Religious Pluralism According to K.H. Abun Bunyamin in Tafsir Al-Ma'arif

Abstract

The pluralism of religion in Indonesia has always been a significant topic of debate, given the diversity of this country, consisting of various ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Among the Islamic community, discussions regarding religious pluralism often become heated, with various arguments and evidence presented. One of the viewpoints that addresses religious pluralism is that of K.H. Abun Bunyamin, a prominent Islamic figure in the West Java region, as articulated in his book, Tafsir Al-Ma'arif. This research aims to understand Abun Bunyamin's perspective on religious pluralism in his work. The research method employed is a descriptive-analytical approach, involving problem description, in-depth analysis, and meticulous presentation of research findings. Data sources used include document analysis of Abun Bunyamin's writings and direct interviews with him. The research findings indicate that Abun Bunyamin vehemently rejects the idea of religious pluralism.

His perspective is grounded in the interpretation of Surah Ali Imran, verse 85, in which he believes that religious pluralism is not only about recognizing the diversity of religions but also supporting the existence and diversity of these religions. Moreover, he opposes the view of proponents of religious pluralism who claim that all religions are true as long as they submit to God. Abun Bunyamin's perspective on religious pluralism is also influenced by his experiences and his position as the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Purwakarta Regency, as well as being a kiai who teaches the general public. This has made him more focused on strengthening faith and distancing himself from hatred towards individuals with different beliefs. Thus, this perspective reflects an effort to promote tolerance and harmony among religions in the diverse context of Indonesia.

Keywords: Pluralism, Religion, Interpretation

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Abstrak


Kata kunci: Pluralisme, Agama, Interpretasi

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a diverse country with various ethnicities, races, religions, and social groups (Rasyid, Lubis, Hutagalung, & Lubis, 2022). The Central Bureau of Statistics recorded that the Indonesian Population Census in 2010 indicated the presence of 1.331 ethnic categories (Statistik, 2015), In addition, Indonesia is also home to various belief systems. The Directorate for Belief in One Almighty God and Indigenous Communities records the existence of 176 belief organizations in One Almighty God that have been registered after undergoing the verification, validation process, and adherence to the teachings of these belief organizations.

Religious pluralism views all religions as equal to other religions and to the plurality of religions an idea and method The views of all religions are the same (Khaerurrozikin, 2015). Opportunities for Religious Pluralism for the Integrity of the Nation That is, if treated properly, it will have an impact on the health of relationships...
between religious people. Thus, Indonesia as a plural country will become a model State in maintaining harmony (Lestari, 2020).

If the Directorate for Belief in One Almighty God and Indigenous Communities only records organizations that have registered and undergone the verification and validation stages, the number of belief organizations is possible to be greater than the mentioned figure. Nevertheless, fundamentally, the government guarantees religious freedom based on the UUD 1945 Pasal 28E ayat (1) dan (2):

“Setiap orang bebas memeluk agama dan beribadat menurut agamanya, memilih pendidikan dan pengajaran, memilih pekerjaan, memilih kewarganegaraan, memilih tempat tinggal di wilayah negara dan meninggalkannya, serta berhak kembali.”

“Setiap orang berhak atas kebebasan meyakini kepercayaan, menyatakan pikiran dan sikap, sesuai dengan hati nuraninya.” (Www.Hukumonline.Com, 1945)

The freedom of religion and belief is also regulated in the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 39 Tahun 1999 Tentanghak Asasi Manusia), pasal 22:

“Setiap orang bebas memeluk agamanya masing-masing dan beribadat menurut agamanya dan kepercayaannya itu”

“Negara menjamin kemerdekaan setiap orang memeluk agamanya masing-masing dan untuk beribadat menurut agamanya dan kepercayaannya itu.” (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 39 Tahun 1999, 1999)

The 1945 Constitution Article 28E paragraph (1) and (2), as well as Republic of Indonesia Law Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights Article 22, emphasize the importance of religious freedom and belief. On the other hand, the Quran has already recognized the existence of religions by mentioning Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and others. It also guarantees the freedom to embrace one’s believed religion without any form of coercion. One of the steps taken by the government in this regard is the establishment of the Forum for Religious Harmony (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama or FKUB). Through FKUB, Indonesia strives to achieve harmony among religious communities in accordance with the principles of religious freedom recognized by the law.

The level of religious tolerance held by individuals or religious groups can be measured by their awareness of belief differences and diversity within society. In this context, a person’s humanity and social concern are often reflected in the extent to which they acknowledge and appreciate the pluralism and complexity in their daily lives. Religious tolerance means that a person sticks to a belief that is believed to be true, and views the beliefs of others right, so that in him there is a truth that he.
believes in according to his own conscience that is not obtained by coercion of others or obtained from the gifts of others (Casram, 2016).

