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Theological Values in Inter-religious Relation Verses : A Study on Tafsir Marah Labid

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Abstract

Building interreligious relations was often viewed merely from social perspectives. It actually contains theological values. This research attempts to analyze the theological values in the tolerance and interreligious relation verses of the Qur'an that are interpreted by Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani. This descriptive-analytical study employs thematic methods by Al-Farmawi. The collected data are then analyzed in terms of its theological aspect. Marah Al-Labid is chosen for it's written by an Indonesian scholar connecting classic and modern era. In addition, Marah Al-Labid is of Sufistic tafsir. Therefore, it is interesting to know how an Indonesian scholar viewed interreligious relation and its spiritual and theological values in the context of Indonesia. It can be concluded that having interreligious relation is lawful. Muslims are allowed to have social relation with Ahlul kitab or the people of books such as to get marry with them, to eat the meat of the animals they (Jews and Christians) slaughtered, and to have debate and discussion with them in the best way.

Keywords: *Interreligious Relation, Theology, Marah Labid*

Abstrak

Hubungan antar umat beragama seringkali dilihat dari perspektif sosial. Padahal, di dalamnya sebenarnya terdapat nilai-nilai teologis. Penelitian ini mencoba menganalisa nilai-nilai teologis dalam ayat-ayat hubungan antar umat beragama dalam tafsir Marah Labid yang ditulis oleh Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani. Penelitian deskriptif analitis ini menggunakan pendekatan tematis Al-Farmawi. Data yang terkumpul lalu dianalisa dari aspek teologis. Marah Labid dipilih karena kitab tersebut ditulis oleh mufassir Indonesia yang hidup dalam era yang menghubungkan masa klasik dan modern. Selain itu, Marah Labid adalah sebuah tafsir sufi. Oleh karena itu, menarik untuk mengkaji bagaimana seorang mufassir Indonesia yang hidup pada masa penjajahan Belanda melihat relasi antar umat beragama dan nilai-nilai sufistik yang terkandung di dalamnya dalam konteks ke-Indonesia-an. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa hubungan antarumat beragama adalah sesuatu yang diperbolehkan. Muslim dapat memiliki hubungan sosial dengan Ahli Kitab seperti pernikahan, memamakan daging hewan sembelihan, dan berdiskusi dengan cara yang terbaik. Di dalam hubungan ini, terdapat nilai-nilai ketakwaan,

Kata kunci: *Interreligious relation, theology, Marah Labid*

Introduction

It is undeniable that Indonesia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. The country with a 100 million population consists of hundreds of ethnicities. Indonesia also acknowledges six religions. The plural society lives together in harmony although conflicts have also their potential.

The plurality has its benefits and drawbacks. When plural society can live in harmony, it will become a great power of the nation. Varied culture and traditions can be assets of the country. On the other hand, plurality can also trigger conflicts. When people cannot accept diversities. Several conflicts in Indonesia are caused by intolerant action to others who have different beliefs. The recent example is the rejection of building a church in West Java.

Thus, religion in relation to society contains a centripetal aspect, religion as an integrator unifying diversity. On the other hand, it also contains centrifugal, namely religion as a conflict trigger. Religion as a set of beliefs is started from creating a new worldview in which the old conception and the institution of a religion may lose its underlying foundation of its existence.

Nevertheless, a religion is also universal. The universality of religion is pointed to a more or less homogenous society. Religion becomes a symbol of solidarity of certain groups. A disunity within a group will occur when there is rejection towards old worldview or “others” who are different from them (Ali, 1999).

Diverse religious life is not only indicated by the presence of many religions which have various traditions, but also indicated by the behavior of internal plurality of each religion. Internal plurality here means respecting different interpretations towards religious doctrines and text and those having different views or schisms. We need to underline that plurality in religion is a sensitive issue since it is related to absolute and ultimate theology.

There are several kinds of societal responses towards religious plurality. First, Society accepts “others” presence and lives with them in harmony. Second, society conducts socio-religious cooperation through activities which symbolically indicates and functionally supports the development of living harmonic religious life. Third, society finds the meeting point of the religions to overcome problems, challenges and sorrows of human beings (Ali, 1999).

