

NURCHOLISH MADJID'S QURAN-BASED CONCEPT OF CRITICAL PLURALISM

Muh. Tasrif

STAIN Ponorogo Jl. Pramuka 156 Ponorogo East Java
muhtasrif@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Pluralism is one theme of Islamic thought of Nurcholish widely debated by Indonesian Muslims. Nurcholish built his thought by referring to verses of the Quran. Nurcholish's thought had sparked sharp controversy. In one hand, Nurcholish is regarded as a public figure who can provide the basics of the remedies for Indonesian nation which is religiously and culturally plural. On other hand, Nurcholish is a prominent denier and destroyer of Islamic theology. Based on the background, this article explores the socio-historical background of Nurcholish's support on the concept of pluralism, its fundamental structures, its Quranic bases, and its distinctiveness compared to ideas of other thinkers. Pluralism according to Nurcholish is understood as a value system which looks positively at plural realities and acts also positively on the basis of the realities. Pluralism in Nurcholish's explanation includes notion of pluralism in many fields of studies: cosmological-ontological, social, cultural, political, and religious. Pluralism of Nurcholish rests on beliefs about God and human. Two basic beliefs that become foundations of Nurcholish's concept of pluralism have implications to uniqueness of his concept of religious pluralism.*

Introduction

One of the themes of Islamic thought of Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) (called Nurcholish afterwards) widely debated by Indonesian Muslims is pluralism. As a neomodernist Muslim thinker, Nurcholish built his thought of pluralism by referring to the verses of the Quran. With reference to Q.S. al-Hujurât (49): 13, he defines pluralism as “a system of values which looks pluralism itself positively and optimistically, accepts it as a reality and does

on the fact for its best” (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxv). The definition contains two things: first, an optimistic view or understanding on plural facts, and secondly, positive attitudes or actions that correspond to the reality.

Nurcholish's thought had sparked sharp controversy. For the proponents of pluralism, Nurcholish is regarded as a public figure who can provide the basics of the remedies for theological issues arising from Indonesian nation which is religiously and culturally plural (Sukidi, 2001) (Rifki, 2005). However, for the opponents of pluralism, Nurcholish is a prominent denier and destroyer of Islamic theology (Bashori, 2004, pp. 48-49) (Husaini, Pluralisme, 2005, p. 103) (Husaini, Nurcholish, 2005). For Daud Rashid, the use of concepts *islâm*, *kalimatun sawâ'*, and *ahl al-kitâb* by Nurcholish to support the idea of pluralism is a form of “manipulation of the meaning of the verses” or interpret the verses “based on his own desires.” For Adian Husaini, what was done by Nurcholish is “a deconstruction of the key terms in Islam” (Husaini, Nurcholish, 2005, p. 104). Furthermore, he said, “If the basic concepts of Islam were altered and compromised, then what will happen is ‘destruction of Islamic scholarship’ as a system of religious thought built by the last prophet, Muhammad p.b.u.h..” According to Anis Malik Thoha, Nurcholish's concept of pluralism is based on an arbitrary and fragmented interpretation on the verses of the Quran (Thoha, 2005, p. 161). In fact, for Adian Husaini, the emergence of the Indonesian Ulema Council Decision Number: 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005 on Pluralism, Liberalism, and Secularism is “a serious blow to Nurcholish, especially on the idea of religious pluralism.”¹

¹ In the fatwa, religious pluralism is defined as “an understanding which teaches that all religions are the same and, therefore, the truth of every

Moreover, the interpretation of Nurcholish on verses of the Quran that is different from the interpretation of other scholars also implies a difference methodological framework of interpretation used. This is in line with his own claim in building his thought, namely the need to go back to the Quran and the Hadith as a neomodernist Islamic methodology (Madjid, *Ensiklopedi*, 2006, pp. 1446—1448).