Slogans like "all religions are true" have emerged as a form of tolerance, and beyond that, this expression is also a recognition of religious diversity, even falling under the category of equating religions. Such an attitude is then commonly known as religious pluralism, although it has varying tendencies in its presentation, leading to both support and opposition.

Supporters of religious pluralism, such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Syafii Ma’arif, argue that religious pluralism is a necessity in the midst of Indonesia’s diverse conditions. (Nasir, 2022). The discussion on religious pluralism has been extensively explored by researchers, including Ahmad Zaiyadi, who explains the Comparative Interpretation of Religious Pluralism in the Quran. He presents interpretations of verses from Surah Al-Baqarah verse 62, Al-Hajj verse 17, and Al-Maidah verse 69. He mentions that in the context of religious pluralism, groups supporting this view will seek legitimacy for their beliefs in the Quran, and they will undoubtedly find a basis for legitimacy. Similarly, groups opposing religious pluralism will search for evidence in the Quran, regardless of whether it is forced or not. Therefore, each group has arguments, but as researchers, it is important to evaluate the strength of arguments from each group and consider the benefits that can be derived from both perspectives.

On the other hand, the thinking of K.H. Abun Bunyamin in his Tafsir Al-Ma’arif is clear in rejecting the idea of religious pluralism. In fact, in Tafsir Al-Ma’arif, he uses the phrase "The Essence of Rejecting Pluralism" as the title of his writing, indicating a firm stance taken by K.H. Abun Bunyamin. In this regard, the author will present K.H. Abun Bunyamin’s ideas regarding religious pluralism.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Definition of Religious Pluralism

According to Suriawan, religious pluralism is a concept with a very broad meaning. This concept is closely related to the acceptance of different religions and can be used in various diverse ways. Religious pluralism signifies an open and tolerant attitude towards the diversity of religious beliefs, allowing space for various religious traditions to coexist harmoniously. (Suriawan Suriawan, 2023).

Suriawan’s definition of religious pluralism as an open and tolerant attitude is not a serious issue to be debated because such an attitude should indeed be practiced in the interactions between religious communities. The issue of religious
pluralism becomes a highly interesting topic when it is associated with exclusivism and inclusivism. (Najah dan Hakam Al-Ma’mun, 2023).

John Hick argues that exclusivism and inclusivism have fundamental flaws in understanding religions. Hick opposes exclusivism because he believes that this view oversimplifies the truth of religion into the exclusive domain of one religion, while he also rejects inclusivism because he feels that it fails to acknowledge the fundamental differences among religions.

Hick offers a middle path to this issue with religious pluralism, which asserts that a religion should be considered to have an equal level of truth as other religions. This understanding of truth is not about the doctrines or teachings found in each religion but is more related to the spiritual or experiential aspects that can be found within each religion. Hick’s approach to religious pluralism is rooted in the concept of the existence of God, which cannot be comprehended rationally or logically by humans. (Mutaqin et al., 2022).

Hick’s ideas are in stark contrast to the Fatwa (Religious Edict) issued by the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majlis Ulama Indonesia or MUI), which views religious pluralism as a perspective that teaches that all religions have equal value, and thus, the truth within each religion is relative. Therefore, individuals adhering to a particular religion should not declare that their religion is the only correct one while considering other religions as incorrect. Religious pluralism also suggests that all followers of religions will together enter heaven and live harmoniously. (Agama, 2005).

The 2005 Fatwa (Religious Edict) issued by MUI, which explicitly prohibited religious pluralism, appears to have been somewhat hasty as it only considered one perspective of pluralism, ultimately falling into the realms of exclusivism and inclusivism. MUI did not take into account the pluralism advocated by Nurcholis Madjid, which is an awareness of the fact of religious diversity that should be respected in life. (Madjid, 1998).

Therefore, according to Alwi Shihab, as quoted by Faza Ainun Najah and Hakam Al-Ma’mun, there are four perspectives that can be used to understand the concept of pluralism. First, pluralism is not just about describing the existing diversity but also about actively engaging in the dynamics of that diversity. Second, it is important to distinguish between pluralism and cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism focuses on accommodating differences of race or nationality living together in one place without deep social interaction, pluralism prioritizes active interaction. Third, the concept of pluralism must be distinguished from relativism, where relativism
denies the existence of absolute truth in any religion, whereas in the view of pluralism, all religions have an equal position. Fourth, religious pluralism also differs from syncretism, which combines elements from several different religions to create a unified whole. (Najah dan Hakam Al-Ma et al., 2023).

