

Religion and Social Conflicts in Indonesia: An Effort to Build Theological Awareness

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Abstract--- Indonesia with all its diversity is actually a rich country, both natural and human resources. The diversity of religion, ethnicity, culture and language is the most important asset of Indonesian to be a country that has political, social and economic strength. Nevertheless, this kind of diversity is often used by certain parties to create chaos in this country. They ignited conflict in the community which later turned into conflict among religious adherents, even though at first the conflict was actually pure criminal. Due to religious or tribal interest, conflicts aroused in a number of regions. Besides the provocation, and social inequality, religious adherents sometimes could not see the real differences in religious life. They thought the others were wrong and they were the only right. This paper aimed to capture the phenomenon of conflicts that occurred in Indonesia by exploring the objects of problem from several regions. This case study utilized documents in the form of newspaper articles, governmental official reports, seminar articles, and books as the primary data. The data were analyzed qualitatively using relevant theories and experts' judgments. The study revealed the religion and social conflicts were mainly triggered by the religion adherents misunderstanding of its teachings and doctrines. One of the alternative solutions is that every religion adherent must build theological awareness. It is not intended to change the belief system (religion) or not as apologetic, but just as a means to understand the functions and characteristics of human nature. All religions adherents have to maintain their theological awareness through many ways, such as formal and informal learning.

Keywords---theological awareness, social conflict, religion adherent, Islamic teaching, diversity

I. INTRODUCTION

In postmodernism era, theological affairs come to a critical thought space. The greatest theological challenge in this time is that how one can define himself among the religions or theological doctrine adhered by people [1]. It is frequently felt how intensively the adherents meet each other in their daily life. At the same time, religious doctrines are gradually criticized [2].

Mathar pointed out that in this era, social interaction among people with different beliefs constituted something unignored. This was due to the occupation, neighborhood, daily activity, political, economic and cultural relationship [3]. What he stated

above are the social facts faced by community as logical consequences of technological effect that is growing fast, but sometimes, this growth is not followed by a real consciousness of social change. It means, time has changed, but peoples cannot catch up or follow changes. They are still analog. Therefore, there are many people who are not ready to be different, mainly in theological aspects. They refused pluralism and considered other people "misleading, unbeliever (*kafir*)" due to different religious or theological understanding.

Furthermore, Mathar wrote that among the essential human rights is the freedom to embrace a religion and practice the religious understanding. Al-Qur'an even gives people the freedom to believe or disbelieve certain religion, as explained in Quran Surah (Q.S.) Al-Kahfi, verse 29 [4]. In this verse, Muhammad SAW was asked to explain all humans the truth revealed by the God, but Muhammad SAW was requested not to force people to accept this religion. This verse really allows people to determine their faith to believe or not to believe [3].

Djamaris referring to Q.S. Hud (11): 118 and Q.S. Yunus (10): 99 explained that human being could not exactly assure who was really the most correct in his or her religious thought and understanding. This should refer to Allah who will explain in the hereafter something crucially debated so far in this life. Therefore, we cannot be angry with those whose religious understanding is different from ours [5]. Islam is a religion that strictly opposes social conflicts. The word *Islam* or the expression *Assalamualaikum* is a prayer for other people to get and feel peace.

Islam leads human beings to the path of Allah. Allah has created His creatures based on His will. All of His creatures are good and harmonious, so it is impossible for such kindness and harmony lead to destruction. The main problem to answer in this time is, why some religious group/organization that claimed to represent all Moslem communities to hate other groups or consider them as misleading people and *kafir*? One of the "victims" of this case is *Ahmadiyya*. After the Indonesian Council of Ulama (ICU) stamped "*kafir*" for *Ahmadiyya*, some radical groups destroyed its members on August 15, 2005 at Campus al-Mubarak Bogor [6]. The physical and mental violence experienced by *Ahmadiyya* community continues to this day.