Pros and cons of the idea of pluralism in Islam as Nurcholish initiated, as described above, shows several things: 1) a point of dispute between groups of Muslims; 2) it is not constructive and is not directed to the underlying methodology of interpretation used. Even the opposition is also accompanied by accusations that pluralism is an orientalist global project to destroy Islam. A criticism with an appropriate academic framework is not taken seriously. Based on the background, this article will explore the socio-historical background of Nurcholish's support on the concept of pluralism, its fundamental structures, its Quranic bases, and its distinctiveness compared to ideas of other thinkers.

Socio-historical Background of Nurcholish's Support on Pluralism

Thought of a thinker can not be separated from the historical and social contexts of the thinker (Zubair, 1990, p. 46).

religion is relative; therefore, every religious believer should not claim that only his/her religion is true while other religions are wrong. Pluralism also teaches that all people of religions will go and live side by side in heaven." See Fatwa Munas VII Majelis Ulama Indonesia Tahun 2005, In the fatwa, religious pluralism is defined as "an understanding which teaches that all religions are the same and, therefore, the truth of every religion is relative; therefore, every religious believer should not claim that only his/her religion is true while other religions are wrong. Pluralism also teaches that all people of religions will go and live side by side in heaven." See Fatwa Munas VII Majelis Ulama Indonesia Tahun 2005,

Similarly is Nurcholish's thinking. His thoughts on pluralism based on the verses of the Quran can be traced from his concern over experiences in his family, education, and involvement in social and political life of Muslims, in particular, and Indonesian people, in general.

Nurcholish was born of a family of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) politically affiliated to Masyumi. He was born of a father, H. Abdul Madjid and a mother, Hj Fathonah on Friday, March 17, 1939. H. Abdul Madjid was a student of the founder of NU, KH. Hasyim Ash'ari, a caregiver of Tebuireng Pesantren in Jombang. At the initiative of KH. Hasyim Ash'ari, H. Abdul Madjid arranged marriage with his wife, Hj. Fathonah (daughter of Kiai Abdullah Sajad, the founder of Gringging Pesantren, Kediri, East Java), having previously separated from his first wife, Halimah, because she did not have 12 years of marriage. Halimah is the granddaughter of KH. Hasyim Ash'ari who was married to H. Abdul Madjid at the initiative of KH. Hashim Ash'ari too (AF, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Closeness of Nurcholish's family with Pesantren of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) encouraged the family to enter Nurcholish in Pesantren Darul Ulum, Rejoso, after completing the School of the People (SR) in 1953. The pesantren was raised by Kiai Romli Tamim a close friend of H. Abdul Madjid when he became student of KH. Hashim Ash'ari. Nurcholish was directly received in sixth grade of elementary level. In 1954 Nurcholish continued at secondary/tsanawiyah level. In the 1955 general election, political tensions occurred in villages in Jombang. Santris parties represented by NU and Masyumi sought support from Muslim voters in Jombang. NU had been out of Masyumi based on a decree at its Palembang Congress in 1952 with the scent of a

conflict that can not be covered up. The tension was felt by Nurcholish who studied at Pesantren Darul Ulum as a result of his father's affiliation with Masyumi. At the Pesantren Nurcholish was often insinuated by children of NU so that he did not feel at home. Nurcholish told what he felt to his father. H. Abdul Madjid considered the issue seriously so that it prompted him to pull his son from Pesantren Darul Ulum and moved him to Pesantren Darus Salam at Gontor, Ponorogo (AF, 2010, pp. 11-15) (Munawar-Rachman, 2006, p. liv).

At Pesantren Gontor there was no issue of conflict between NU and Masyumi. Among the reasons are that the books taught here are not monolithic. One of fiqh books taught is *Bidâyah al-Mujtahid* of Ibn Rushd, a comparative insightful fiqh textbook. The book was studied in the fifth grade. Moreover, the tradition and motto of the Pesantren can also be a reason. The Pesantren has five fundamental spiritual principles called *Panca Jiwa*, that is, sincerity, simplicity, self-sufficiency, *ukhuwwah Islamiyah*, and a freedom spirit, which became the basis of its tradition. The Pesantren also has a motto, that is, virtuous personality, healthy body, well-informed mind, and free thinking as the basis of its philosophy of education. Based on the tradition and the motto, the students were freed to determine their own choices of schools of jurisprudence. The Pesantren is also aimed at preparing future Muslim leaders who can resolve differences among Muslim people and are also adhesive of the differences. The objective is a reflection of its open attitude and freedom spirit (AF, 2010, pp. 17-19).