2. Biography of K.H. Abun Bunyamin

K.H. Abun Bunyamin, born on September 10, 1955, in Sumedang, had an extraordinary life journey. His initial education was acquired from his parents, K.H. Muhammad Mukhtar and Hj. Juariyah, where he studied the Quran and various Islamic texts such as Sulam al-Taufiq, Safinah al-Naja, Matn Bina, Tijan, and Jurumiyah. Subsequently, in 1968, Abun began his education at Hidayatul Muta’alimin Islamic Boarding School in Majalengka under the guidance of K.H. Abdurrahman and K.H. Abdul Wahab.

Furthering his education, in 1974, Abun Bunyamin continued his studies in Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, under the mentorship of K.H. Ilyas Ruhyat for four years. Under K.H. Ilyas Ruhyat’s guidance, he deepened his understanding of religion through various Islamic texts such as Jam’ul Jawami’, Mubhni Labib, Minhatul Mughits, Uqudul Juman, Fathul Wahab, Al-Luma’, and Bulughul Maram, as well as participating in education at various other Islamic boarding schools like Miftahul Huda Manonjaya, Sukamiskin Islamic Boarding School, Riyadul Alfiyah Islamic Boarding School in Garut, Al-Falah Bandung, and others.

Abun Bunyamin also pursued formal education, starting at the Faculty of Tarbiyah at the Cipasung Institute of Islamic Sciences and successfully completing his undergraduate-level exams. He continued his studies at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Sunan Gunung Djati in Bandung, majoring in Islamic Religious Education within the Faculty of Tarbiyah. His educational zeal did not stop there, as Abun Bunyamin pursued a master’s degree at IIQ Jakarta and graduated in 2005. Subsequently, he embarked on a doctoral program at UIN Jakarta, focusing on the field of Quranic studies, and successfully completed it in 2009. (Ilyas, 2016).

In 1993, K.H. Bunyamin founded the Al-Muhajirin Islamic Boarding School, which, over its 30-year journey until 2023, has grown into 7 different campuses, offering various levels of education from preschool to university, including Al-Muhajirin Islamic College (STAI) and Al-Muhajirin Institute of Technology (ITM). This achievement reflects K.H. Bunyamin’s commitment to educating well-rounded...
generations, adopting the concept of a comprehensive, pesantren-based education system that encompasses not only religious education but also holistic education.

In addition to his accomplishments in education, Abun Bunyamin has been actively involved in various organizations since a young age, including IPNU, Pemuda Ansor, and others. He has also made significant contributions in the religious and social sectors, serving as the Rois Syuriah of the NU (Nahdatul Ulama) Purwakarta District from 2014 to 2022, as well as being the Chairman of MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) Purwakarta District from 2003 to 2018. Currently, Abun Bunyamin holds the responsibility of Rois Syuriah of the NU West Java Regional Board, emphasizing his role in the development and empowerment of the Muslim community in the region.

Abun Bunyamin dedicates his daily activities with exceptional dedication. As the founder of the Islamic boarding school, he is directly involved in educating his students and providing guidance to the teaching staff at the school. With his extensive experience and knowledge, Abun Bunyamin plays a central role in the direct teaching of the students, not only imparting religious knowledge but also striving to shape the character and morality of the younger generation. Every week, he also wholeheartedly conducts religious lectures for the local community, demonstrating his commitment to sharing religious understanding and spiritual values with a broader audience beyond the school environment. This activity reflects his active role in advancing a better understanding of religion and promoting goodness within the community. Additionally, Abun Bunyamin is also an active author, among the books he has authored are Bunga Rampai Ulumul Qur’an, Belajar Shalat Kepada Kiai, Tafsir Pilihan Surat Ali Imran, Pesan Syaikuna, 40 Hadits Pilihan Kiai, and others.

3. Tafsir Al-Ma’arif

K.H. Abun Bunyamin named his book Tafsir Al-Ma’arif, where Tafsir means explanation, and Al-Ma’arif is the plural form of the word al-ma’rifah, which carries the meaning of knowledge, understanding, and recognition. Abun Bunyamin hopes that through his book, he can provide valuable knowledge to readers about the content of the Quran and strengthen their faith in Allah (SWT).

The book Tafsir Al-Ma’arif covers a range of themes that intersect with the beautiful messages of Allah in the Quran. It discusses guidelines for acting in accordance with the will of the Quran and portrays the magnificence of Allah’s power. The points addressed in this book are designed to be interconnected with the daily
realities faced by society. The aim is to build a strong connection between the ideal messages in the Quranic verses and the real-life experiences of humanity in various aspects of life.

