THE CONCEPT OF PLURALISM IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstrak
Religious pluralisme is a term used to refer to positive attitudes toward world religions (e.g., Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Budhism, Catholic, etc) with the aim of creating a harmonious, peaceful, and prosperous life within a pluralist society by upholding people’s equal rights to live peacefully in this world. The aim of this article is to elaborate on the concept of religious pluralism and its relation to Islamic education. There have been a controversy caused by the differing definitions of religious pluralism, which has led to certain misconceptions and hence its alienation from Islamic education in general. In the face of such challenges, efforts must continually be made to foster mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions in order to avoid potential conflicts, either between people embracing different religions or people within the same religion. It is this positive awareness which religious pluralism seeks to foster. Thus, incorporating the concept of pluralism into Islamic education is a must, especially by making change to the system of Islamic education which for a long time has focused only on building individual or communal piety. The new priority should be given to the creation of social sensitivity toward pluralism, either through cultural, language, or religious interventions. This all aims at reinforcing the notion of Islam as Rahmatallil’alamin.

Key Words: Pluralism, Religion, Islamic Education.

A. Introduction
What is pluralism? According to several sources, pluralism can be defined as variation. In the context of understanding religion, it can be seen as a way to understand the nature of religions, why they are numerous and varied, and whether there is only one or many true religions.

The idea of pluralism thus, desperately calls for interreligious dialogues. A religious dialogue allows religions to interact with one another to try to understand various ways in which God provides a path
for salvation. Such an activity, I believe, is very important in order to enrich the interfaith experience, which could serve as the entrance to deeper theological dialogues. This is what Wilfred C. Smith refers to as world theology and what John Hick refers to as global theology. Later, such theology has recently become known as pluralism theology.

The recognition of religious pluralism within a community of believers promises of the prevalence of the principle of inclusiveness, which can lead to the growth of sensitivity toward possibilities that may enrich human efforts in seeking spiritual and moral well-being.

It is undeniable that our worldly life has diverse dimensions. Like a diverse nation, it deals with colors, multilingual languages, different cultures, multi-faceted religions, plural human ideologies and thoughts, and various other aspects and dimensions of human life.

In this case Allah says in the Qur'an:
"O mankind, We created you from a man and a woman and made you nation and tribe so that you may know one another. Verily the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the most wicked among you. Allah is the Knower, the Knower. " (Al-Hujurat: 13)

Plurality of religions has its own challenges due to the dynamics of the society that we live in. According to Berger, the great challenge of religion (religiosity) in the future is not modernization, but the plurality of people. That is, our willingness to understand that we are different from others.¹ The people of Indonesia, who are notably a pluralist society, of course have their own challenges in dealing with the future that is much more complex. And one of the issues that stand out today is the not so harmonious relationship between religions, which often causes wars.²

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As social conflicts arise in the midst of plural societies, especially among religious people, religious pluralism is born with the aim of reducing the conflict. However, such an understanding does not always receive an ideal response from religious people, whether they are Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and others. This is perhaps due to the different interpretations of the ideology each party holds which always stirs debates. The impact of that all, of course, is that the people fall victims. They are confused and not able to take a stance in the face of the pluralist nature of their society, with regard to religious issues. Meanwhile, social conflicts in the name of religion continue to occur.

In the Islamic world especially, the formation of such mindsets stems from the shortcomings found in the field of Islamic or general education. Education in general is still understood as a process of religious knowledge transfer rather than as a process of transforming religious and moral values into real life experiences. Only in this way people will learn to promote interreligious harmony such as love, compassion, friendship, helpfulness, peace and tolerance. In addition, a lack of attention paid to the study of other religions is also to blame for the disruption of social harmony. Thus the success is not determined by the success at a cognitive level alone but by the success at the social level as well. Thus instead of using religious education as a tool to provide solutions for the problems of life today, it is often understood as the mere teaching of jurisprudence, which tends to teach one particular school and reject plurality in religions.