After completing his education at Gontor, Nurcholish continued his studies at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. At the time Nurcholish's involvement in matters of Muslim people and

Indonesian people began to find momentum when he joined the Muslim Students Association (HMI), which has a cultural affiliation with Masyumi. In 1963 HMI was considered as a supporter of counterrevolutionary activities so that some members of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) urged the President Soekarno to dissolve the HMI. The situation required HMI leaders to hold “a national adaptation” in order not to be dissolved by the Government. Nurcholish initially opposed the adaptation effort because it is immoral to lick a government. In following development, the opposing attitudes changed softened. The softening attitude was seen in the HMI congress in Solo in 1966 when protests against the statement of Mar'ie Muhammad—one of the administrators of HMI—who urged severe penalties against Kasman Singodimejo, a member of Masyumi, an Islamic party which had been dissolved by the Government, who was against the revolution. At the moment, Nurcholish appeared to provide an argument on the need of “national adaptation” initiated by the HMI under the leadership of Sulastomo, and the argument might eventually dampen the anger of the congress participants. The Congress led to the election of Nurcholish as chairman of HMI of 1966-1969 period (AF, 2010, pp. 39-41).

Since Old Order Era Nurcholish engaged simultaneously in discourse and praxis of Muslim and national life in general, and in the issue of pluralism in particular. Nurcholish's role in HMI congress in 1966 in Solo—as previously described—began to show his compromising attitude towards national adaptation policies carried out by Executive Board of HMI vis-a-vis the Old Order government which was urged by PKI to dissolve HMI. Nurcholish also showed compromising attitude vis-a-vis the Government of Soekarno which on initiative of the Minister of

Religion, Saifuddin Zuhri, issued an instruction to HMI to perform a cleanup of counterrevolutionary elements in HMI.

In the early 1970s Nurcholish forwarded ideas of Islamic renewal, which became known as the notion of “secularization” and “Islam Yes, Islamic Party No.” The ideas of the reform—viewed from the context of socio-political life of Indonesian pluralism—showed actually Nurcholish’s concern about the lack of consciousness of the Muslim people of social and political pluralism of Indonesia. In general, Muslims people—especially activists of social and political organizations—at the time argued that Islamic political parties were the only channel that can be used to articulate the interests of Muslims. Or with a more emphatic expression, the presence of Islamic political parties is a representation of Muslims in the observance of the teachings of religion in the socio-political field. Thus, Islam as a religion is synonymous with Islamic political parties. For Nurcholish, this general view of the Muslims reflects a lack of awareness about the teachings of pluralism in Islam. For Nurcholish, Islamic political party is just one of several channels—not the only one—by which Muslims are able to articulate their political aspirations. The awareness of Muslims considered “frozen”, according to Nurcholish, should be updated by the method of “secularization”, a term which then has been triggering a sharp debates throughout the life of Nurcholish.² Secularization, for Nurcholish, is an attempt to view worldly matters as worldly and not as eschatological ones. The idea was a critique of the tendency of Muslims who sanctified Islamic political thought that existed at the

² The secularization idea gets serious rejection of scholars since the beginning of rolled up to the time when Nurcholish already died in August 2005. See for example the works H.M. Rasjidi (Rasjidi, 1972) dan Faisal Ismail (Ismail, 2008).

time. With secularization, Nurcholish called on Muslims to perform *ijtihâd* in order to formulate new values that could answer the problems facing them. The idea of secularization was delivered in the context of the Suharto's New Order Government refusal as a ruler to rehabilitate Masyumi. The rejection implied psychological barriers of young Muslims, especially members of the HMI—considered to have an emotional connection with Masyumi—to involve themselves in government. Thus, the idea of secularization of Nurcholish could be regarded as an attempt to eliminate the psychological barriers.

