

The Dialogue of Mysticisms as an Indonesian Islam-Christian Approach on Interfaith Relation

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Abstract— For as the one of the biggest pluralistic country in the world, Indonesia constantly encouraged to embrace interfaith dialogue. Since the country always faced many interfaith riots, there are scholars who tried to discover many ways of dialogue. As one of the main content of religion, mysticism has been formed to be a way of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. This presentation will collaborate some Indonesian Islam-Christian scholars researches, namely Syafaatun Almirzanah, Albertus Bagus Laksana, and Leonard Chrisostomos Epafras. This presentation tend to purpose a fresh way of interfaith dialogue in the pluralistic context of Indonesia as a way to engage and endorse a social transformation.

Keywords—Pluralistic context, Mysticism, Indonesia

I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of Interreligious Dialogue has been an enormous theme in the context of Indonesia. The reality of religious diversity constantly pushed many society groups to analyze it. Either by governmental organizations such as Ministry of Religious Affair who endorsed a theme namely “Moderasi Beragama”[1] or religious institution and academic institution tried to cope this problem from their perspectives. The term of “Moderasi Beragama” itself comes from Islamic Theological terms “Islam *Wasatiyyah*” or often said as Moderate Islam. In Christianity or other religion were hardly found such terms. But by the policy of anti-radicalism, Indonesian government tried to popularized this term.[1] Religious institution such as Catholic Church also embrace the problem of religious diversity as a part of their faith development. Ryanto armanda [2] a Pastor *cum* Professor of Catholic Theological studies in Indonesia, saw the inter-religious dialogue in the Catholic Church often goes with the shallow one. It mainly concerns only about

soft manner. Instead the fact that many Catholic Church teachings such as Second Vatican Concile and others are highly interested in the problem of inter-religious dialogue. This is the reason why religious diversity must be embrace faithfully. The similar effort came also from academic realm.

Center for Religion and Cross-cultural studies in Gadjah Mada University published a book about how Indonesian Inter-religious dialogue applied in the country. Inter-religious dialogue which held by institutions already started from 1960s but the critical analysis on that phenomenon was rarely found.[3] The book tried to depict some initiatives of inter-religious dialogues, started from Indonesian Government such as Ministry of Religious Affair and Ministry of Foreign Affair, grass root dialogue and goes until academic world. This last attempt of academic people apparently was not explored enough especially on some personal trial to build an Inter-religious dialogue.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This short article will examine some personal effort of Indonesian Academic Scholars who comes from various religious background. The main purpose of this article is to present how inter-religious dialogue can be developed from an academic realm who build seriously some critical analysis using various tools. By the purpose of the article to present a contour of thoughts, we will explain some academic scholar with its various approach on how to deal with inter-religious reality from the perspective of mysticism. This kind of approach apparently was not something new in the academic discussion. But in this article we will see how these academic scholar elaborated this theme by doing it interdisciplinary. The consideration of choosing the scholar which analyzed here is by seeing them as representatives of some religious traditions. This research can be developed also by involving some other scholar. The

method to explain this scholar is by focusing on their main work on mysticism an interfaith dialogue to see how they examine this focus.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Leonard Epafras: Cross boundary religious identity

Leonard Epafras is a Lecturer and Researcher in Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies in Yogyakarta. It is a consortium which consists of three universities from different religious background. *Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta* (Islam), *Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana Yogyakarta* (Christian), and *Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta* (Secular). He also got his PhD from this institution which we can interpret how the his skill on inter-religious dialogue was highly trained. He has a special interest on Judaic Studies. And for his PhD studies, he wrote about Jewish-Islamic dialogue. This article will explore how Epafras elaborated his interest on Jewish Studies from the perspective of interfaith dialogue.

One interesting thing Epafras examined is about inter-religious mysticism. He focused on the topic of "Jewish Sufism" in Medieval Egypt. The term implied that there are mixed identity phenomenon from two different religious traditions which is Judaism and Islam. In his research, he tried to analyzed how the two radically different religious traditions can formed a new hybrid identity. He found that at the time of King Ayyubid (1174-1250) and King Mamluk (1250-1570) there are some Jewish people who dwell on some Sufi tradition to developed on their spirituality. Some of them even went far by join the sufist community. The event, who happened in the era where Sufism was very popular, was analyzed by Epafras using the perspective of Frontier. By that, Epafras means that religious people who appeared as agency which live in the frontier of their own religious tradition and have interconnectivity with other religion. This analysis pictured a phenomenon where some people who found many inspirations from other religion. The spiritual need from one religion can be fulfilled by other religion.

It seems that Epafras concern mainly on the problem of identity. He stated, "the discourse of "Jewish Sūfism" in medieval Egypt demonstrated that our world is full of possibilities and the mutual learning from different traditions is inexhaustible." [4] He wants to endorsed that in the history of religion, we can encounter some people who live in the consciousness of the Other. This reality is called by Epafras as a "composite self". Meaning that there are

possible way of living by recognizing the Other. By the fact of Jewish Sufism, Epafras clearly stated that "*dialogue with the Other is inexhaustible*". We can learn some things from Epafras' effort. This clearly not a proposal on how should one religious people should behaved. But this one is an image of how a religion can be explored and expanded by learning from the Other. The cross boundary spirituality was build by the willing to learn from the Other.