If this way of learning remains unchanged, we should not expect much of the Islamic religious education to help reduce the conflict that hits the country now. Islamic religious education should undergo some changes to its learning system in order to create a more dynamic and plural society whose members are ready to co-exist.

B. Discussion

1. The Concept of Religious Pluralism
Religious pluralism is an understanding which accommodate differing perspectives on existing religions. This term has yielded a long discussion among scientists in religious studies, both proponents and opponents.

Etymologically, this term derives from two words, Pluralism and Religion. In Arabic this term is translated as *al-ta‘addudiyah al-diniyyah* and in English as religious pluralism.³

Pluralism consists of two syllables: plural, which means plural, more than one;⁴ and isms, which is a suffix used to form a noun, in this case, related to political, social, or economic beliefs. In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian grand dictionary), pluralism refers to a plural society (with its social and political system).⁵

Meanwhile, according to Anis, pluralism comes from the English word *Pluralism*, which has three meanings: *First*, ecclesiastical which refers to a) a reference to a person holding more than one position in the ecclesiastical structure, and b); A reference to a person holding two or more positions simultaneously, whether ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical. *Second*, a philosophical notion which refers to a system of thoughts that acknowledges the underlying foundation of thoughts which are various in nature. *Third*, a socio-political notion, which is a system that recognizes the coexistence of different groups, whether in terms of race, ethnicity, stream or party, while upholding the highly characteristic aspects of differences among these groups. Based on these three meanings, pluralism can be simply defined as the coexistence of a group of people or beliefs at one time by maintaining the differences and characteristics of each.⁶

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³ Anis Malik Toha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama: Tinjauan kritis*, (Jakarta: Perspektif, 2005), h. 11
⁵ Ibid. h. 884
⁶ Anis Malik Toha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama...*, h. 11-12.
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The second root of the word is "Agama" (religion), which refers to the binding agent of human life inherited continuously from one generation to another. Language scholars differ on whether the word is derived from the combination of the word "a" which means "meaningless" and "gama" which means "chaotic", or whether it is derived from the Indo-Germanic language, which also gave birth to other words such as "go", "geoin" and "gang". Together, the word "agama" means "the way to heaven." 7

From the explanation of the two definitions of the words "pluralism" and "agama," the authors concludes that religious pluralism refers to a form of attitudes on religious plurality that centers on mutual respect and understanding toward differences characterized by active involvement while upholding the characteristics of each religion.

2. The Concept of Religious Pluralism in Islam

The system of plural values is a system which originates from God (sunnatullah) and hence impossible to change, challenge, or deny. Whoever tries to disregard the law of cultural pluralism will face the consequence of endless upheaval. 8 Thus, to deal with such diversity in beliefs, we cannot take the position of anti-pluralism. We must continue to learn to be tolerant of pluralism. 9

The Qur'an explicitly states that Allah Almighty created men in a plural state, be it due to differences in race, nation, culture and even religion. Allah SWT says in the Qur'an:

"O mankind, We created you from a man and a woman and made you nation and tribe so that you may know one another. Verily the most honorable among you in

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7 M. Quraish Shihab, Secercah Cahaya Ilahi Hidup Bersama Al-qur'an, Cet. I, (Bandung: Mizan, 2000), h. 52.


the sight of Allah is the most wicked among you. Allah is the Knower, the Knower. "(Al-Hujarat: 13)

The differences created by Allah SWT encourage people to get to know each other. In this case, positive interactions\textsuperscript{10} are needed, because there is no way that humans can get to know one another without having good interactions. But when a person claims that his or her beliefs are absolute, he or she can be said to have been trapped in an attitude of fanaticism. This attitude insists that only one's view is the most correct one while other people's view is wrong. Such a position often leads to conflicts between people. According to Khamami Zada, this relates to how people understand the views or beliefs of others as "something different" (the others'). Therefore, to avoid a conflict, other people's ideology should be viewed as "a reality" that also has its place in the society.\textsuperscript{11} Other people also need to be appreciated and understood.

