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Kalimatun Sawa' as The Basis of Religious Tolerance (Interpretation of Nurcholish Madjid's Thoughts Based on Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics)

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Abstract

This paper aims to understand Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts deeply on kalimatun sawa' as the foundation of religious tolerance. The study employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach with a qualitative research method, focusing on textual analysis of Madjid's works. The main issues examined include the interpretation theory in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Nurcholish Madjid's perspective on kalimatun sawa', and the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory in understanding kalimatun sawa'. The findings indicate that kalimatun sawa' serves as a universal ethical foundation for interfaith dialogue, emphasizing shared human values fostering religious tolerance in Indonesia. This study contributes to the academic discourse by offering a novel application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach in Islamic studies, providing a deeper interpretative framework for understanding religious pluralism.

Keywords: *Interpretation, Inclusive, Plurality, Common Platform, Monotheism*

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INTRODUCTION

The characteristics of the modern world are marked by a plurality of social, cultural, and religious discourse due to the globalization of information flows. One of the empirical phenomena that is inevitable is the plurality of religions and their respective people with a tendency of a truth claim, which makes the religious people very vulnerable to social conflicts in the name of religion. This issue has become a long debate among theologians and academics, one of whom is Ahmed (1992: 27) who views religious values important to understand others for the realization of tolerance. Sociologically, religious practices often

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show multiple faces, which are integration and disintegration. While Syamsuddin (1996: 4- 5) sees the double face as a tendency of religious ambivalence because the single truth claims of each religion are absolute until a rejectionist attitude toward the truth of other religions. Consequently, the problem becomes problematic and complicates the position of religion because religion is not isolated, but is practiced in space and time by the religious community.

To react to this problem, various responses emerged from various groups, such as Rahman (2001: 14) who sees the condition of religious plurality as something dynamic in order to establish awareness of *to be religious is to be interreligious* to develop inclusive and pluralist theology. Shihab (1999: 41) views inclusive theology as a fundamental need for religious people to be able to accept religious plurality. This is supported by the empirical facts of the history of Islam that tends to be inclusive by giving high appreciation to non- Muslims (Madjid, 1992: 102). Inclusive theology can be realized if religion is seen both internally and externally, like Hans Kung's thoughts. Externally, there are various religions with different paths, but they all head for the one truth which is salvation, and this is a relative dimension of a religion. While internally, it must be recognized that there is one religion with a single truth as an absolute dimension of a religion (Sunardi, 1994: 66-67). Some of the thoughts above can conceptually be the entrance of studies to find the common platform of religions or in the language of the Qur'an it is called *kalimatun sawa'* (Surah Ali Imran/3: 64).

Discussion about the common platform of religions has been done by many Islamic thinkers, including Nasr (1987: 92) with the idea of Islamic Traditionalism based on perennial philosophy. Whereas Husein (1994: 163-175) views the common platform of religion to be at the level of substance, that is the similarity of the belief in monotheism because all religions come from the same God. It is similar to the perspective of Schuon (1953: 115-124) that all religions teach the doctrine of monotheism. While the thought of Azad (1981: 153-160) is famous for the statement of *al-Din wabid wa al-Shari'at muhtalifat*. While the Indonesian intellectual who is very intensely echoing the urgency of the common platform of both theological and sociological religions is Nurcholish Madjid (1992: 425- 445), with his view that the essence of religions is "Islam", even though in terms of *ẓāhir*, it is called Jews and Christians. Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts become relevant for religious

life in Indonesia, especially because it leads to harmony and tolerance, as well as responding to social conflicts that are religiously patterned.

To understand deeply the meaning of *kalimatun sawa*, this discourse uses the Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics. Ricoeur's Hermeneutics (2012: 80) is an interpretation that places the text in an autonomous position, so that understanding is done through "de-contextualization" and "re-contextualization". The autonomy of the text in Ricoeur's view has three aspects: the intention of the author, the socio-cultural situation that creates the text, and for whom the text is intended (Supena, 2012: 149). In addition, Ricoeur's Hermeneutics (2012: 56) is dialectical and evaluative. It is dialectical because on the one hand, there is a reciprocal link between "understanding" and "explanation", while on the other hand, it is a dialogical moment between the text and the reader. It is evaluative because methodological distinction assumes the existence of interpretation subjectivity that requires certain procedures or methods to evaluate it (Sirry, 2011: 70). The procedure to evaluate interpretation subjectivity uses probability logic, not empirical verification logic (Ricoeur, 2012: 163; Ricoeur, 2011: 214-216). It indicates that differences in interpretation are always open to debate, dialogue, and synthesis. Even if there is a conflict of interpretation, support and arguments are needed to strengthen. Through Ricoeur's interpretation theory, it is expected to find the meaning of *kalimatun sawa* as the basis of religious tolerance—a relevant contribution in the renewal of Islamic thoughts in this country, especially to reduce social conflict in the name of religion. Thus, the awareness of religious community is sociologically expected to emerge to be more realistic in seeing empirical facts in a society with religious plurality as an inevitability.