There are 36 titles in Tafsir Al-Ma‘arif, including: the beauty of Allah’s commands, believers as one body, striving for piety in Ramadan, hoping for righteous descendants as the Sunnah of the Prophet, supporting the call to righteousness for the sake of the hereafter’s happiness, Allah’s mercy and justice, delving into the Quran, the criteria of the righteous, sincerity, knowledge, and action, the essence of rejecting pluralism, sincere repentance, rejected repentance, the power of deeds for happiness and nobility, faith before action, dealing with non-believers, obeying the Prophet, protecting infants from the touch of Satan, prayer as a safeguard against arrogance, steadfastness on the straight path, the Shahada (testimony of faith) not just a word, a shield against Satan’s deception, avoiding harm through Tawhid (belief in the oneness of Allah), belief in the Day of Judgment, Allah’s wrath upon traitors, Allah is everything, the wisdom of Allah’s knowledge, Allah’s boundless mercy, the inevitability of reckoning and Allah’s justice, power belongs only to Allah, evidence of Allah’s power and mercy, "Kun" as a manifestation of Allah’s perfect power, the uniqueness of Allah’s mercy, Shariah is Allah’s uniqueness, relying solely on Al-Malik (the Sovereign), surrendering to Allah’s power, and the concept of truth in the Quran. (Bunyamin, 2017).

This book refers to various classical tafsir literature from the early generations such as Tafsir Al-Thabari, Al-Qurtubi, Al-Rozi, Ibn Kathir, Ibn 'Ashur, Al-Sa‘adi, Al-Shawkani, Al-Zamakhshari, and others. Additionally, it also draws upon some contemporary tafsir works like Tafsir fi Zhilal Al-Quran, Tafsir Al-Maraghi, Tafsir Al-Misbah, Tafsir Al-Azhar, and others that are relevant to the current conditions of the Muslim community. However, the author does not extensively reference all issues in all of these tafsir works. The author selectively quotes unique, distinctive, and differing viewpoints from the majority of mufassirs as a more concise way to develop their arguments.

The writings in Tafsir Al-Ma‘arif always begin with Quranic verses after the title, followed by an explanation of these verses with references to several tafsir books. Afterward, Abun Bunyamin presents his own perspective on the discussed verses. In the book "Tafsir Al-Ma‘arif," a comparative or comparative method is adopted among various tafsir books from different schools of thought. The goal is to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the richness of tafsir scholars’ thoughts from diverse backgrounds.
4. Analysis of K.H. Abun Bunyamin’s Thought on Religious Pluralism

K.H. Abun Bunyamin began the discussion of religious pluralism with Ali Imran verse 185.

“Wa may yatabtagi gairal-islāmi dīnan fa lay yuqbalā min-h, wa huwa fil-ākhirati mīnal-khāsirīn”

“Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter” (Q.S. Ali Imran [3]:85)

According to Abun Bunyamin, this verse emphasizes the truth of Islam as the final divine religion. Anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam or refuses to obey the teachings of Islam will not have their faith accepted by Allah SWT. In fact, in the Hereafter, they will be among those who incur loss. Abun Bunyamin then quotes the opinion of Wahbah al-Zuhaili, who states that those who choose a path other than the path of Allah (Islam), all of their deeds will not be accepted, and they will be considered as those who have wasted their lives. (Bunyamin, 2017).

From the selected verse by Abun Bunyamin and his exposition about the truth of Islam, it is clear that Islam is the only religion accepted by Allah SWT, and the position of religions other than Islam in the Hereafter indicates his rejection of religious pluralism, which allows for the validity of religions other than Islam, and in the Hereafter, they have an equal chance of entering paradise.

In the subsequent discussion, in "Tafsir Al-Ma’arif," Abun Bunyamin further emphasizes his stance by creating a subsection titled "Islam Versus Pluralism." He presents the definition of pluralism as follows:

“Kata pluralisme ketika dikatikan dengan kata agama menekankan dan merujuk pada sikap dan pandangan tertentu yang mendukung realitas keragaman agama. Di samping merujuk pada adanya realitas yang plural, konsep pluralisme agama juga berhubungan erat dengan teori tertentu tentang hubungan antar tradisi agama yang beragam dengan klaim merka yang berbeda dan bersaing.” (Bunyamin, 2017)

The definition of religious pluralism explained by Abun Bunyamin in Tafsir Al-Ma’arif appears to be similar to the definition of religious pluralism according to the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majlis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) in MUI Fatwa Number 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005:

