Multidimensional Relations between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia

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Abstract. Religion has a large dimension in human's life, and it's not only about the ritual and spiritual aspects. Discussing the relationship between Islam and Christianity can also be seen from different dimensions: theology, philosophy, historical, social, political, and cultural. The history of relationship shows that Islam has a dynamic relationship with Christianity in the form of cooperation, competition, conflict, acculturation, and assimilation within the various dimensions. The relationship between Islam and Christian has often been observed only from the political perspective; therefore it is always colored with conflicts worse than others. This is not only unfair, but also makes things worse. In reality, their relationship is very colored, not only by conflicts and tensions, but also filled with cooperation, tolerance, assimilation and acculturation that bring harmony, peace and beauty, and also advancement of civilization.

Keywords: relation between religion, islam, christianity, indonesia

Introduction

The relationship between Islam and Christian is the most heated interfaith relation in the human history. The historical phenomenon of the Crusade and the demolition of World Trade Center (WTC) in New York in September 11, 2001, where Al-Quidah had been accused as the actor by America, have created a more dramatic relationship between the two religions. A contemporary phenomenon that also affects the relationship between religions is, the development of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In Indonesia the tension has been higher since the Reformation era in 1997/1998 that was accompanied by horizontal conflict involving two religions. Although the relations between both religions has been colored by so many conflicts and clashes, there are still other good forms of relations namely cooperation, competition, tolerance, acculturation, and also assimilation. When and in what scope the relationship is shaped depends on the dimensions in diversities. The most significant dimensions in Islam-Christian relation according to Goddard [1] includes theological dimension, philosophical dimension, historical dimension, social dimension, and political dimension. Meanwhile, R. Stark and C.Y Glock see the other five dimensions in religion: belief, application, experience, knowledge, and ethical [2].

Theological Dimension

The theological theme is the most fundamental theme in each religion. It also occurs in the teachings and traditions of faith in Islam and Christian. Islam and Christian relationship cannot be detached from this theological problem. According to Goddard [3], the statement of Islam and Christianity about divine matter seems to be very close. Therefore, the stress on monotheism, the fact that God creates the universe, God who seems to speak to mankind, and the responsibility of human beings to their God, are basic similarities between the two religions. Those similarities highlight the fact that both Islam and Christian are celestial religions. These similarities in the theological dimension have brought dialog, empathy, and cooperation.

There is no harmonious and sincere relation than the relation between Islam and Christianity. Syaikh Shafiyurrahman al-Mubarakfurri, the author of Prophet Muhammad SAW’s history who received an award as the best author from Rabitah Alum Islami, has carved the beauty of friendship, tolerance, assistance, and respect among Prophet Muhammad, his friends and Christian priests based on the divine similarities and celestial religion missions [4].

Besides similarities, there are some principle and ideas differences between both religions. In some ways, they even stand against each other. The fundamental differences including Christian doctrine on Trinity, Incarnation, and Penance is considered as fundamental failure which is cursed and even considered as an abuse to God. On the other hand, Christian philosophers seem to question Moslem’s faith on the true prophecy of Muhammad who started the history of Islam back in 7 BC.

How should we react to these facts? Mukti Ali, the former Minister on Religious Affairs of Indonesia period 1971-1981 in his book entitled, “The Inter Faith Relation and Its Problems” stated the needs of dialog, cooperation, and competition to strengthen each other’s faith. While for some undecided points, we need dialog and tolerance[5]. In World Book [6], tolerance is defined as “Willing to let other people do as they think best; willing to endure beliefs and actions of which one does not approve”.

Moslem and Christians use the same word to refer to God. “Allah”. The word “Allah” is an Arabic utterance used by Moslems all over the world and some Christians, especially those who speak Arabic. Islam and Christianity have several similarities on the essence, God’s character and action as the Creator, Care Taker,
Giver. The Most Affectionate and Most Equitable in the Universe. Is God really transcendence, or immanent, involved in human’s creation or even human’s forming? Mostly, Christians and Moslems will give the same answer for the question. But it is different as they talk about God’s independence. Both Christian and Moslem agree on the oracle, but when they were asked to explain the meaning of the word, Christian would refer to Jesus Christ. For example, is a cite from the verse - God is inside Christ, who reconciles the world on his own (The Second Letter of Paul to Corinthian 5, 9). While Moslem will refer to the Holy Koran, as the main place for God’s oracle, “Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Koran in order that you may understand”[7].