This case really surprised some elements of community and government and became headline news broadcasted in some national/international television. ICU's statements and the destruction of several Ahmadiyya's properties drew strong criticism of some community elements, such as Liberal Islam Network (JIL), and Madani Community Alienation [7]. They regarded this case violating human rights due to some arguments. First, a religious doctrine or understanding is very private sphere and each people has the right to practice his or her belief. Second, 1945 constitution has guaranteed the freedom to worship, adhere a religion, and make group as well as freedom of gathering. Third, there is none who has an absolute authority to declare that he or she is the most correct while others are *kafir* [6].

It was very disappointing that "the destroyers" who felt the most in practicing Islam and the most correct by showing "radical Islam" in the society [9]. For this reason, it is logic to ask again the religious awareness of the adherents who are living in this 21st century. It is not easy to answer such question. As the definition of religion itself is still obscure, it is not easy either to understand what religion is. In Islamic perspectives, religion is a *fitrah* (devious potency) grown up by Allah in the heart of human being. It means that he cannot be separated from the religion (QS. Al-Rum; 30).

II. METHOD

This study aimed to capture the phenomenon of conflicts that occurred in Indonesia by exploring the objects of problem from several regions. This case study utilized documents, like newspaper articles, governmental official reports, seminar articles, and books as the primary data. Besides, unstructured interviews with some religions adherents who experienced the conflicts were also conducted. The data were analyzed qualitatively using relevant theories and experts' judgments in order to describe the problems comprehensively and find out the appropriate alternative solution.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Religion in Social Conflict

Mathar was once asked by a participant in a one-day seminar, whether a religion was still relevant with current life. He responded to it, by asking confirmation that it should be addressed to the religion adherents who used their religion as a means of justification of doing a chaos in the public sphere [3]. In such a social reality where religion becomes a means of justification, a religion is not relevant anymore. However, if religious values, such as peace, harmony, justice, honesty, etc. are still implemented in the social life, a religion is still very relevant. Religious teachings, as explained in holy books teach human being to live in harmony and peace. Religion disagrees with anarchism. Religious leaders always remind the adherents to spread peace in human life. Therefore, if there is a conflict among adherents who live in society, there must be something wrong in their religious practices. Religious values are not reflected in their social life due to many factors. There are many factors bringing about social conflicts.

1) Narrow Religious Understanding

Religion in practical implementation, not in the form of revelation, could bring about conflicts. Although it offers concepts of peace, honesty, justice, love and affection, it may also lead to religious sentiments which often result in harassment and violence because its adherents cannot implement the core values of religious teaching. Whereas in Islam, for example, three concepts of the human status and their roles have been taught. First, if someone is dealing with God, his status is as a servant of God and his role is to carry out religious commandments. Second, if he is dealing with other people, his/her status is brothers and sisters. His role is to connect, improve and strengthen the brotherhood, both as Adam's children and grandchildren although they have different skin color, language and religion. Third, if he is dealing with the environment, his status is as a caliph and his role is to prosper the earth. Thus, if the religious teachings are well understood and implemented, the human being could live in harmony and peace.

2) Socio-Economic Gap

Individual differences of human being are inevitable. Some people are better than others in terms of body, mind, wealth, position and so on. These are the facts. As a result of these differences, stratification of the people places them in their respective groups. There are individuals who are able to produce more or enough, some are lack, some are not able to produce anything at all [8]. The existing social gaps could not be separated from the social stratification as mentioned above. Social inequality initially began in the economic field, namely in the field of material fulfillment, but over the time it cannot be denied that this extended to other sectors namely social, political, cultural and religious [9].

In modern societies, social inequality seems very complicated, because it can no longer be separated from the existing factors. These factors are closely related to each other. Economic disparities are almost difficult to separate from politics or others. The current social reality in Indonesia shows inequality, social injustice and injustice of power sharing. The riots that occurred in Makassar in 1997 (attacks on Chinese groups), the expulsion of Madurese by Dayak tribes in Central Kalimantan, the expulsion of the BBM group (Bugis, Buton, Makassar) from Ambon, were examples of conflicts due to socio-economic disparities. In poor communities, such as in Indonesia, there would be unavoidable income and social disparities bringing about inequalities that caused conflicts, because there were several groups unable to take profit provided by the development.