“Pluralisme agama adalah suatu paham yang mengajarkan bahwa semua agama adalah sama dan karenanya kebenaran setiap agama adalah relatif; oleh sebab itu, setiap pemeluk agama tidak boleh mengklaim bahwa hanya agamanya saja yang benar sedangkan agama yang lain salah. Pluralisme agama juga mengajarkan bahwa semua pemeluk agama akan masuk dan hidup berdampingan di surga.” (Agama, 2005)
Abun Bunyamin also critiques the idea of religious pluralism by using Surah Al-Baqarah verse 62 and Surah Al-Maidah verse 69, which they interpret to mean that not only the believers will enter paradise. Jews, Christians, and Sabians can also enter paradise on the condition that they believe in Allah, the Day of Judgment, and perform righteous deeds. Advocates of religious pluralism interpret Islam not as a religious institution, but as submission to God; according to them, all religions are valid as long as one submits to God.

In an interview conducted with Abun Bunyamin, he emphasizes that the interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah verse 62 and Surah Al-Maidah verse 69 does not refer to the Jews or Christians of today who will enter paradise, but rather to the Jews and Christians of the past who followed the teachings of their Prophets, or the Jews and Christians who have embraced Islam now.

Abun Bunyamin also quotes the opinion of Quraish Shihab, stating that if humans, including those who support pluralism, engage in good deeds that benefit humanity but do not have a foundation of obedience to Allah and submission to the shariah conveyed by the Prophet, all their deeds will be in vain, as mentioned in Allah’s verse in Surah Al-Furqan verse 23.

"Wa qadimmā ilā mā ‘amilū min ‘amalin fa ja’alnāhu habā’am mansūrā(n)“.  
“We show them all the deeds that they have done, then We make them (like) dust that flies away.” (Al-Furqan [25]:23)

In addition, Abu Bunyamin also mentioned that religous diversity is sunnatullah based on surah Ali Imran verse 113.

“Laṣu sawā`ā, min ahlil-kitābi ummatung qā`imatuy yatlynā āyātillāhi ānā’al-laili wa hum yasjudūn”  
“They are not the same, among the people of the book there is a righteous grouppp. They recite the verses of Allah at night in prostration (prayer).” (Ali Imran [3]:113)

However, those who embrace Islam must be firm in their belief that Islam is the truest religion, and other religions are not accepted in the sight of Allah SWT. However, this should not be a basis for hating other religions.

Abun Bunyamin also explains that in delivering the verses of the Qur’an, there are what are called internal and external verses. In practice, verses about faith, such as Surah Al-Ikhlas, are internal verses that are more suitable for delivery to the Muslim community because, fundamentally, when it comes to personal faith, a Muslim’s tolerance may not apply once someone has made their choice of belief. (Muhammad Aroka Fadli, 2022). On the other hand, verses that mention there is no compulsion in religion or other tolerance-related verses are considered external
verses that are more appropriate to convey to non-Muslims to demonstrate the courtesy of the Islamic religion.

The author believes that what Abun Bunyamin conveys regarding his rejection of the concept of religious pluralism is based on his position as the Chairman of MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) in Purwakarta Regency from 2003 to 2018, considering that the fatwa declaring the prohibition of pluralism was issued by MUI in 2005. Furthermore, the similarity in the verses used by Abun Bunyamin and the MUI fatwa, namely Surah Ali Imran verse 85, also plays a role. Additionally, due to Abun Bunyamin’s position, which involves educating the general public (rather than academics), presenting comprehensive theories of religious pluralism to the general public has the potential to confuse them.

In the concluding part of his writing, Abun Bunyamin emphasizes that Islam teaches that there is no compulsion in religion, but this does not mean that Islam recognizes religious pluralism. Islamic doctrine explicitly rejects all forms of worship other than Allah. However, Muslims are not allowed to use this rejection as a basis for hatred, causing harm, engaging in destructive behavior, or violating Islamic principles of being a source of mercy for all beings.

CONCLUSION

Religious pluralism is a concept that heavily depends on the attitudes of individuals and societies towards religious diversity. On one hand, pluralism refers to the sincere recognition of the existence of other religions and the goodwill towards them. This reflects the acceptance that differences in beliefs are a natural part of life and inspires interfaith dialogue and harmonious cooperation. On the other hand, pluralism is also interpreted as the view that all religions hold truth, a perspective rejected by Abun Bunyamin in Tafsir Al-Ma’arif. However, this rejection should not be understood as hatred towards other religions. Therefore, the understanding and practice of religious pluralism greatly depend on an individual’s attitude towards religious diversity and how they treat and interact with other religions in society.

Bibliography


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