This article aims to deeply understand the meaning of *kalimatun sawa* using Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics (2012: 80), which is an interpretation that places the text in an autonomous position including the intention of the writer, the socio-cultural situation that underlies the production of the text, and for whom the text was intended (Supena, 2012: 149). The process of understanding is dialectical and evaluative (Ricoeur, 2012: 56) through "decontextualization" and "recontextualization" because there is a reciprocal relationship between "understanding" and "explanation", and dialogical moments between the text and the reader. It is evaluative because methodological distinction assumes the existence of interpretation subjectivity that requires certain procedures or methods to evaluate it (Sirry,

2011: 70), which is by using probability logic, not empirical verification logic (Ricoeur, 2012: 163; Ricoeur, 2011: 214-216). As the implication, an interpretation is always open to debate, dialogue, and synthesis. Even if there is a conflict of interpretation, it needs support and corroborate arguments. Therefore, Ricoeur's Hermeneutics is relevant to be applied in Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts about *kalimatun sawa* the basis for religious tolerance. The discussion will be directed at three levels of analysis including semantic, reflexive, and existential. Through this interpretation, axiologically its contribution can be obtained for the renewal of Islamic thought in Indonesia, especially to reduce social conflicts in the name of religion. Thus, sociologically, it is expected that the awareness of religious communities will emerge to be more realistic in seeing empirical facts in a society with religious plurality as an inevitability.

DISCUSSION

1. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, according to Ricoeur (1981: 43; 2012: 61), is "the theory of the operation of understanding in their relations to the interpretation of text". The definition implies that the text is the object of interpretation which occupies a fundamental position in Hermeneutics. However, before interpreting or dismantling the hidden meaning contained in the text, the question that must first be answered is what is a text?

Text is any fixed discourse in written form. The scope of the text is also very broad, which are symbols and myths (Ricoeur, 2012: 62,171). Therefore, the main task of Hermeneutics is to understand the text in a broad sense, open the sheath of text to be understood, and systematize the reality behind language, symbols and myths in a reflective manner (Supena, 2012: 150 & 152). If there are various meanings in the text, then interpretation becomes an important and major need to be able to understand the text. In Ricoeur's view, interpretation is elaborating the meaning that is still hidden from the meaning that appears at the level of implicit meaning in the literary meaning. Interpretation arises when there is a diversity of meanings, and within it, the diversity is manifested (Wachid, 2006). An interpretation (Ricoeur, 2011: 216) is not only possible, but the possibility is also associated with other interpretations if there are several conflicting interpretations because the impossibility of all interpretations is the same. This is called the logic of probability in the hermeneutic process because it is always possible to approve or reject and find a mutual solution in interpretation to find a common platform.

Ricoeur puts the hermeneutic process as an indirect path as Husserl's thoughts. Therefore, methodology becomes an urgent need to find ontological meaning. However, the method used in this process is not single, it can use the methods of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, critical reflection and others. When confronted with the text, the ways of working of Hermeneutics will be able to capture the hidden intentions of the text itself, not the intentions that are tucked into the text from the author. In this interpretation process, Ricoeur places distance as a facility to understand the texts that enables readers to find new meanings (Hardiman, <http://salihara.org/community/2014/05/19>).

Ricoeur's interpretation principle (2012: 59) is to explain more is to understand better. The interpreter approaches the text with the intimacy of understanding, then takes distance from the text through methodical-historical explanation, to produce a comprehensive analytical understanding (Sirry, 2011: 69). Capturing the intention of the text is without releasing the distance between the text and the reader. This methodological distance is an important dimension of the hermeneutic process because the "methodical explanations" and "phenomenological understandings" can meet in productive dialogue to find text autonomy (Hardiman, <http://salihara.org/community/2014/05/19>).