Historical Dimension

The historical dimension has an important role in shaping the tradition of faith and mindset of religious followers to followers of other religions. History plays an important role in developing the Islam-Christian relation. At the time Islam emerged and proved its existence outside Arabian land, Christians reacted by showing their understanding of Islam in the context of religion that was already familiar for them. As written in their Bible, Islam is interpreted as the fulfillment of God’s promise in the Genesis towards Ishmael, son of Abraham, that one day a big nation will come from his heirs [8]. Christian’s first reaction of Islam was to understand it as God’s will.

Mubarakfurri mentioned that when Muhammad received the first oracle and was terrified and confused, Khadijah brought him to Waraqah bin Naufal, a Christian. Naufal said to Muhammad, “You will be hated for what you bring (oracle), and if I am still alive at the time coming, I would defend you with all my life.” Muhammad’s relationship with Christians remains harmonious until the day he passed away [9].

However, the relationship between these two revelation religions developed into political logic, as harmony and friendship had changed. The change had also colored Islam’s interpretation towards Christian and vice versa. For example, the protection from Christian priests and King Habasyah (Ethiopia) to Muhammad and his followers changed upon Qurasy’s calumny. The Crusade phenomenon and local conflicts among several powers in Islam and Christian have changed brotherhood doctrine and Islam as mission continuity of attribute of a messenger of God which is believed in Gospel. Moslems that considered Christians as older brother at first had changed, and it has considered themselves as Christian opposite. Then, Islam was called as “Muhammadanisme” it means a religion which was created by Muhammad, it is not the continuity prophetic treatise anymore after prophet Isa, as it was written down in Bible. It also happened the opposite, it was Muslims interpretation toward Christianity and Christian followers. The first doctrine supported prophet Muhammad, and then it was revised so the new Bible is not the genuine Bible anymore. Christian and its followers that was first was considered as a part of monotheism religion then, it is now interpreted as polytheism religion and as polytheism followers. The change of perception and interpretation of Islam towards Christian and vise verse, of course, could not be separated from the historical dimension of the dynamical relationship between Islam and Christianity that was not only colored by brotherhood and cooperation, but also by conflict and competition.

In Indonesian context generally, Islam-Christian relation is in condition that can support a harmony relationship in the future. Islam that came to Indonesia on 7th century had its sovereign power on 12th century and it was accepted and become the religion of Kings and of course it had been accepted massively as a religion and state identity on 15/16th century. At that time, Islam was the religion of Indonesian society. Then, on 16 century until the middle of 20 century, western colonial came such as; Portugal, Dutch, and England whose first aim was to monopolize spices trading, and then they became a colonizer. Besides, they stewed Christian. Their coming into this country was not welcomed by Indonesian people. It was not only to maintain their country but also to maintain their religion (Islam).

This non conducive relationship continued until now. Dutch colonial traces was still very much felt until now in some regions in this country like; Batak, Ambon, North Sulawesi, that were Dutch inhabitant and the places of Dutch troops. In those regions, Christian inhabitants were higher than other regions. The concentration of Christian power in certain regions could have positive meaning, but also could raise the communication gap since it is difficult to make renewing. The conflict happened in Ambon was caused by region dividing or concentration of certain religion group, so village A is Muslim village and Village B is Christian concentration.

Christian and Moslem relationship that was not conducive still continued after Indonesian independence, especially at “Orde Lamii” era (Soekarno Government 1945-1965) and in the “New Orde (Orde Baru)” era (Soeharto Government 1966-1998). It could be traced from the attitude of those governments toward Islam, especially politic Islam. According to Fatimah Husein, at Soekarno leadership, Muslims were treated carefully. Soekarno actually wanted a harmony among Moslems and they could apply their religion teaching cleverly in order to find Islam soul, it was civilization advance. However, thing that was not liked by Muslims was his secular ideology that was considered becoming an obstacle for Muslims to realize Islam as a state basic. Even, in the last ten years in his leadership, Soekarno was considered giving bigger expectation to a communist group. Related with Islam-Christian relationship, the Christian group was considered as the detractor in the meeting of Committee of Indonesian Indepence Preparation to determine Jakarta charter that consisted of obligation for Muslims to do their religion lessons [10].