B. Syafa'atun Almirzanah : Mystics Master dialogue represented Religious Diversity

Syafa'atun Almirzanah is a professor of Comparative Religion and Sufism at the Faculty of Ushuluddin (Theology) a State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. She is the First Female Professor at the University and many involved in the interreligious activities. Almirzanah also a board member of Interfidei Foundation and Central Asia Production Research, Chicago, a research coordinator for the Institute for Inter-Faith Dialogue INTERFIDEI, a visiting Professor on Women and Islam at Catholic Theological Union Chicago, and a Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at Sanata Dharma Catholic University in Yogyakarta.

In her experience, she received fellowships and grants from The Ford Foundation, Utrecht University Netherland, McGill University Canada, and The Bernardin Center Chicago. Her Research mainly focused on the Sufism, interfaith dialogue, comparative mysticism and recently the issue of Religion and Science. She also has experience in staying at the Coptic Catholic Seminary Egypt during her research on Christian-Muslim Relations, an immersion experience with a non-Muslim tradition outside her country.

The keyword to understand Syafa'atun Almirzanah's approach on dialogue is rediscovery. [5] She did not mean to find a new theory about dialogue. In her research, Almirzanah discover that many religious resources either from Muslim or Christian was not elaborate enough for Indonesian context. This findings encourage her to study deeply to Mystic Masters, Ibn Al' Arabi and Meister Eckhart in order to explore the possibility of Interfaith Dialogue in the context of Muslim and Christian. She firstly explain their thoughts that give opportunity of Interfaith Dialogue. She found some concept, namely, Arabi's hidden Treasure, Nafas Al-Rahman, Insan Al-kamil and unlimited creation process. She found that Arabi's concept of the Self-Disclosure of God had a logical consequences on the religious plurality.

God is continuously create the World and disclose Himself but the world was not ready enough to receive. This is why some people can have a perfect religion while the other is not. On the other side, religious plurality is come from the uniqueness of God's *Wujud* in the world. The *Wujud* of God appear in a unlimited way and comes into reality in every human being. This is why every human is special. While from Meister Eckhart, Almirzanah found that God for that master, God is always beyond. The unity of God only reached by human in the condition of letting go. It means that human has let go all thyself in order to unify with God. In this perspective, every religion is a way to achieve unity with God. These two master give Almirzanah an understanding of the limitness of faith. Because either by Arabi or Eckhart, those two realise that human have limitation to understand God. That is a ultimate reality (*Wujud* or *Godhead*), and human only can reached God in limited way.

From the perspective of dialogue, these two masters give a great contribution on how to understand God. Humility, equity, respect and freedom only can achieved by realizing its own limitation. By that way, religiosity can only means as a way of humility. Almirzanah purpose that either by Christian or Muslim have to discover again its own tradition and by that tries to see that from the perspective of dialogue. Not only that, this mysticism comparative give some insight on how we see other religion and bravely enough to admit that we are the same sojourner in the way to God.

C. Albertus Bagus Laksana: Spiritual Pilgrimage as a way of Encounter

Albertus Bagus Laksana is a Lecturer of Comparative Theology in Sanata Dharma Catholic University. He graduated from Boston College with a specialization in the area. One big work of him is the book about spiritual Pilgrimage in Java. He found that in Java, there is a site of spiritual training which related not only in Christianity, but also in Islam. He focuses his research on the some spiritual sites, such as tomb and other spiritual training places in Southern Part of Central Java. Some places where he did on research, some place for Islamic sites is pilgrimage shrines in Tembayat, Gunungpring, and Mawlana Maghribi, and for the Christian shrines are in the Sendangsono Marian Grotto, the Sacred Heart Shrine at Ganjuran, and the Mausoleum at Muntilan.[6] The main thesis of Bagus Laksana is that the formation of identity is related closely to the spiritual sites, because *ziarah* in such place also concerned about communality. The formation of

identity, always needs much time and effort, which mainly also contained ambiguity.[6]

He marked some spiritual concept of spiritual journey which can be a cross part between Islam and Catholic in Java. But mainly he saw that one aspect who plays great role for Christian and Muslim is the identity of Java. So the spiritual shrines where it become some places who not only visited by either Muslim or Christian people, it also related to some Javanese Myth. This spiritual places, related to either Christian or Muslim because these people from one religious background can feel some spiritual awakening by visiting other religious shrines. This is very interesting and by this phenomena, Laksana developed another meaning of multiple belonging. One story from the Christian shrine is when a Muslim Women who felt a very heartbroken moment of her life which related to the experience of divorce. She get a spiritual awakening by visiting a Christian shrines an spoke with a pastor and lately the pastor bought her a *mesin jahit* to support her life after her husband abondenment. This story became a famous story in the place because it showed how "The Other" help them to formed their identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we can see in this presentation, that some Indonesian scholar already make enormous effort to find some alternatives in the problem of Interreligious relation. Even when these approaches have to be considered critically, but we think this a great progress for Indonesian context of interreligious studies.

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