The text according to Ricoeur (2012: 70-71), is autonomous and independent. The autonomy of the text has three aspects namely the intention of the writer, the socio-cultural situation that underlies the birth of the text, and for whom the text was intended. Therefore, the text always stands between objective structural explanations and subjective understanding of hermeneutics. Based on this dichotomy, texts can be treated as "decontextualization" and "recontextualization" (Supena, 2012: 149). Through the texts, readers understand that they are in a world full of new possibilities. The text also provides the potential for understanding and a place for keeping meaning, which can be opened and actualized through methodical-historical explanations at any time. In interpreting a text does not mean establishing an intersubjective relation between the subjectivity of the author and the subjectivity of the reader, but rather the relationship between the two discourses namely the text discourse and the interpretation discourse, and interpretation occurs when the "world of text" and "world of interpreters" are mixed into one (Bertens, 2001: 274) which lead to the achievement of the hermeneutic task of understanding the text.

The process of understanding the text according to Ricoeur is by combining *verstehen* (understanding) and *erklären* (explanation) into a dialectical model of text interpretation (Hardiman, <http://salihara.org/community/2014/05/19>). In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, there is no contradiction between *verstehen* and *erklären*, both need and complement each other. The basic difference between *verstehen* and *erklären* is: in *erklären*, it explains or opens ranks of propositions of meaning, whereas, in *verstehen*, it understands or comprehend a series of overall partial meanings in a synthetic effort (B. Thompson, 1984: 65-66). "Understanding" is the purpose of "explanation" and "clarification" is the method to "understand". Reading is interpreting, and interpreting is understanding (Sirry, 2011: 61). Ricoeur integrates "explanation" and "understanding" in an interpretation process, as seen in the initial moment of interpretation.

Ricoeur's interpretation (Ricoeur, 1976: 72; Ricoeur, 2011: 211) has three moments:

1). Guessing or assuming the meaning of the text, because the reader does not know the author's intention. This is the earliest process, it is still pre-reflective understanding. At this moment the text might present various meanings; 2). Seeking critical and methodical explanations about the initial meaning generated through pre-reflective understanding. The initial understanding can be validated, corrected, or deepened by considering the objective structure of the text. At this moment, it is seen that understanding must be obtained through a moment of methodical explanation, an argumentative-rational process; 3). Appropriation or the process of understanding oneself in front of the projected world of texts, and the culmination of the process of interpretation which a person becomes more understanding of themselves. At this moment, there is a dialogue between the reader and the text. Consequently, the process of understanding, explanation, and appropriation forms a kind of hermeneutic circle, which Ricoeur referred to as the hermeneutical arc. Hermeneutic interpretation introduces a series of new meanings before the text and allows for a variety of readings which sometimes even contradictory.

Ricoeur answered this possibility using structural analysis and phenomenological analysis which manifested in three steps of understanding: First, the Semantic Level. The most concrete semantic definition is a theory that connects the inner form (immanent) of meaning to the outer purpose (transcendent) of reference (Ricoeur, 2012: 57). The first process that cannot be ignored is the language problem. Language is a symbol system that

refers to all other elements such as signs, symbols, and text. The study of language structure is the main mode for ontological expression. So, the role of this semantic level is fundamental, on the one hand maintaining the relationship between hermeneutics and methods (epistemological), and on the other hand the relationship between hermeneutics and ontology (the existence of interpreters) (Supena, 2012: 158; Bertens, 2001: 273). In its application, Ricoeur proposes four categories of hermeneutics for understanding autonomous texts: objectivation through the structure, distantiation through writing, the world of texts, and appropriation (self-understanding). These four categories will lead to an ontological understanding.

Second, Reflective Level. The position of this level is in the philosophical plane. Hermeneutics is no longer seeks the hidden meaning behind the text (as it is done at the semantic level) but instead directs its attention to the objective meaning of a text, regardless of the subjective intention of the author or others. Interpreting a text does not create a relationship between the intersubjectivity of the author and the subjectivity of the reader, but the relationship between the two discourses including the text discourse and the interpretation discourse. In other words, applicatively through a process of alternating between text understanding and self-understanding. As a result, the world of readers underwent a transformation that Ricoeur referred to as transfiguration, where “the world of texts and interpreters” is mixed together (Supena, 2012: 163; Bertens, 2001: 275).