After reading and reviewing some concepts related to pluralism and the arguments presented by both the proponents and opponents of pluralism, the author is convinced that Islam rejects any idea which suggests that all religions are equally true. Despite the many arguments rejecting the concept of deity in the perspective of other religions, this does not mean that Islam has no stance in relations to the issue of plurality, which is in itself the reality created by Allah SWT. Despite the long history of religious pluralism occurring in the West, the definition of pluralism offered by Quraish Shihab is worth contemplating. He claims that religious pluralism is an attitude that must be possessed by every embracer of a religion not only to recognize the existence the rights of the people of other religions, but also to engage in understanding the differences and equality in order to achieve harmony in diversity

\textsuperscript{10} Alwi Shihab, Islam Inklusif..., 41

\textsuperscript{11}Khamami Zada, dkk., Islam Pribumi MendialogkanAgama Membaca Realitas, (Jakarta: Air Langga, 2003) h. 73-74.
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(kebhinekaan).\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, to understand pluralism, interactions are needed. Good understanding will not be obtained without engaging in meaningful interactions with others.

Rasulullah SAW himself highly appreciated the existence of other religions. This was evident in the declaration of Madinah charter (\textit{Mitsaq Al-Madinah})\textsuperscript{13}. It explicitly states that the Jews and others were as one with the Muslims. They were to be treated fairly and were guaranteed their rights as long as they did not commit crimes and treason. It was by this law that the Messenger of Allah managed to give birth to the plural society of Medina.

Furthermore, the truth claim can be seen as a natural thing. It is impossible for a person to embrace a belief which he or she believes is not true. In this case, what one ought to do is not express it in a way that tends to give rise to extremism such as by stating inconsiderately that people's understanding of something is wrong. Islam itself strongly prohibits this fanatical act. This can be understood from the hadith of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ra narrated from Rasulullah SAW who said: "Really perish the people who behave tanaththu (extreme) '- he repeated this statement three times"\textsuperscript{14} (HR. Muslim)

3. The Urgency of Religious Pluralism in Islamic Education

Considering the notion of "one God, many religions" is a fact or reality, which has existed in our society, people must now realize that pluralism is indeed the very nature of human life.

Encouraging everyone to appreciate diversity is of paramount importance, especially in a pluralistic Indonesia. The multi-dimensional crisis that hit Indonesia has caused various social problems to the nation.

\textsuperscript{12} Alwi Shihab, \textit{Islam Inklusif}... h.41.
\textsuperscript{13} Muhammad Bin Ismail Bin Ibrahim, \textit{Shahih Al-Bukhari} ...h. 132.
\textsuperscript{14} Shafiyurrahman Al- Mubarakfury, \textit{Minnat Al-Mun'im Syarh Sahih Muslim}, Cet. I, Jilid IV, (Riyad: Dar As- Salam, 1999), h. 228.
Among the major problems that are faced by Indonesia are ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts, or better known in Indonesia as SARA.

The failure of religion in playing its role as problem solver for SARA-related problems in Indonesia is closely linked to exclusive religious teaching. So, in order to get out of the chaos that plagued the nation, it is time to bring about some changes to religious education, to be made more inclusive and more humanist.

At the theological level, religious education needs to change the currently passive, technocratic, and exclusive theological paradigm which exists today to a theology of mutual respect, mutual recognition of existence, of positive thinking, and of mutually enriching. It should aim to build interactions among religious and interfaith people who not only coexist harmoniously and peacefully but are also willing to be active and productive humans.

Furthermore, the people of Indonesia have long been familiar with the dictum of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Unfortunately, however, this concept has undergone a shift in meaning and has been subjected to bias interpretations, especially during the New Order administration. The socio-political policy at the time tended to be uniformist. At the time, the prevailing culture tended to belong to the dominant group, which was given the opportunity to be taught and distributed by schools from one generation to another.

