhammadiyah tends to get strong support in urban areas. Meanwhile, NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*), which is often referred to as the "traditional" group, has greater influence in rural areas (Bambang Pranowo, 1999: 19)

So, it must be understood that although a religion is taught by one Prophet and one holy book, if the religion develops well and had a higher number of adherents and wider influenced areas, it will be also more difficult to maintain the unity of the faces of that religion. When the teachings and religions that come from God are about to be extended to the empirical ground, then inevitably they have to be faced with a series of inconsistent or even contradictory socio-cultural realities to the religious teachings (Bambang Pranowo, 1999: 18). There is not a single religion that does not depart from a social response. All of them depart and struggle from, for, and with it.

When a religion (God's holy commandment) has a dialectic with social reality, it means that it has come to the puddle of history. History, space, and time are testers of the truth and the solidity of the existence of religion. As a tester, history has a set of testing materials. They are local culture, new phenomena and cultures, and rationality (Said Agiel Siradj, "Religious Tradition and Reform", *Republika*, June 2, 2007). Once again, the affair between religion and tradition is *sunatullah*. Tradition is a profane human thought on sacred religious texts. Thus, the relationship between Islam and Muslim traditions is very close. Understanding Islam without the support of the intellectual heritage of its predecessors is very difficult. However, tradition is not everything. It remains in its imperfection as the fruit of a very valuable thought. It must be addressed proportionally and should not be reduced or exaggerated from the actual certainty (Said Agiel Siradj, "Religious Tradition and Reform", *Republika*, 2 June 2007).

Moderate Islamic Miniatures

Islamic moderation was established by the long history of Indonesian Islam struggles. Muhammadiyah and NU are two Islamic organizations that have crossed paths in fighting for forms of Islamic moderation through the educational institutions they manage and the socio-political-religious activities they play. Therefore, they deserve to be called two civil society institutions that are very vital for the moderation process in this country. Muhammadiyah and NU are two socio-religious organizations that play an active role in maintaining and strengthening networks and institutions that support Islamic moderation, even making Indonesia a model project of tolerance for foreign countries.

As the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia, NU has played a significant role in promoting tolerant and peaceful Islamic ideas (Ahmad Zainul Hamid, *Afkar*, Edition Nu. 21 of 2007: 28) Muhammadiyah, for example, is a modern socio-religious movement that aims to adapt the pure teachings of Islam into the life of the modern world of Indonesia. To achieve this goal, this movement has broadly been inspired by the ideas of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh's renewal, which ignited the spirit of reforming understanding and cleansing Islam from the historical climbs that had been considered an inseparable part of Islam (Alwi Shihab, 1997, 303-304).

In the history of colonialism in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah is a moderate organization. It is because it uses an educational approach and cultural transformation. The character of the Muhammadiyah movement looks very moderate, especially compared to the Islamic movement that uses violence in the struggle to expel the invaders, as shown by the movements of *tarekat* groups that carry out violent rebellions. In the course of subsequent history, NU and Muhammadiyah are the most productive Islamic organizations in building

dialogue within the internal Islamic community. They aim to stem the wave of radicalism. Thus, the moderate Islamic agenda cannot be separated from efforts to build mutual understanding among civilizations. Muhammadiyah's moderation attitude has been built from the beginning by its founder, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. One important lesson from Ahmad Dahlan's leadership was his strong commitment to moderation and religious tolerance. During his leadership, there was a creative and harmonious collaboration with almost all community groups. Even with his fellow Christians, he could inspire respect and admiration.

The most interesting matter of K.H. Ahmad was his close friendships with many Christian religious leaders. He was known as a tolerant person to Christian missionaries, but he never compromised his principles. He was a true practitioner of inter-religious dialogue, which means that he carefully listened to and paid attention to what was implied behind the words spoken (Alwi Shihab, 1997: 311-312). In further development, Syafi'i noted that "the modernist movement, especially Muhammadiyah, is increasingly considering the cultural dimension in its *da'wah* movement so that it feels more flexible without losing its main principles and mission. Persis and AlIrsyad persisted, but never followed their partner Muhammadiyah who performed expanding ideas" (Ahmad Syafii Maarif, 2009: 62).