3) Provocation

Some analysts are of the opinion that almost every riot that occurred in some area of Indonesia was triggered by the intervention and provocation of other contributing factors (third party) popularly known as provocateurs. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of the phenomenon of uniform patterns and times of riots. Unfortunately, these provocateurs were sometimes hard to identify.

4) *Fanaticism of Political Parties*

Party fanaticism turned out to ignite inter-religious conflicts as what happened in Pekalongan in 1997. In Pekalongan, the majority of the people idolized United Development Party (UDP) as their party. However, *Golkar* Party, through its approach to *kyai* (religious leaders) and bureaucracy, was able to compensate for UDP's votes. This brought about a conflict that was not only limited to party supporters, but eventually seeped into religious conflicts [10]. In addition, it cannot be denied that there are religious people who understand religion partially. People of the world today are struggling with a number of problems due to the depletion of living and practicing religious teachings. This raises a new problem that bears various crises, including the decline of moral values, corrupt lifestyle, depletion of law, the lack of honesty and justice and social disintegration. In addition, there is also a social phenomenon of people's lives that tends to be material-interests oriented rather than to be spiritually oriented. This has an impact on the deterioration of the work order and ethos.

Looking for a comprehensive solution to the various problems of social life as mentioned above, I proposed re-actualizing religious and moral values as introduced in holy book in people's lives. It is because it applies universally to all nations without distinguishing their nation, skin color, and culture. The most appropriate place to actualize the moral values of religion is the teachings of religion itself which were brought by the prophets and messengers, either regarding the matter of divinity or noble characters.

In short, all religions recognize social differences and polarization. Islam itself sees the phenomenon of plurality as a *sunnatullah*, as a natural law and as an empirical reality of the world [11]. Nevertheless, this does not mean that religion, in this case notably Islam, tolerates social inequality which causes conflicts. The religion has social aspirations to continuously uphold egalitarianism and justice that is demanded by every adherent. This is regarded a very good worship to God since human beings must realize social justice in society.

Actually, the opportunity to compete and to maintain life is widely open to every individual. Individual struggle and involvement will determine the quality of each as a caliph. However, in this competition, religion also sets limits in the use of natural resources and employment. These restrictions are intended to eliminate the exploitation of a group over other groups and save people from deterioration [12]. Thus, it is clear that religion forbids concentration and monopoly of wealth which also includes power, because it will cause injustice. Power can turn into a tool of *taghout* (oppression) that ends up creating social conflicts in the name of religion.

Religion tells mankind to walk on the path of peace. Allah the Almighty created something based on His will. All His creation is so good and harmonious that it is impossible that the good and harmony lead to chaos and conflict. The creature of God actually comes from one source (Q.S. Al-Anbiya: 92). "Likewise, human beings are created from the ground through a father and mother. Therefore, humans live not only must be in harmony with fellow humans but also with the environment.

Isn't it when a human die, he returns to the ground?"

The problem is whether every religion adherent must see each other as enemies who must be hated and destroyed. It is not suitable with religious substance. Isn't Islam or Christianity, for example, teaching salvation and love? In addition to other meanings of Islam, this religion basically contains the message and salvation. For example, when a Muslim performs prayers, he greets right and left that means he spreads salvation and peace around the people. Similarly, Christianity has a teaching of love that emphasizes the importance of love and peace.

Some social conflicts that happened in the country was assumed from religious interest. Some experts stated that the conflicts among the people or ethnic groups was an open conflict in order to maintain "religion", such as Ambon, Poso and Ketapang. These cases actually originated from a small case that happened individually at first. For example, in Ambon, the conflict began only from a fight between street kid who as Muslim and taxi drivers who were Christians. These criminal cases massively spread to conflict among religious adherents. This was similar to what happened in Medan between members of the Pancasila Youth (Moslem in majority) and members of the Youth Workers Association (Christian), they got in conflict at the first time because of contested land issues, but eventually they brought the name of religion.