At Soeharto’s era, the dissatisfaction of Muslims reappears especially at two of the first decade of his leadership. By his floating mass politic, Soeharto did not give a chance for Politic Islam that was considered as “circumlocution” of Islam parties. Related to Christian,
Soeharto’s Government was considered giving concession and preference to an “abangan” group (Muslims that do what is ordered in the Koran but they also do some things which are forbidden by the Koran) and non-Muslim especially Christian followers. This condition was worsened by an issue of Christianization of around 2 million people from ex Indonesian Communist party [11].

Social Dimension

Every religion must have a social dimension [12]. The social dimension of every religion holds an important role because teaching construction of certain religion could not be separated from its historical context. The formation of Islam teaching could not be separated from socio-cultural of Arabic society [13]. Also, Christian Theology forming could not also be separated from socio-cultural Europe Society because although Christian was born in the Middle East it developed and reached maturity in Europe [14]. The social dimension of those Islam-Christian relationship includes a group or a community, leadership system, relationship between groups and relationship between a community and a leader.

A group/a community in any religion holds an important role. It is also in Islam and Christian. In Islam or Christian, a community is a group of people organized for the same purpose, activity, and leadership like a Mosque community, a Hajj community, religion learning community, Sufism community, and other religion communities. In Christian, no matter Catholic or Protestant, they use a “jemaat” term (community) which has the same meaning as “jamaah” (community) in Muslims like “jemaat” Church. However, to show a Muslims broader community or a community that has religion identity, “ummat” or “ummah” term is used. This term has the same meaning in Christian community by calling themselves as Christian “ummat” of Protestant or Catholic. Christian “ummat” has a special term to call their community, it is ecclesia that means a community. The use of the similar might be caused by technical term in Islam that had been standardized in Indonesian language, so its use is not limited just for Islam. Besides, the use of the similar term will ease the community to understand the term. It also describes the close relation of Moslems and Christians.

The relationship between Islam and Christian religion leaders in Indonesia is considered good. They often share their ideas in managing their members and developing religion charity such as hospital and education center. They also gather in every activity which is conducted by government or interfaith harmony organization such as “Religious Harmony Forum”. They often communicate with each other if there is a national or international problem which can disturb the harmony relationship of Islam-Christian in Indonesia, for example criticizing Israeli aggression to Palestine. Interfaith corporation in Indonesia, in general, is good and harmonious. Muhammadiyah movement which mainly focuses on the education sector, health and social take many teachings from Zending Christian mission [15]. It is admitted that Christianity has a contradictive attitude to Islam. In one side, they oppose and deny the religion; on the other hand they need protection from Islam as the majority.

Political Dimension

The political dimension is the dimension which manages political problems caused by a different group in society or country. It is the most crucial dimension in Islam-Christianity relationship all over the world including Indonesia or Malaysia. The history showed that Islam-Christianity relationship was colored with spectacular Crusade, also Israel and America aggression toward Islam. This phenomenon leaves a wound and stigma for each group (Islam and Christianity). Later, the stigma is awakened by Samuel Huntington from Harvard University with the term “Clash of Civilization” between West and Islam [16].

In Indonesia, the political dimension between Islam and Christianity has existed since Christian mission in Indonesia brought by Netherlands, Portugal, and England which was confronted by local citizens who accepted Islam as their National identity. The confrontation against colonialism of Indonesia turned into Crusade (Jihad fi sabillah) between Islam (as a right) versus Christianity (as the flaws/infidel). The tension between Islam and Christianity is continuing until recently.

CONCLUSION

In Indonesia, there is also an Islam-Christianity cultural relationship. The architect of Istiqal mosque in Jakarta was a Christian, and Muhammadiyah has learned much from Christian about how to manage education, hospital, and orphanage homes. Religion social ceremony for Christian is mostly influenced by Islam culture such as gathering (Halal-bihalal), visiting each other (Silaatulrahmi), Thanksgiving (Tasyakuran), wedding ceremony, and other daily expressions such as: Ibahah, Insyaallah, Masyaallah, and etc. Islam song’s lyrics are also influenced by church songs lyric. Proselytizing model and method developed by Wali Songo with cultural colors such as creating/changing Wayang kulit, Gending-gending (Iava) song and Java religious ceremony influence and imitated by Christian missionarne.

REFERENCES


[9] Mubarakfurry, ibid. hal. 89