Third, the Existential Level. This is the most complex stage namely finding the nature of understanding (ontology of understanding) through the method of interpretation. The ontology of human understanding has roots in awareness of a reality which is higher than oneself, have a purpose (teleological), and unites the harmonious and orderly universal forces. This can be drawn at the tip of the end and external and at this last layer, people will penetrate the passage of phenomenology of religion which according to Ricoeur is the highest stage (eschatological). This stage can be achieved through interpretation so that a concrete ontology for hermeneutics is not an ontology of understanding but an ontology of interpretation. Thus, the third stage is the position of hermeneutics placed in the metaphysical area through methodological procedures (Supena, 2012: 165). Consequently, interpretation becomes an ongoing process, continue, and no one can complete it. The

interpretation theory of Ricoeur will be used to read Nurcholish Madjid's ideas about *Kalimatun Sawa'*.

2. Nurcholish Madjid's ideas regarding *Kalimatun Sawa'*

a. Intellectual biography

Nurcholish Madjid was born in Jombang, East Java on March 17, 1939. He died in Jakarta on August 29, 2005, at the age of 66 years. He grew up in a religious family environment in Mojoanyar Hamlet, Mojotengah Village, Bareng Sub-district, Jombang Regency, East Java. His father was KH Abdul Madjid, known as a supporter of the Masyumi; while his mother's name was Fatonah, the daughter of Kiai Abdullah Sadjad from Kediri.

After studying in various Islamic boarding school (pesantren), including Darul Ulum Rejoso Islamic boarding school in Jombang and Gontor Islamic boarding school in Ponorogo, Nurcholish Madjid continued his studies at the Faculty of Islamic Literature and Culture, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in 1961-1968, and being active in the Muslim Students' Association (HMI)—when he became an HMI activist—he issued the idea of secularization and pluralism which caused controversy and received a lot of attention from various groups of society. After that, Nurcholish Madjid continued his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago, United States (1978-1984), with a dissertation on philosophy and the kalam of Ibn Taymiyyah.

Nurcholish Madjid, is an Islamic philosopher, scholar and cultural observer in Indonesia. He was also a researcher at the Jakarta Economic and Social Research Institute (LEKNAS-LIPI) in 1978-1984 and was also a senior researcher at the Jakarta Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in 1984-2005. In 1985-2005, he became Professor of the Postgraduate Faculty of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, and as the Rector of Paramadina University from 1998 until his death in 2005. As an Islamic philosopher, he has produced many works in the form of essays and articles published in various daily news, magazines or journals, and papers submitted in scientific forums. His works have been published in the form of books with various titles.

b. Kalimatus Sawa'

Kalimatus sawa' is the terminology of the Qur'an contained in Surah Ali Imran, verse 64:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ٦٤

Meaning:

Say: "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah." But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]."

Kalimatus sawa' according to Madjid (1995: 75-76) is the common platform of each religion. The verse is a normative foundation that is used as an entry point for the study of pluralism towards pluralistic awareness of the realization of tolerance among religious communities. The basis of Nurcholish Madjid's view on kalimatus sawa' is the unity of humanity and prophetic unity that departs from the concept of monotheism or Islamic monotheism.

First, the unity of humanity. In this perspective, all humans are born with a primordial agreement with God. The agreement is in the spiritual realm, which is a recognition of the One God as the center of life orientation (QS. Al-A'raf/7: 172). The implication is that humans have a basic human nature, which is a tendency in nature (fitrah) always to worship God. Even so, humans do not always follow their original purity and have the potential to deviate from holiness by taking a wrongdoing way due to the influence of the surrounding socio-cultural environment. Therefore, according to Madjid (1993: 182), humans need guidance through the revelations brought by the prophets, so that their lives remain within the instructions outlined by God. In that sense, nature contains two dimensions, which are the dimension of instinctive human nature that tends toward holiness and the dimension of human tendency to receive God's revelation through His prophets. In short, it can be said that the component of nature contains two abilities, which are the human potential to worship God and the human ability to receive God's revelation. It is this potential of nature that makes humans called hanif, and its manifestation is worshiping Islam (surrender to God)—as a natural condition and an essential human need (Madjid, 1992: 3).