Schools were also blamed for reflecting and echoing the stereotypes and prejudices at the time when they were expected to try to neutralize and eliminate them. There were also indications that schools were participating in developing prejudices and escalating intergroup tensions through the legislations that confounded the delivery of religious education, ethnocentric content of the curriculum, and the segregated dynamics of intergroup social relationships.\(^{15}\) It is not impossible that the segregation of schools based on religious beliefs also contributed to the prejudice and the process of

demonization between one group and another group, either directly or indirectly.

In fact, according to S. Hamid Hasan,16 "social, cultural, economic, political aspirations and economic capabilities are a reality for Indonesian society and nation. However, the social, cultural, economic, and political aspirations that should be taken into account in the determination of philosophy, theory, vision, document development, curriculum socialization and curriculum implementation are not yet considered as factors to be considered in the implementation of the curriculum in our country".17

Consequently, it was only natural that failure occurred in the field of education (including religious education), particularly due to a lack of respect given to differences in the Indonesian society.

In addition, Kautsar Azhari Noer mentions that there are at least four factors which have contributed to the failure of religious education in encouraging pluralism. First, the emphasis has been on the process of transfer of religious knowledge rather than on the process of transforming religious and moral values to students. Second, there has been a misconception that religious education is nothing more than a mere "curriculum ornament", or "complementary". Third, there has been a lack of emphasis on the cultivation of moral values which support interreligious harmony, such as love, compassion, friendship, helping, peace and tolerance. Fourth, there has been a lack of attention or interest in studying other religions.18

Based on this situation, coupled with the many conflicts, violence, and even cruelty carried out in the name of religion, the goal of religious education should be to transform the religious life itself by looking at both

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17 S. Hamid Hasan, “Pendekatan Multikultural..., h. 511.
the divine and socio-cultural aspect of life. Religious education should be able to instill a better way of life and courtesy to students so that attitudes such as mutual respect, sincerity, and tolerance toward religions and cultural diversity can be achieved in a plural society like Indonesia.

Efforts to build tolerant Islamic education characterized by cultural and religious diversity are not easy to make, because at the same time, Islamic education also has an obligation to preserve and inculcate the values of Islamic teachings. Such plausibility for the Indonesian nation can be a positive and constructive force, which can also become a negative and destructive force if it is not directed correctly. Therefore, educational institutions should be able to direct learners who will later become the nation's successors to understand the notion of nation by establishing cooperation. This is because the role of education is central in the life of a society. The social, political, and economic system of the nation has always been decisive in emphasizing the importance of education.

By understanding that our society is made up of many tribes and various religions we can become truly pluralist. Thus, the search for alternative forms of education is absolutely necessary. It is a form of education which seeks to preserve the culture of a society and pass it along to the next generation, fosters values, fosters friendships between diverse students of different races and religions, and develops mutual understanding, openness and dialogue. This form of education has been advocated by "many experts" in order to anticipate religious conflicts and to build a lasting peace. This is the true meaning of "pluralism in education".

C. Conclusions

20Fasli Jalal, Reformasi Pendidikan dalam Konteks Otonomi Daerah, (Yogyakarta: Adicita, 2001), h.6.
Religious pluralism according to the Islamic view is the concept that every Muslim must understand in order to address the plurality issue, which is part of "sunnatullah" and which can not be changed by anyone. Muslims should not be overly confused by the notion that religious pluralism refers to the equality of all religions. That is because, essentially, the emphasis in such an understanding is on the positive interaction between religious adherents with each side maintaining their own faith. To understand a concept fully is impossible because humans are not perfect and perfection only belongs to God Almighty. Because Indonesia is a multicultural nation, with different cultures, languages, and religions, it certainly has far more complex challenges to deal with.

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