Some experts are sure the social conflicts happening so far were not caused by religious interest, but much more caused by criminals which later on become conflicts based on religion. Therefore, the conflict among religious communities cannot be called conflict - in the sense of hostile behavior in the form of confrontation - which can actually be classified as inter-religious conflict. The riots are more precisely categorized as social conflicts that cannot be addressed to a particular religion, even though the two conflicting groups are two adherents of different religions [13].

If we observe it in such a way, the conflicts that have occurred in this country so far, actually it have nothing to inter-religious conflict. If we view the characteristics of the perpetrators, we can assume that they are individuals who adhere to religion (citizens) but do not know much about the religious doctrine and even have almost no attention to their religion. The background of the group involved in conflict was not from a religious organization. Moreover, the target to be achieved from the conflict was not intended to a particular religion, but it was more about the economic and political interests.

Nonetheless, I did not deny the presence of purely religious conflicts such as the cases of church attack and arson due to the establishment of a church regardless of permission from local residents who were predominantly Muslim. Likewise, there were conflicts in certain areas in which Christians protested the loudness of the mosque's sound system which disturbed their calm. However, although there were ripples of conflicts like that, the area of conflict was only limited to the surrounding environment. It did not cause a widespread conflict. Even it could be resolved peacefully on the bases of sense of togetherness as one family.

B. *The Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution*

There are some roles of religion in conflict resolution that I can propose.

1) *Spreading the Understanding of Diversity*

The low quality of understanding of religion can trigger conflicts. This is particularly evident to those who exclusively claim they are the most correct. Likewise, the narrow understanding of the community about symbols and religious terms such as jihad misinterpreted as a holy war against other. Such a narrow understanding is also transferred through learning process in *pesantren*. It sometimes teaches religion to the *santri* with a linear, one-way, narrow-minded, fanaticism pattern and does not accept differences [10]. Therefore, in the provision of religious curriculum, various opinions of scholars who can eventually form a tolerance in religion and in school should be introduced.

Shihab pointed out how Islam actually describes the basic idea of harmony and democracy. He further explained, religion - in this case Islam - was revealed not only aimed at maintaining its existence as a religion but also acknowledging the existence of other religions and giving them the right to coexist while respecting adherents of other religions. Shihab gave an example by quoting several Quranic verses including Q.S. al-An'am; 108, Q.S. Al-Baqarah; 256, Q.S. Al- Kafirun; 6 and Q.S. Al-Hajj; 40. These verses are used by some scholars as arguments for maintaining non-Muslim places of worship [14]. If every religion always upholds justice, peace and harmony, then social conflicts in the name of religion can be avoided. Thus, to develop harmony between religious communities, a plural-dialogical approach to religious understanding is needed. This approach sounds "placing others in my perspective," and "put me in others' perspective." For this reason, the religious leaders need to have a noble attitude, that is eliminating a mutual suspicion and evading hostility and hatred; avoiding making a generalization in seeing a religious phenomenon, and developing an atmosphere of positive thinking by trying to understand and respect others' beliefs.

Religion could experience the crisis of relevance unless it is practiced well. The meaning of the relevance crisis is when people seeks a solution of social problems, he does not find directions from religious understanding or ideology, thus he seeks out other ideologies. In addition, if we are not able to elaborate social monotheism, it might appear in the community of an ideology of non-religion, or anti-religious ideology that many people follow since it may offer an alternative solution to life's problems. They do not believe in religion anymore, because it only brings social conflicts, controversies, ritualism alone, there is no social monotheism.

If leaders or religious leaders are not able to formulate social monotheism, there could be groups who find the appropriate values in Marxism, Leninism, and Trotskyism. This has a fatal impact on the lives of religious people. If the problem above is not solved, we have allowed the growth of secularism, that rejects religious interference in the life of the nation and state.