In this paradigm, the authors are interested in the issues of religious moderation, including how is Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's understanding of the verses of inter-religious relations and its theological and spiritual values in his commentary (tafsir) book?

Method

This research employs a study of documentation by collecting various data and library documents related to the object of research. The data were obtained from various literatures. To make it easier to track various Quranic verses related to Religious Moderation, this research employs the keyword of the Relationship of Muslims with Non-Muslims. The author refers to the book Tafsir Marah Labid. In this study, the author cites the text of the Qur'an and its translation from various sources in the internet.

'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi in al-Bidayah fi al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i, until now there are at least four methods of interpretation that have developed in interpreting the verses

of the Qur'an, namely the analytical method, global study methods, comparative methods and thematic methods (Al-Farmawi, 1977).

The maudhu'i interpretation method is a method of interpretation that seeks to find answers in the Qur'an by collecting verses of the Qur'an that together discuss certain topics/titles and put them in order according to the time when they were revealed in accordance with the reasons for their revelation (*asbabun nuzul*), then they are explained with paying attention to their relationships with other verses. Lastly, the conclusion is drawn (Ichwan, 2005).

Result and Discussion

Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani and Tafsir Marah Labid

A Brief Biography of Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani

The real name of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani al Jawi is Nawawi bin Umar bin 'Arabi. He was born in the village of Tanara, Tirtayasa, Serang, Banten, in 1230H/1813AD. He died on Thursday 25 Shawwal 1314 H/1897 AD in Syi'ib Ali, Mecca at the age of 84 years (M.H.A. Ghafur, 2003).

Nawawi al-Bantani was the first son of a wedding officiant and an ulema' in Tanara. His mother's name was Jubaidah, a native of Tanara from his father's lineage. Nawawi al-Bantani is a descendant of Maulana Hasanuddin, who founded the Islamic kingdom of Banten obeying the orders of Hasanuddin's father, Shaykh Syarif Hidayatullah (Sunan Gunung Djati Cirebon). At the age of 15, Nawawi al-Bantani headed for Mecca (Al-Rahman, 1996). There he studied with Sayyid Ahmad Nahrawi, Sayyid Ahmad Dimiyathi, Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan (the Masyaykhs of the Masjid al-Haram) (Dewan Redaksi Ensiklopedi Islam, 1997).

He also studied with Muhammad Khathib al-Hanbali, a scholar who lived in Medina, then he continued his studies in Syria (now Syria) and Egypt. On the sidelines of studying, he is also busy teaching his students who later became great scholars (Sunanto, 2000) in the archipelago, such as KH. Khalil Bangkalaan Madura, KH. Asnawi Caringin, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang (founder of NU), Tubagus Bakri and

KH. Arsyad Towil, both from Banten (Muhammad, 2001). There were also students from Malaysia, such as KH. Daud (Dewan Redaksi Ensiklopedi Islam, 1997).

After thirty years in the Arab country, in 1833 he returned to Tanara, Banten with the permission of his teachers. He disseminated his knowledge to his parents' boarding school students. His activities were known by the Dutch colonials. So that the Dutch Colonial always supervised his religious activities without exception. His ability to mobilize the masses made the Dutch even more afraid.

In order to limit his influence in society, the Colonials felt the need to create a way that could hinder his relationship with the community. In the end, his preaching activities were stopped by the Dutch. These conditions made Nawawi al-Bantani feel limited in spreading religious teachings to his community. Even his willingness to eradicate ignorance and fear of the colonials was often faced by the strong resistance from the Colonials. It was felt by Nawawi al-Bantani that he did not feel comfortable staying for a long period in his homeland. After approximately three years in Banten, in 1855 to be exact, he returned back to Mecca to study (Anshari et al., 1989).

Even though he finally settled in the land of Mecca until his death, Nawawi al-Bantani was still concerned with the problems of his nation, through his students who came from the archipelago.

