

RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE ON THE GROUND

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We are now living in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. No single society that is monolithic. All great cultural and religious traditions have to deal with plurality and diversity of cultures and religions. These pluralities are both given and generation. As mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an, God created mankind into tribes and races with different skin colors and languages. Plurality of religions is also a part of God's Will. Indeed, plurality is observable signs or evidence of God Almighty for intellectuals, knowledgeable persons.

Cultural and religious plurality becomes more complex in line with development and interactions between people from different faiths and cultures. Plurality is resulted from creativity and adaptation of people to cope with realities, changes and challenges. A plausible consequence of these creativity and adaptation is the birth of ideologies across human history. Now, variety of multiculturalism, pluralism and other ideologies have become major studies of modern social sciences especially sociology and anthropology.

Islam has a positive view of plurality. Islam outlines three basic principles of plurality. Firstly, Muslim has to accept plurality and all consequences as part of social, cultural and religious realities. Secondly, Muslim has to response these realities in positive ways. Thirdly, plurality has to lead to harmony and better life and harmony.

The positive of Islam on plurality might be called as Islamic Pluralism which consists of three basic teachings. The first teaching is to respect differences. It is obligatory for every Muslim to respect human life and dignity. No infant can choose their parents, race, sex, color of skin, eyes and hair. When they were born, children could not choose their culture, country, environment, and, even religion. In later development, human are given freedom and rights to choose their religion, nationality and culture. These choices are private. Therefore, everyone is responsible to their own choices. In this regards, Islam teaches its adherents to always address others with a full respect and dignity as human being. This is the very basic teaching of Islam on tolerance and Human Rights principles.

The second teaching is to race or compete in goodness. The teaching of Islam on competition is based on four principles. The first, Muslim has to be confident with their faith and identity. Being a Muslim is a private choice that distinguishes someone from others. Being a Muslim could mean being an exclusive man. The second, Muslim has to be consistent with and committed to do goodness beneficial for themselves and others. It is not a true Muslim that has plenty of food and let their neighbor in hunger. Real Muslims are those presence create peace for their immediate environment. The third, Muslim has to perform goodness in a perfect performance according to the guidance of God (*ihsan*). For Islam, what is more important is not the quantity or amount of deeds but the quality or perfection of deeds. The fourth is to be always innovative and creative. In an open competition only the most creative, innovative and productive could leading and survive. In line with teaching, relationships of Muslim with others are not based on hatred and rivalry but love, respect and fair competition.

The third teaching of Islam on positive plurality is unity and inclusion of society. This teaching is based on two concepts namely *tawhid* and *umma*. The very basic principle of Islam as a monotheist religion is *tawhid*. Literally, *tawhid* means unity. Muslim testifies to worship Allah, the Only God. *Tawhid* brings implication that any existences other than God are creatures (*makhluq*). Further, *tawhid* brings implication on unity of creation, unity of mankind and unity of the purpose of life. The consequences of *tawhid* are equality, sovereignty and solidarity among people. With the concept of *umma* Islam teaches the inclusion of a society. Mankind is one single community which comes from the same origin and

same parents. They are all created from mud and children of Adam and Eve. The concept of *umma* implies unity, commonality, shared rights and responsibility. People are bound with their society and consensus between people. In line with the concept of *umma*, Muslim has to follow rule of religion and social norms and is prohibited to be indifference. On the ground, the concept of *umma* highlights the principle of unity, integration, inclusion and cooperation.

In line with this principle, Islam views religious and cultural plurality not simple as a co-existence. It entails a world view and code of conducts on how to see plurality and to deal with accordingly. Historically, there are two examples of *umma* on the ground. The first example is Medina Community or State. This State is based on the Medina Charter (*mitsaq al madinah*) as a consensus among people. There are three characteristic of Medina Charter. The first, Medina Charter is not based a particular religion (Islam) but universal teaching and values of existing religions especially Christianity and Judaism. Second, every single community, ethnic and religion is entitled as *umma*. Therefore none of them are excluded or alienated. The third, the Charter did not abandon the existence and identity of religions, ethnics and tribes but they are highly respected and well-protected. As could be seen from history, under Medina Chapter every religion, tribe and ethnic lived in conformity, harmony and unity.