Second, the prophetic unity. Prophets sent by God to mankind carry guidance in the form of scriptures which are a collection of God's message. According to Madjid (1992: 495), there is a similarity between the messages of God both carried by the Prophet Muhammad saw and the prophets before him, which is the message to be always cautious. The similarity of the message in the terminology of the Qur'an is called *washiyyah*, which is monotheism as the core teachings of all the prophets and messengers of Allah (Surah Al-Anbiya'/21: 25). Monotheism does not merely mean believe, but truly believes in Allah SWT with all its implications, including how to behave to Him and to others besides Him (Rahman, 1993: 8). Therefore, the religions brought by the messengers of God are true religions, there is a unity of messages or teachings within them and they are al-Islam (teach surrender to God) (Surah Al-Syura/42: 13). Consequently, the meaning of Islam according to Madjid (1995: xii), is not limited to the name of the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad saw, but also applies to all places and times both past, present, and future. Thus, the truth of Islam can be found in various socio-cultural patterns. Therefore, it is very unlikely to create a single society by denying the plurality that exists. This is what supports the fact that the prophets and apostles did not carry the same *syir'ah* and *minhaj* (Madjid, 1995: 530-531).

Islam—as a “way”, which teaches resignation to God can be understood as the spirit or the core spirit of the Islamic religion. The difference between various religions lies only in the *syir'ah* and *minhaj* in taking the path (Madjid, 1997: 48). Departing from this premise, Madjid concluded that although in all religions there are similarities in God's message, the socio-cultural manifestations vary, so that they appear empirically in a pluralist form. However, this phenomenon should not be seen as a hindrance of efforts to find common platform among all religions—in line with the spirit of the Qur'an to invite Ahl Al-Kitab towards the *kalimatun sawa'*, which is the teachings of monotheism.

c. Ricoeur's Interpretation of Kalimatun Sawa'

Semantic Level

Semantically, the term *kalimatun sawa'* comes from Arabic as contained in the Surah Ali Imran/3: 64. It literally means the same word or agreement. In the context of pluralism, it can be interpreted simply as a common platform. However, to understand the meaning of *kalimatun sawa'* which consists of two words, *kalimatun* and *sawa'* is not easy.

If the word *kalimat* can be easily understood, this is not the case with *sawa* which has several meanings, including: something similar or identical; the middle or midpoint position of a state (or object); and justice or equal (Manzur, 1883: 408-412).

Based on some interpretations of theologian according to Rowi (2003: 12), there is an agreement related to the understanding of *kalimatun sawa* which is an equivalent or fair sentence, its position is halfway between the two parties, and there is no partiality for either of them. The parties in question are Ahl al-Kitab (Jews and Christians). While in the interpretation of Shihab (2002: 140-141), there are several aspects in the verse: 1). Prophet Muhammad's invitation to the Ahl al-Kitab; 2). The parties involved are equal; there is no higher or lower position; 3). Aiming to reach heights, which is a straight and fair provision; 4). Teaching brought by all the prophets and messengers of God; 5). Teaching that is not disputed, that is submission and total obedience to Allah without the slightest infidelity to God (monotheism); 6). The characteristic of a Muslim is surrender to Allah as taught by Prophet Ibrahim as. Based on these aspects, it can be understood that in *kalimatun sawa* there is a joint commitment among all parties involved (without being co-opted with one another and their position is equal), to return to the basic teachings brought by all the prophets and apostles who inherited the millah of the Prophet Ibrahim as, which is surrender to Allah, do not worship other than Allah and do not be unfaithful to Allah, and do not appoint God but Allah.

Whereas in the context of religious pluralism, *kalimatun sawa* is the invitation of the Prophet Muhammad to the Ahl al-Kitab which is basically a call for liberation of false beliefs and focusing on true *aqeedah*, which is purification of belief in God (monotheism). *Aqeedah* has been taught by prophets and apostles in the previous scriptures. Therefore, the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad saw are essentially not new teachings, but a form of remembrance of the teachings of the previous prophets and apostles that are monotheistic.

The invitation or the call of the Prophet Muhammad was a call to do justice. The word justice, according to Harun Nasution as quoted by Rahman (2001: 288), means the state of one's soul that causes him to be straight. It also contains the notion of determining the law properly and fairly, as well as maintaining what is right and valid. To facilitate understanding of the word justice, it can be contrasted with wrongdoing as a binary

opposition. If justice means the fulfillment of the rights of others, wrongdoing means abuse or actions that result in harm to others. The idea of justice in this context is an equal position among all religious communities, does not benefit one party and does not co-opt each other and is not biased to achieve the common platform of religions which is indeed the initial belief of all parties. Thus, the meaning of the word justice cannot be separated from the concept of monotheism.