Regarding the scientific works of Shaykh Nawawi al Bantani, KH. Saefuddin Zuhri mentioned that he wrote more than a hundred books. These works generally discuss the science of jurisprudence, *ushuluddin*, and interpretation of the Qur'an (Zuhri, 1981). In fact, as stated by Martin (Bruinessen, 1999), some of Nawawi al-Bantani's works are quite popular and the majority are often studied by Muslims studying at Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. The works can be categorized into seven fields of knowledge as follows:

Shaykh Nawawi al Bantani wrote in the science of morals and sufism, *Nashaih al-'Ibad*, *al-Adzkar*, *al-Maraqi al-'Ubudiyah*, *Sulalim al-Fudhala*, *Mishbah al-Zhulam*; in hadith/prophetic traditions; *Al-Arba'in al-Nawawi*, *Tanqih al-Qaul*; in Islamic jurisprudence/fiqh *Nihayah al-Zain*, *Kasyifah al-Saja*, *al-Tsamar fi Riyadh al-Badi'ah*, *Sulam Munajat*, *'Uqud al-Lujain*, *al-Tausyih ibn Qasim*. In theology and *ushuluddin*, he

wrote *Tijan al-Darari, Qami' Thugyan, Fath al-Majid*. In tafsir, he wrote *Marah Labid fi Kasyfi Ma'na al-Quran al-Majid*.

Tafsir Marah Labid

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani is a prolific scholar with his works in various fields. The work of *Tafsir al Munir li Ma'alim al Tanzil al-Mufassiru 'an Wujud Mahasin al-Ta'wil* which is popular with *Marah Labid li Kasyfi Ma'na Qur'an al-Majid* is a work in the field of the Qur'an interpretation. It may become his magnum opus among his works.

The background of writing the work is not known including when or since when Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani started to write *Tafsir Marah Labid* or *Tafsir al Munir*. However, he began to write the commentary after some requests from the many noble friends of him to write a commentary on the Qur'an. This information is stated in the introduction of the tafsir before he explained the surah al-Fatihah (Nawawi, n.d.).

The request underlies the writing of *Tafsir Marah Labid* or *Tafsir Munir*. The word *Marah Labid* linguistically means "a sack or a place of happiness". Terminologically it means "a place of happiness for people who return to the way of Allah SWT" (Al Fayumi, n.d.). The naming doesn't seem to have any tendency, because the meaning of the name in the language given is like other interpretations' orientation.

Marah Labid is written in Arabic, not Malay like Abddurrauf Sinkel's (another Nusantara cleric) *Tafsir Turjuman al Mustafid*(al Fanshuri, 1981) which appeared earlier than *Marah Labid*. Even among the existing interpretations of Nusantara's works, *Marah Labid* is the only tafsir written in Arabic. The majority-not to say none- of the Qur'anic interpretations in the archipelago are written in the archipelago language, such as Javanese, Sundanese, Malay, and the Indonesian language(Ghofur & Fatkhiyati, 2023).

Concerning the quality of his interpretation, the author himself in the *Muqaddimah* stated that as a work of non-Middle Eastern scholars, *Tafsir Marah Labid* received approval from scholars residing in Mecca and Cairo (Egypt) to be printed or published in 1887 AD for the first time (Al-Rahman, 1996).

Muhammad 'Ali Iyazi categorizes Tafsir Marah Labid as a Sufi-style interpretation (Al-Farmawi, 1977) with the consideration that in his interpretation of every verse of the Qur'an, he always refers to the book al-Futuhah al-Ilahiyah by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. Among the features of his tafsir is that he mentioned the meanings of the surah along with its names. He also explained its contents in various aspects. For example, to begin the explanation of the surah al-Kafirun, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani explained another name for the surah, namely al-Mu'abadzah (Nawawi, n.d.)

Based on the above explanation, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (in Tafsir Marah Labid) tries to explain the Qur'an based on the order of verses concisely and clearly. It can be identified that Tafsir Marah Labid uses the ijmal method. Besides, the interpretation of the Qur'an is also based on a systematic sequence of verses according to the mushaf and reviewed the verses from various other aspects, such as *qira'at*, *asbab al-Nuzul* and so on. It can be also classified as tahlili method. Thus, it can be concluded temporarily that the method of interpretation of Marah Labid is a combination of tahlili bi al-Matsur and ijmal.