The second example is that of *Pancasila* in Indonesia. By population, Indonesia is a Muslim majority country. More than 85 percents of its citizen are Muslims. Despite, Indonesia is neither a theocratic nor an Islam State. The *Pancasila* as the State Ideology is dig from universal teaching and values embraces by Indonesian. Because the teaching and values are inclusive, *Pancasila* is accepted by all ethnics and religious groups in Indonesia. Under the *Pancasila*, despite their religious and cultural differences, Indonesian could live peacefully, side by side in harmony.

What can be done in the future? We have to admit that the world is facing more serious and complex challenges. Not every community, religion and state leaders are happy and supportive to multiculturalism and pluralism. Some of them even stated that multiculturalism and pluralism have been fail. In my view, there is no reason to discard multiculturalism and pluralism. Under above mentioned concepts multiculturalism and pluralism are necessary foundation to find a common ground for our life and our common world. Multiculturalism and pluralism are likely to fail if some of us still think that one particular religion, culture and ethnic is better and superior over other. It has been fail to create a peaceful world if multiculturalism is directed to unilateral world. Multiculturalism can only be successful if is subjected to respect difference and protect identity of all people.

Second, having this view, then people of faith should find ways to build harmony and prosperity. This is possible through a more productive and constructive dialogue to see differences and commonalities of religions. Theologically, there are points when people from different faiths stand in an exclusive state, but there are also points where they share common teaching. Towards differences we have to be tolerant, but to the point of agreement we could develop cooperation.

So far, there are numerous interfaith dialogues as well as Muslim-Christian dialogues. There have been declaration produces from these dialogues. Off course, dialogue is not everything. It is not a panacea that could heal any diseases. Dialogue is just one struggle to find a common ground and shared responsibility. Despites some over-stated criticism on inter-faith, we need to extend dialogue which involves more people from the ground, the grass-root and ordinary people.

But, more importantly, we need to explore ways to move beyond political and theological dialogues. We need to develop cooperation as part of well-grounded dialog. It is cooperation that reflects and represents our common concern to heal the world. Together now, we face a serious climate change and environmental damages. We witness people who suffer of poverty, energy crisis, water crisis, hunger and other human calamities. It is our humanity duty to find ways for a more positive and constructive cooperation on the ground.

There are lesson learned from Indonesia. In the last five years, we face series of natural disasters and thousands people lost their live. Based on humanity reasons, people from different faith helped us

for relief and reconstruction. As the experience of Muhammadiyah, based on our common ground and shared responsibility. Muhammadiyah could develop partnership and cooperation with international and national religious organization. Three years ago, we set up Indonesian Humanitarian Forum consists of humanitarian organization from different faiths. It is also our Indonesian experience where leaders from different faith made a joint action for anti-corruption, promoting democracy and good-governance.

In October 2007, 138 Muslim leaders wrote an open letter *A Common World* which outlines the fact that Muslims and Christians around the world are bound by the twin “golden” commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving the neighbor. These principles of the Love of God and the neighbour emphasised in the open letter are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. I fully endorsed the document as an additional signatory because I believe that we indeed inherit a common world.

Therefore, I am not going to argue that we need to create common grounds for co-existence. In fact, I would like to re-emphasise the fact that such common grounds for Islam and Christian to live together in peace have long existed. Indeed, the importance of love occupies a central place in both the Quran and the Bible. As such, both the Quran and the Bible have long emphasised the very existence of common ground between Muslims and Christians.

However, let me explore three other grounds for co-existence.

First, *the Values of Humanity*.

- ➔ Obligation to help the oppressed
- ➔ Poverty as common enemy
- ➔ Against any exploitation of the people by the people
- ➔ Ensure peace and undertake peaceful settlement of dispute

Second, *universal values*

- ➔ Justice
- ➔ Respect for Human Rights
- ➔ Freedom of Religion
- ➔ Tolerance and respect for pluralism

Third, *a common inheritance, saving the future of the Earth* (environment)

- ➔ The need to combat climate change