The search for the semantic meaning above brings ontological consequences that *kalimatun sawa* is an effort to build relationships among all religious communities in a multicultural society, through an ongoing dialogical process to find common platform between differences of religious traditions according to their respective historical settings and experiences. In the context of the thought of Nurcholish Madjid, the common platform is rooted in the primordality of human nature that tends toward holiness, and *fitrah munazzalah* which is the ability of humans to accept God's message revealed through His prophets and apostles—which is the teachings of monotheism. Because in essence, religion is a formulation of human longing and spiritual thirst for God in the course of the history of his life. Whereas axiologically, *kalimatun sawa* can be used as a means of self-transformation, fostering spirit and forming thought patterns and dialogical attitudes for the sake of creating peace in the lives of human beings both individually and communally.

Reflexive Level

Reflexively, Madjid's thoughts about *kalimatun sawa* are from the teachings of monotheism. In the teachings of monotheism, there is an eternal law that is universal in which all humanity is one and created by the will of the One (God the Creator of Nature) (Boisard, 1982: 184). In fact, all of God's creations are essentially one entity. The implication is that all people of all nationalities and languages are brothers because they are both creatures of God. Awareness of the sense of brotherhood among all human beings shows the externalization of their faith in the same dimension of humanity—despite the differences in religion between them.

Monotheism in the context of the common platform of religions is a basic principle of teachings revealed to the prophets and apostles of God for all mankind. All revelations codified in the scriptures contain fundamentally the same messages that manifest the teachings of monotheism and the obligation of humans to submit to and obey Him. Thus,

two very important concepts in Islamic theology are monotheism and piety which have implications for submission to Him. The attitude of resignation is literally can be seen in His message to the prophet Nuh as (Surah Yunus/10: 72), the prophet Ibrahim as (Surah Al-Baqarah/2: 131), descendants of the prophet Ya‘qub as (Surah Al -Baqarah / 2: 132), the prophet Musa (Surah Almaidah / 5: 44), and the prophet Isa (Surah Almaidah/5: 111). All of these verses show a parallel between the attitude of monotheism (not worshipping other than Allah) with al-Islam (in the generic sense meaning surrender)—before Islam became the name of the religion carried by the prophet Muhammad. Thus, all true religions are al-Islam, because they teach an attitude of surrender to God, and this is what is called prophetic unity according to Madjid (1992: 185).

Madjid’s thoughts above can be interpreted that the main problem lies not in the literal word of Islam, but the meaning of the word Islam. Because of the impossibility of the literal use of the word Islam by all prophets and apostles in various places and times, as the meaning is expressed in different languages. Such understanding has implications for the truth of Islam which can be found in every nation and in all times, which means it applies universally to all messengers of Allah to all humanity. Although the universality of truth appears in different outward forms.

Historical facts that support this universal truth are rooted in the Abrahamic religious tradition. The importance of the position of the prophet Ibrahim as in the Islamic faith system has implications for the prophet Ibrahim to be called as “Father of the Prophets” and “Father of the Faith” in three religious traditions, which are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Madjid, 1998: xvi). The apostles mentioned in the Qur‘an are the figures of the Torah and the Gospel (the Old and New Testaments), in which all of them came from the Semites in the Middle East. Most of them are descendants of the prophet Ya‘kub as called Bani Israel which are divided into twelve tribes (Surah Al-A‘raf/7: 160) which is in accordance to the number of sons of the prophet Ya‘kub as. The twelve tribes were enslaved by the Egyptian pharaohs for hundreds of years, and later became the people of the Prophet Musa as and were set free by him. The Prophet Ya‘qub as is the son of the Prophet Ishaq as, and the Prophet Ishaq as is the son of the Prophet Ibrahim as from his wife named Sarah. While from Hajar, the Prophet Ibrahim as had the son of the Prophet

Ismail as from whom Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born, the last of the prophets and apostles.

If a straight line is drawn from this historical fact, then Islam is the religion of millah of Ibrahim, which is said in the Qurʾan that Prophet Ibrahim is not a Jew nor a Christian, but a hanif and surrendered to Allah (Muslim); he is not one of those who is unfaithful to Allah (Surah Al-Maidah/3: 67). That statement in the Qurʾan according to Watt (1996: 19) shows that Jews and Christians are the inheritors of the religion of Prophet Ibrahim as, and this proves that there is true knowledge about Allah from Judaism and Christianity. The implication of this reflection can be said that there has been an interpretation of *kalimatun sawaʿ*, which is the similarity of the recognition as a legitimate heir to the faith of Prophet Ibrahim (who essentially teaches monotheism).