Inter-religious Relation Verses in Marah Labid

Consuming Meat of Animals Slaughtered by Non-Muslims

S. Al-Maidah Ayat 5

“Today, all good, pure foods have been made lawful for you. Similarly, the food of the People of the book (the meat of the animals slaughtered) is permissible for you and theirs is permissible for them. And permissible for you in marriage are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of those given the Scripture before you—as long as you pay them their dowries in wedlock, neither fornicating nor taking them as mistresses. and whoever rejects the faith, all their good deeds will be void in this life and in the Hereafter, they will be among the losers” (quran.com, n.d.)

Based on the above verse, Shaykh Nawawi gives an explanation that it is permissible to eat animals slaughtered by people of the book who still hold the teachings of the Torah and the Bible, when Muslim marriages are lawful with them, their slaughtered food becomes lawful to eat. If a Jew or a Christian slaughter an animal in the name of someone other than Allah, then the slaughter is not lawful as the Christian

slaughters in the name of the Messiah, as well as the slaughter of those who do not keep torah and bible like Suhuf Ibrahim.

Some scholars agreed that zoroastrians are like the people of the book who are obliged to pay *jizya* (tax). Ibn Musayyib added that, if a sick Muslim orders a zoroastrian to slaughter in the name of Allah, then the slaughter is lawful. Muslims are allowed to consume the meat the zoroastrian slaughtered. It is also permissible to feed the people of the book from the slaughter of Muslims. But Muslims are also not allowed to marry their women.

The majority of fiqh scholars, women who are legally married by Muslims are women who still hold the religious teachings of the Torah and the Bible before the revelation of the Qur'an. Meanwhile, according to Imam Shafi'i, those who believe in the Torah and Bible after the revelation of the Qur'an are not considered as the People of the Book. Meanwhile, according to the other three madhhabs (Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali) do not provide any details concerning the women of ahlul kitab. The three madhhabs even make it absolutely lawful to eat the slaughter of the People of the Book and marry their women even though they convert to the religion of the People of the Book after the revelation of the Qur'an.

The above-mentioned verse is related to the previous verse which deals with good and bad food. Good food is food that tastes delicious and is liked by *the ahl al-Muruah wa al-Akhlak*. This verse is closed with the command to fear Allah by observing the limitations of His law, and Allah's reckoning is very fast, nothing can weaken it.

The meat of animals slaughtered by the people of the Book, not the slaughter of the polytheists, is lawful for Muslims. Some say, it is lawful for Muslims to eat their slaughter when we slaughter in the name of Allah. The strongest opinion is, when slaughtering, the one who carries the slaughter must not mention a name other than Allah, then the slaughtered meat is not lawful for us to eat. But if we don't hear what they say, we are lawful to eat it. It was narrated by Ibn Jarir from Abi Darda' and Ibn Zaid that they were both asked about animals being slaughtered for the church. Therefore, both of them allowed us to eat them. Ibn Zaid said that "Allah has justified their slaughter without excluding anything." When asked if it was permissible to eat lambs slaughtered for the church called Jirjis, and they (askers) were rewarded for the

slaughter, Abu Darda' replied: 'O Lord, forgive me, they are people of the Book. Their food is lawful for us and our food is lawful for them. Then Darda' ordered the asker to eat it. The slaughter of the believers is lawful for the people of the Book. There is nothing wrong with you (asker), you sell your food to them. The slaughter of each Ahlul Kitab is permissible for both parties. In contrast to the matter of marriage, we can marry their women (ahlul Kitab), while men from Ahlul Kitab cannot marry believing or Muslim women (ash-Shiddieqy, 2000)

Having Discussion with Non-Muslims in the Best Ethics

S. Al-Ankabut Ayat 46

“Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, “we believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you”. Our God and your God is only One. And to Him, we fully submit”(quran.com, n.d.)

Based on the above verse, Shaykh Nawawi explains that arguing with Jews and Christians should be done properly without any humiliation. Muslims should not argue that their ancestors were misguided. They did not acknowledge the prophethood of the prophet Muhammad but they still believe in the revelation of the books and messengers of Allah before Muhammad. They also believe in the Day of Resurrection. For the polytheists who say that Allah has children and Allah is Lord of the three, then they must be debated loudly by explaining their ignorance of polytheism and evil and telling them we believe in what has been sent down to us, namely faith in Allah, His Book, His Messenger and our God and your God is one with no partner and we obey Him (Nawawi, n.d.).