Meanwhile, NU's moderation attitude is based on the creed of *Ahlussunnah waljama'ah* (*Aswaja*) which can be classified as moderate. In its Articles of Association, it is stated that NU as *Jam'iyah Diniyah Islamiyah* has Islamic beliefs according to the *Ahlussunnah waljamaah* understanding by acknowledging the four schools of thought, namely Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i, and Hambali. NU follows the *Ahlussunnah waljamaah* understanding pioneered by Imam Abu Hasan Al-Asy'ari and Imam Abu Mansyur Al-Maturidi. In terms of Islamic laws (*fiqh*), NU follows the approach (*al-mazhab*) of the Abu Hanifah Al-Nu'man, Imam Malik ibn Anas, Imam Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Shafi'i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbali. In Sufism matters, there are Imam al-Junaid al-Bagdadi, Imam al-Ghazali, and other priests (Mujamil Qomar, 2002: 62)

The term "Ahlussunnah waljama'ah" can be interpreted as "the followers of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and *ijma* (agreement) of the Islamic scholars". Meanwhile, moderate character (*tawassuth*) is the most prominent characteristic of Ahlussunnah waljamaah, besides *i'tidal* (fair), *tawazun* (balance), and *tasamuh* (tolerant). The organization rejects all forms of extreme actions and thoughts (*tatharruf*) that can lead to deviations from Islamic teachings. In religious thought, a balanced way (middle way) is also developed between the use of revelation (*naqliyah*) and ratio (*'aqliyah*). Therefore, it is possible to accommodate changes in society as long as they do not go against dogmatic doctrines. As a consequence of their moderate attitude, Ahlussunnah waljamaah is also more tolerant of tradition than other Islamic groups. For Ahlussunnah people, maintaining tradition has meaning important in religious life. A tradition is not immediately deleted entirely, nor is it completely accepted, but tries to be gradually Islamized (filled with Islamic values)(Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 1994: 65).

Aswaja's idea is very tolerant of pluralism. Various concepts and opinions that grow in Muslim society get appreciative recognition. In this case, Aswaja is very responsive to the ideas of various schools of thought, not only those that still exist amid society (Hanafi, Malik, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools), but also to others like Imam Daud al -Dhahiri, Imam Abdurrahman al-Auza'i, and Imam Sufyan al-Tsauri (Imam Baehaqi (ed.), (1999): 40).

NU's model of religiosity may be appropriate to be called the heirs of Walisongo. It is known that old Islamic scholars applied wise approaches and used various non-Islamic elements. Does not the Qur'an recommend a wise method, namely "call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice" (Surah An-Nahl: 125)? (Abdurrahman Mas'ud, 2004: 9). In dynamizing the development of society, NU circles always respect local culture and traditions. Their methods are based on Islamic teachings which are more tolerant of local culture. The same is true of the persuasive methods that Walisongo developed in Islamizing Java and replacing the Hindu-Buddhist forces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was not a form of intervention, but rather an acculturation of peaceful coexistence. This is an expression of "cultural Islam" or "moderate Islam" in which the *ulama* act as agents of social changes who are widely understood to have preserved and respected local traditions by subordinating these cultures to Islamic values (Abdurrahman Mas'ud, 2004).

C. Closing

Hereby this paper is made to add to the scientific treasures. Essentially, religious moderation is represented by the mass organizations (Muhammadiyah and NU) as two Islamic organizations that have been intertwined in fighting for forms of Islamic moderation, both through the educational institutions they manage and their socio-political activities. Therefore, they deserve to be called two vital civil institutions for the moderation process of this country. Thank you.

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