Existential Level

Phenomenologically, a pluralistic society is not only characteristic of modern society. In the Islamic religious historicity of Muhammad's prophetic era, religious plurality was formed sociologically, because Islam chronologically emerged after a number of pre-existing religions. Historical facts of Islamic civilization in the past display an inclusive style and respect for non-Muslims (Madjid, 1992: 102). The inclusiveness of Islam can be interpreted that Islam is an open religion that accommodates various differences. It is implicit that Islam rejects absolutism and in itself is not exclusive.

This inclusive attitude is rooted in the teachings of the Qurʾan about religious plurality, which is respecting the rights of others to believe in a religion and there is no compulsion in religion. Thus, Islam gives freedom for all religions to live. Because in global life, Muslims cannot isolate themselves, considering factually in this world there are indeed various religions. However, in the perspective of the common platform of religions, the diversity is only an external appearance (exoteric), because in esoterically there is a unity of the divine message (which is monotheism). However, that does not mean that all religions are considered equal. Therefore, within certain limits, the differences and uniqueness of each religion must be respected.

Different disclosures from the oneness of God's message according to Nasr are called Primordial Islam which in historical contexts comes in various forms such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and others. However, various forms still originate and lead to

Primordial Islam (Tanja, 1992: 73). This is the common platform of religions which is primordial religion or in Madjid's term, it is called hanif. Primordial religion is the path to the quality of primordial humanity—a spiritual human figure in which self-perfection is reflected by its sacred nature (symbolizing the potential of nature in the primordial agreement). Meanwhile, the nature of religion is a message of remembrance of the primordial nature of self (Schuon, 1953: 9). The path to primordialism is found in every religion.

Sociologically, one's religious socialization will produce a self-image as "Muslims" or "Christians", and so on. But, this self-identification is basically exoteric and only in the form of Islamic or Christian diversity. But, the true self is totally unaffected by attributes such as: ethnicity, religion, race, and class, because the authenticity of the self in the form of the spirit transcends the exoteric physical self. Because religious identity is only as a role carried out by humans in life in this world.

The issue of the common platform of religions can also be interpreted with absolute and relative perspectives. Everything in this world including all religions is relative, because the absolute is only the transcendent Divine. In this perspective, religion can be seen in two perspectives which are from the divine side as something that originates and aims of all beings, and from the point of view of humanity as the path to God. These two perspectives carry the implication that religion is esoterically united with universal policy and ultimately every religion has the same view of absolute reality as the origin and destination of all beings. This is where the common platform of these religions occurs, which is located in the supernatural or inward (esoteric) space, overcoming religious manifestations that tend to be ritualistic and formalistic. If this understanding is shared by all religious people, the claims of truth will be far replaced by an attitude of tolerance towards differences.

All perspectives used to interpret *kalimatun sawa* lead to the existence of internal relativism of religion, but that does not mean eliminating all religious truths embraced by someone. Because the true meeting desired in various religions is the religious attitude of *al-hanifiyyat al-samhah* (the spirit of seeking truth that is tolerant, without fanaticism, and does not disturb the soul), a way to approach transcendental truth which is none other than God. This is the essence of religion (*al-din*) which means attachment to God (Madjid,

1992: 148), and this type of diversity becomes the common platform of religions, which is supernatural and on an esoteric level.

The search for common platform of these religions is a process that is still ongoing in all religious communities including Islam. To create harmony among religious communities, interacting between religious communities must prioritize similar aspects and emphasize differences that can become potential conflicts. However, that does not mean justifying the faith of other religious communities, because the basic component in the common platform is the teachings of monotheism. Its actualization can form the social awareness of opening good relations through inclusive attitudes as well as positive tolerance for the creation of a new color for the freshness of faith in the modern era with plurality as its trademark.

d. The Contribution of Kalimatun Sawa' Interpretation for Religious Plurality in Indonesia

Indonesia has cultural diversity (religion, race, language, and culture) or what is commonly referred to as a multicultural society. There are three terms to describe a society with this diversity, including plurality, diversity, and multiculturalism. Even though the three of them do not have the same meaning, they all refer to the "multiplicity". Plurality implies more than one (many) things; diversity shows that the existence of more than one is diverse, heterogeneous, and even cannot be equated. While multiculturalism is not the same as ethnic diversity or ethnic culture which characterizes a multicultural society because it emphasizes cultural diversity in equality (Suparlan, 2002). Therefore, if plurality only represents multiplicity (something more than one), then multiculturalism emphasizes that there are similarities in all differences, and this has implications for an individual's attitudes in the public space. The consequence is a willingness to accept other groups in the same manner as a whole, despite the differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, language, or religion.