In the early 1990s Nurcholish restated the idea of pluralism in form of a critique against fundamentalist and cult tendencies in religious life in general, and in Muslim communities in particular. The fundamentalist and cult tendencies of religious life are excesses of modernization and technicalization of human life that cause psychological alienation and social dislocation. Nurcholish reminded that fundamentalism is false manifestation of religions. On this context, Nurcholish put forward the idea of tolerance and awareness of religious pluralism as solution to the phenomenon of fundamentalism in modern times (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999).

At the end of the 1990 1998 , Nurcholish restated the idea of religious pluralism as a response to massive conflicts and violence in Indonesia (Madjid, , 2001, pp. 1-8). Conflicts that occurred were colored by ethnic and religious sentiments. The most prominent symptoms of ethnic and religious conflicts resulting in many casualties occurred in Sambas, West Kalimantan between ethnic Malay and Dayak tribes versus Madura³ and In

³ The conflict between the Malays and Madurese occurred in 1999, which is a conflict that occurs first and the last. Conflicts between Dayaks and Madurese has been going for 11 1962 that ended in 1999. The conflict in 1999 occurred simultaneously between the Malays and Dayaks and

Poso and Ambon, North Sulawesi between Muslims and Christians⁴. Again, in the context of communal and religious conflicts, Nurcholish restated his belief in tolerance and pluralism as a solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, authentic understanding of tolerance and pluralism has not been recognized by most religious people in Indonesia. In his phrase:

With regard to the issue of pluralism, we get the fact that our society still show a superficial and false understanding. The term “pluralism” has become a common daily term in our national discourse. But in society there are signs that people understand pluralism only in passing, without a deeper meaning, and more importantly, having no root in the teachings of truth (Madjid, *Ensiklopedi*, 2006, p. 2694).

Elsewhere, he expressed his concern about inappropriate understanding of Muslims on positive-optimistic outlook toward other faiths. He said, ... of course, there are Islamist groups who do not feel so familiar with positive-optimistic outlook towards other religions as it is, either by coincidence they are not aware of Word of God, or do not understand it, or are defeated by the sociological-psychological expediencies so that they do not want to receive explicit meaning of the Word and lean towards the interpretation that attempts to modify it. The issue is a hassle for Muslims, together with similar complexity for all religious groups (Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin*, 2005, p. c) (Madjid, *Interpreting*, 2005, p.220).

Madurese. The conflict ended with the expulsion of the Madurese from Sambas (Suparlan, 2003, p. 2).

⁴ Ambon riots began on January 19, 1999 while the Poso riots originated from events that occurred on December 26, 1998 (Nahrawi, 2003, p. 137).

In the context of these concerns, the explanation of Nurcholish in many writings is his attempt to explain deep and true meaning of pluralism in the bonds of civility (genuine engagement of diversities within the bonds of civility),” as well as “a must for human safety, among others, through the resulted mechanism of checks and balances” (Madjid, Cendekiawan, 2009, pp. 69-70) Nurcholish based some of key ideas in the concept of pluralism on interpretation of verses of Quran. The idea of a positive-optimistic view of the diversities is based on the doctrine that human is created as nations and tribes to know and appreciate each other as confirmed in Q.S. al-Hujurât (49): 13, (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxv). The translation is as below:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full Knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things).

The notion of pluralism as a must for human safety through mechanism of checks and balances is based on the Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 251, (Madjid, Ensiklopedi, 2006, p. 2695) which translates: And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief: but Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds.

Quranic Bases of Pluralism

Viewed systemically with his fundamental thoughts, Nurcholish thought on pluralism is the implication of his thoughts on two major themes: divinity and humanity. In other words, his

thoughts on two important themes became the foundation and rationale of pluralism.