Doing Good and Just to Non-Muslims

Al-Mumtahanah Ayat 8-9

“God only forbids you to make friends with those who fought against you on account of your faith and driven you out of your homes or helped others to do so. Any of you who turn towards them in friendship will truly be transgressors”

Allah does not forbid you to do good and do justice to those who do not fight you in religious matters and do not expel you from your hometown. Verily, Allah loves those who act justly.

Indeed, Allah only forbids you from making friends those who fight you in religious matters and expel you from your hometown and help (others) to expel you. Whoever takes them as friends, they are the wrongdoers.

Based on the above verse, Shaykh Nawawi explains the permissibility of doing good and being fair to people who do not fight Islam, this verse was revealed regarding Asma' bint Abu Bakr who was visited by her mother who was still an infidel and brought her a gift but Asma refused it so that this verse came down, then the Prophet ordered to Asma' to invite her mother to enter the house and respect her. And this verse also prohibits making friends with those who fight Islam and expel Muslims from their hometowns and help others to expel Muslims (Nawawi, n.d.)

Theological Values in Inter-religious Relation

Inter-religious engagement is an important aspect to build social harmony. However, in Islam, religious interactions have several limitations. Building interreligious relation does not merely involve social interaction, but it needs also to rethink the theological aspects.

According to Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani in his work *Marah Labid*, believers should not take non-believers as *awliya'* (friends). Befriending non-muslim or kafir is not allowed whether for individual or group friendship. Muslims are better befriending other muslims. There are three kinds of Muslims-Non-muslims relationship as follows (Nawawi, n.d.):

1. When a muslim accepets their infidelity, and befriends them due to their infidelity, it is unlawful. Accepting infidelity is infidel.
2. Good social relation for worldly needs is not forbidden.
3. When Muslims help non-muslims for the love of their ideology without believing in their theology, they are not considered infidel. The action is unsuggested because the help will path the way to accepting their believes.

The above explanation is related to theological aspects of friendship particularly related to a specific case namely the case of Abdullah ibn Ubay. Abdullah ibn Ubay is a hypocritical Muslims who befriends with non-Muslims. This verse limits the interpretation on Muslims' relation with non-muslims who are kind. Building social engagement is encouraged but Muslims should not accept or confirm their ideology.

The authors of *Ensiklopedi Islam* stated that Nawawi's gesture and thought on inter-religious relation was not so aggressive or reactionary or a frontal confrontation in facing of the Dutch colonial government, even though he was not cooperative in any form. In addition, according to the *Ensiklopedia Islam*, fostering and advocating social relations with non-colonizing infidels, because all humans are brothers.

It can be concluded that Nawawi al-Bantani is a scholar who holds principles and is firm on the teaching his religious beliefs. Bantani's thoughts and attitudes to non-muslims can be classified into two. First, social relation (*muamalah*) is encouraged. Muslims should befriend non-Muslims for the sake of humanity. Al Bantani is considered tolerant towards followers of other religions. He acknowledged the existence of human plurality.

Conclusion

Shaykh Nawawi Al Bantani's interpretation on the verses of Muslim and non-Muslim relations contains moderate attitude. This can be seen from his interpretation of the verses mentioned above. In the interpretation of the first verse, Shaykh Nawawi allows Muslims to eat the meat of animals slaughtered by the people of the book (Jews and Christians) without any difference between *ulama'*. Vice versa, Muslims can provide food or meat of slaughtered animals to the people of the book. Shaykh Nawawi also allows marriage of Muslims and people of the book who still hold the teachings of the Torah and the Bible. The second verse explains the order of God to debate or discuss with the people of the book using a good method, evidence, and wisdom. The third verse allows for associating with the unbelievers well as long as they do not fight and expel Muslims from their homes.

The data presented by the authors are still limited. The theme discussed is still general in the issues of social engagement between Muslims and non-Muslims. The authors recommend that this research can be expanded to a more detailed scope.

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