In fact, these conditions are very contextual to the current realities of modern society with basic values in global culture, such as equality, justice, openness, and recognition of differences. However, these values are historically not only characteristic of modern society. Because of to the historicity of Islamic diversity in the prophetic era of Muhammad saw, pluralistic society has been formed as it appears chronologically that Islam emerged

after some pre-existing religions. The empirical fact in the history of Islamic civilization shows that Islam is inclusive and greatly respects non-Muslims as the teachings of the Qurʾān on religious plurality—to this day, there is still a diversity of religions in this world. Although there are claims that the truth of religion is in Islam (QS Ali Imran/3: 13), the Qurʾān also states that there is a right of other people to worship a religion, and religion cannot be forced on others (QS al-Baqarah/2: 256). This attitude is the fundamental principle in the glory days of Islam.

The actualization in modern times will be able to inspire more conducive tolerance and new wisdom to social life among adherences of religions and create an inclusive attitude. This inclusive attitude causes Muslims to be able to adapt to all situations and conditions—which in terms of Fiqh is *al-Islam Shalih Li Kulli Zaman wa Makan*. This new wisdom can also give the meaning that differences between religious communities in human life are mercy to be grateful for. This is because the Qurʾān has theologically explained that humans are made of peoples and tribes. Textually, differences in nationality and ethnicity are even one of the factors that allow humans to interact dynamically—that you may know one another (QS. Al-Hujurat/49: 13). Thus, Islam gives a high appreciation of differences between human beings, in line with the spirit of the Qurʾān so that external phenomena do not hinder efforts to reach a common platform (*kalimatun sawaʾ*) between all of them (Surah Ali Imran/3: 64). This is because it is impossible for Muslims to isolate themselves from the social world which in reality there are ethnic and religious differences.

If this perspective is applied to Islamic life in modern times, an inclusive religious attitude will emerge, and it will be able to provide a freshness of faith for religious communities, particularly for the Indonesian people with the ideals of the state of Pancasila, so that it can be implemented to the welfare of the entire people without seeing differences in religion, race, language, and culture. In accordance with the matter, the spirit of the motto of Indonesia is “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” which means that Indonesia is one of the nations in the world consisting of various ethnicities and races, which have different cultures, languages, and religions but within the unity of Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Kalimatun sawa' is an effort to build relationships between religious communities in a multicultural society through a continuous dialogical process to find a common platform among various religious traditions. In Nurcholish Madjid's thought, this common platform is contextually rooted in the primordial nature of humans, having a tendency toward holiness and the ability of accepting God's message revealed through His prophets and messengers—namely, the teachings of monotheism. Historical facts show that the origins of Islam is inseparable from millah Ibrahim, where Prophet Ibrahim is referred to in the Qur'an as *hanif* and a Muslim (one who surrenders to God) and does not associate partners with Him. The implication is that there is a shared recognition in *kalimatun sawa'* as the legitimate inheritance of Prophet Ibrahim's faith, essentially teaching monotheism.

This study contributes mainly to offering a new perspective on understanding *kalimatun sawa'* as a theological principle that can serve as a foundation for building interfaith harmony. Moreover, the historical and theological approaches used in this study provide deeper insights into how Islam, through Madjid's thought, offers a concept of inclusivity in religious dialogue. This study also demonstrates that the search for a common platform among religions is a continuous process involving all religious communities, including Islam, to create harmony amidst diversity.

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, it focuses more on theoretical analysis and has not yet empirically explored how the concept of *kalimatun sawa'* is practiced in today's multicultural society. Secondly, the study is limited to Madjid's perspective, making it necessary to explore further the thoughts of other scholars or intellectuals also discussing similar themes.

As a recommendation for future research, it is suggested to explore the implementation of *kalimatun sawa'* in socio-political contexts, both in interfaith relations in Indonesia and at the global level. Additionally, a comparative study with other religious traditions that have similar concepts could further enrich the understanding of how the common platform principle can be practically realized in fostering tolerance and world peace.

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