1. The Notion of monotheism or tawhîd

According to Nurcholish, the word tawhîd is an active verbal noun which requires complementary object, a derivation of word wâhîd, which means one. For this reason, the literal meaning of tawhîd is to unite. Furthermore, the generic meaning of tawhîd is also to unify things scattered or fragmented. For example, the use of the Arabic language tawhîd al-kalimah means unifying understanding, and the expression of tawhîd al-quwwah means unifying force (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 72).

As a technical term of theology, tawhîd means a notion of "acknowledging the oneness of God" or monotheism. Even if not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, the expression tawhîd itself accurately reveals the contents of the basic teaching of the holy books, which is the doctrine of "acknowledging the oneness of God." Even the word tawhîd also accurately describes the core teachings of all prophets and messengers sent to all group of humans on earth until the appearance of the last Prophet, Muhammad p.b.u.h.. (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 73).

According Nurcholish further, notion of tawhîd can not be simply interpreted as a faith or trust in God. This is due to the fact that people of idolaters of Mecca at the time of the Prophet are also people who believed in God, as affirmed by Q.S. al-Zumar (39): 38; al-'Ankabût (29): 63; al-Zukhruf (43): 9; and Luqmân (31): 25, of which the translations are as below: (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 75)

If indeed thou ask them who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they would be sure to say, "Allah." Say: "See ye then the things that ye invoke besides Allah; can they, if Allah wills

some Penalty for me, remove His Penalty? Or if He wills some Grace for me, can they keep back His Grace?" Say: "Sufficient is Allah for me! in Him trust those who put their trust."

And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, they will certainly reply, "Allah!" Say: "Praise be to Allah!" But most of them understand not.

If thou wert to question them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They would be sure to reply, 'They were created by (Him), the Exalted in Power, full of Knowledge'; If thou ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, "Allah." Say: "Praise be to Allah." But most of them understand not.

The verses above, in view of Nurcholish, hint that tawhîd is not enough and does not only mean to believe in God alone, but also includes a proper understanding of who and how believed-God is and how attitudes upon Him and objects other than Him are. The Arabs before Islam believed that God created the universe (the whole skies and earth), but they could not be named as the faithful (mu'minûn) and, therefore, also not called people of tawhîd (al-muwahhidûn). On the contrary, they are referred to as al-mushrikûn, people who ascribe God, that is the notion that God has shârik (allies or union), persons accompanying him in terms of divinity (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 75).

Monotheism or tawhîd in turn has consequences in view of plurality of things outside of God. This argument is based on the Q.S. al-Ikhlâs (112): 4, "And there is none like unto Him." Properly understood, as understood by scholars, the uniqueness of God can be equated with absoluteness of The One. In other words, The One is only The Absolute while everything other than

God is plural and, as such, is relative. The nature of The Absolute is that He is not covered by the relative. This means that God (ilâh) for granted is (the only one) God (al-ilâh, according to Nurcholish, is shortened to al-Lâh, usually written in upright letters, Allâh). He is God who should be worshiped and obeyed. Taking nature as a worshiped object or following his/her own desires (hawâ), mankind has adopted false gods that can not be referred to as God or Allah (Madjid, *Interpreting*, 2005, p.209)

Nurcholish's statement that the One is only the Absolute as something other than God is plural and, as such, is relative can be interpreted that he accepts theory of pluralism in all spheres of reality: ontological-cosmological, sociological, political, cultural, and religious. It is supported by the context of conversation. First, talking about absoluteness of God relates to and implies plurality and relativity of universe. Second, talking about absoluteness of God also relates to discussion on the ban to absolutize human views (hawâ al-nafs) and, thus, also human realities of all areas and dimensions. The fact in turn proves that Nurcholish's thinking on pluralism is based on his view of notion on God or tawhîd.