In short, religious teachings must be implemented in life as well as they are used to solve the problems being faced. The teaching of justice which is recognized by all religions must be re-practiced and enforced

2) *Inter-Religious dialogues*

At present, there is a need for dialogues among leaders or religious leaders to reduce the misunderstanding of religious adherents. In Indonesia, the theory of shadows applies. If the original substance moves, the shadow also moves. This means that what happened so far in the bottom layers actually reflects what is happening in the upper layers, nevertheless the patterns and models are different due to educational differences. Admittedly, in certain communities, religious leaders are central figures in society. In general, a person is considered a religious figure because of his charisma, has the basis of knowledge of theology, commits to the teachings of his religion and becomes an example for his congregation. In Christianity, such people include pastors, evangelists, elders, and deacons, while in Islam, they are known as cleric, priest, *kiyai*, *ustadz*, and *muballigh*. The pattern of relations between leaders and his people is top down. A figure for his people is a central figure who is sacred because of his charisma.

That is why good relations and dialogues are needed among these figures to reduce conflict in society. In Sitarjo Village, according to Prayogo the togetherness of the religious community seems to be going well [15]. This is due to:

1. The visit of religious leaders to places of worship;
2. Social cooperation that involves all elements of religion, for example in the
3. construction of roads and bridges;
4. Good co-existence. If there is a citizen dies, whole community helps him regardless of his religions;
5. The absence of distinctive funeral locations between Muslims and Christians;

A dialogical atmosphere illustrates the association between individuals who try to know each other as they are. Interfaith dialogue means that every religion is willing to express their religious experiences rooted in their respective religious traditions. These notions show that to engage in dialogues for the implementation of tolerance among religious communities, basic attitudes are needed, such as openness (inclusiveness), willingness to exchange ideas with people or different, trust each other, and desire to build a harmonious life. Honesty in expressing ideas or facts will be very helpful for all parties to make decisions that are responsible for the common interest [16].

Indeed, the tolerance and inclusive attitude described above has long been practiced in Islamic da'wa. In this case, the teachings of Islam as the core of the messages of da'wa respect the independence of every person to embrace and practice religious teachings. Islam teaches that every person who is born is not deprived to get the freedom given by God. The mandate given by God to the Prophet Muhammad SAW only conveyed the teachings of Islam and did not force others to adhere Islam.

In Islam the dialogue process and tolerance are very clear. For example, in history it was noted that the people who supported the Medina Charter clearly showed the character of a pluralistic society, both in terms of ancestral origin, as well as cultural and religious aspects. There were Muslim, Jewish and Arab non-Muslim Arabs in the community [17].

All religious communities represented by their respective figures must have a lot of dialogue to find out the points of similarities. Al-Qur'an itself urges the prophet Muhammad SAW and his followers to invite the experts of the book to hold the same sentence (dialogue-consensus) to build brotherhood. (Q.S. Ali Imran (3): 64)

Dialogue needs to be extended, for example, most Muslims are restless with the establishment of a church, since at the location, the Christians are minority. In this case, it should be explained to Muslims community that building a church is not same as building a mosque in Islam. Muslims think that every church can be entered by Christians as the case of mosques for Muslims. In Christianity, each church indeed may only be used just by its congregation. Unlike in Islam, all Muslims can enter mosques even though they are built by Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah or any other organizations.

IV. CONCLUSION

To overcome the conflict caused by lack of religious understanding, one of the alternative solutions is that every religious people must build theological awareness. It is not intended to change the belief system (religion) or not as apologetic, but just as a means to understand the functions and characteristics of human nature.

In order to go into a theological awareness, religion and belief must be held firmly while differences and similarities of religions must be learned. Based on this understanding, sympathy and mutual respect can be upheld. However, the crucial problems faced by modern society currently are the egocentric, primordial and sectarian tendencies as opposed to

togetherness. Therefore, a laboratory is needed to educate people to be able to live in diversities. In this connection, a kindergarten school can be the first place to introduce and teach children tolerance, love, respect and diversity from an early age. They learn together and have programs to visit places of worship and chat with religious leaders. It is expected that this generation will be able to guard the life of nation and state on the basis of peace, togetherness and love. Later on, when they become adults, those peace values guide them to live in harmony in the society.

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