2. The notion of positive humanism

Notion of pluralism, according to Nurcholish, also has a strong grounding in Islam, namely positive humanitarianism. Nurcholish formulates points of humanity notion in Islam as follow (Madjid, *Islam Agama Kemanusiaan*, 2003, pp. 192-194)

- a. Humans are tied in a primordial covenant with God, namely that human, from their life in the spiritual realm, promised to acknowledge One Almighty God as the center of their orientation of life. This is confirmed by Q.S. al-A'raf (7): 172, of which its translation is so, When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam from their loins, their descendants, and

made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?" They said: "Yea! we do testify!" (this), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of this we were never mindful."

- b. The result is the birth of humans in sanctity origin (nature), and it is assumed that they will grow in holiness if there are no evil influences of environments. In other words, humans are created in states of *fitrah* (innate and intuitive human abilities to distinguish between right and wrong, straight and crooked) and, therefore, have natural tendencies to goodness, truth, and purity (*hanîfiyyah*) (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 102) This is confirmed by Q.S. al-Rûm (30): 30, So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not. and saying of the Prophet, "Every child is born in purity."
- c. The sanctity of human origins reside in the consciences (*nûrânî*, meaning the bright light), which encourage them to continue searching, siding, and doing what is good and right (*hanîfiyah* properties). Thus, each person has the potential to be correct, such as spoken in Q.S. al-Ahzâb (33): 4, of which translation is "Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body." That is, hearts of humans, as long as still having bright lights or consciences, just voice only one thing, namely truth or purity, in accordance with the natures on which God created humans.
- d. However, being created weak (among other things, being short-sighted, and tending to be attracted to immediate things), each human has the potential to be incorrect. In other words, human

often fails to see long-term consequences of his/her actions due to temptation of short-term pleasure, (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 102) as stated by Q.S. al-Qiyâmah (75): 20;

”Nay, (ye men!) But ye love the fleeting life,” and Q.S. al-Dahr (76): 27, ”As to these, they love the fleeting life, and put away behind them a Day (that will be) hard.” Even further, human has potential to become a tyrant when he/she looks at him/herself as self-sufficient and no longer needs others, as confirmed by Q.S. al-‘Alaq (96): 6-7, (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 102) ”Nay, but man doth transgress all bounds, in that he looketh upon himself as self-sufficient.”

- e. So, for the advantage of life, human is equipped with mind and religion, and is burdened by obligations to constantly look for and choose a straight, true, and good life. Therefore, human is obliged to do prayers, which require reading al-Fâtihah in which there is a prayer that must be lived with at all heart, namely prayer to be shown a straight path. To search, find, understand, and follow the straight path is a journey in which there is no stop. For this reason, the prayer does never stop in continuously everlasting life.
- f. So, human is ethical and moral creature, in the sense that doing good or bad should be accounted for, both in this world to fellow human beings and in the hereafter in the presence of God Almighty, as affirmed by Q.S. al-Zilzâl (99): 7-8, Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it.
- g. In contrast to relative responsibility in the world so it is still possible for human to avoid it, accountability in hereafter is absolute and can not be avoided altogether, as narrated by Q.S.

al-Mu'min (40): 16, The Day whereon they will (all) come forth: not a single thing concerning them is hidden from Allah. Whose will be the Dominion that Day? That of Allah, the One, the Irresistible!

In addition, absolute accountability to God in hereafter is personal so that no defense, relations of solidarity, comradeship, even among friends, dear relatives, children and mother or father, as affirmed by Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 48; Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for her, nor shall compensation be taken from her, nor shall anyone be helped (from outside);

Q.S. al-An'am (6):94;

"And behold! ye come to Us bare and alone as We created you for the first time: ye have left behind you all (the favours) which We bestowed on you: We see not with you your intercessors whom ye thought to be partners in your affairs: so now all relations between you have been cut off, and your (pet) fancies have left you in the lurch!";

Q.S. Maryam (19): 95;

And every one of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment; and Q.S. Luqman (31) : 33,

O mankind! do your duty to your Lord, and fear (the coming of) a Day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father. Verily, the promise of Allah is true: let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver deceive you about Allah.

- h. Overall above points assume that every human, in his/her life in this world, has basic right to choose and determine his/her own moral and ethical behavior (without the right it is not

possible to demand moral and ethical accountability, and thus human will be at the same degree as other creatures, and will not experience true happiness). This is confirmed by Q.S. al-Kahf (18): 29, Say, "The Truth is from your Lord": Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)" i. Because of the basic nature of glory, human is a culmination of all God creatures and is created in the best of creation, who has the highest origin and dignity, as asserted by Q.S. al-Tîn (95): 4, "Verily We created man in the best possible shape."

- j. God glorifies, protects and bears Adam's posterity on land and at sea, as confirmed by Q.S. Banî Isrâ'îl (17): 70, We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation.
- k. Every human is as valuable as all humans. Therefore, whoever harms a person, such as to kill without any valid reason as if he/she harms all mankind. On the contrary, whoever does good to someone, such as to help him/her, as if he does good to all mankind, as confirmed by Q.S. al-Mâidah (5): 32, On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person- unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land- it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our Messengers with Clear Signs, Yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.
- l. Therefore, every human must do good to others to meet obligations of others, and to respect rights of others, in a fabric of peaceful and open social relationships. This is one meaning

of good deeds, within the meaning and spirit of greeting to look to right and to left at the end of the prayers. This is a remainder for humans who face God (through prayers) to pay attention to their fellow human beings, even fellow creatures, and to have spirit of noble character. This is in line with the affirmation of the Prophet in a Hadîth, "The most commonly deed that incorporates people into heaven is piety to Allah and virtue" (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 103).

In addition to the views of human nature previously described, there is another principle, according to Nurcholish, which needs to be added related to human nature, namely the doctrine of unity and equivalence of human beings, as affirmed by Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 213, (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 103)

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the People of the Book, after the Clear Signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His Grace guided the Believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight.

For that, based on a view of human nature, according to Nurcholish, everyone has right to express his views and to be heard at the same time because he/she always has potential to be correct and well-behaved in thoughts, desires, and actions. However, because of his natural weakness, a person has an obligation to hear views of others and then select them critically to determine which one is good to follow. It is an affirmation of Q.S. al-Zumar (39): 17-18, (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 103)

Those who eschew Evil, tâghût, and fall not into its worship, and turn to Allah (in repentance), for them is Good News: so announce the Good News to My Servants, Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it: those are the ones whom Allah has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding.

With the notion of positive humanism, Muslims in its past history was able to create a glorious civilization. With their successes in internalizing the positive and optimistic notion, the classical Muslims could be cosmopolitan and universalist communities so that they were willing to learn and accept everything valuable from other communities. However, according to Nurcholish, being needed to support a globalized human interaction, classical notion of pluralism is beginning to fade among Muslims (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, pp. 103-105).

Pluralist Beliefs

1. Recognizing pluralism as a sign of God's greatness and as sunnatullâh

According to Nurcholish, "differences among humans in language and skin color should be accepted as a positive reality, which is one of the signs of God" (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxv) The idea is based on Q.S. al-Rûm (30): 22 :

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours; verily in that are Signs for those who know.

Positive-optimistic outlook towards plurality, for Nurcholish, is also revealed in the recognition of Quran that plurality is a fact of life and part of arrangement of world order. One manifestation of plurality is religious diversity (Madjid, , 2005,

pp. 209-225). The religious diversity must be recognized because recognition of rights of religions is the basis of notion of the socio-cultural and religious pluralism, as a statute of the Lord which is not changeable. In other words, “pluralism in fact is a rule of God (sunnat Allâh) that will not change so it can not be resisted and denied” (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxvi). In other words, as a divine provision, pluralism is included in irresistible sunnat Allâh because of its certainty (Madjid, Islam, Doctrine, 2005, p. 160). Nurcholish rest the idea on Q.S. al-Mâidah (5): 44-50, (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxvi) of which its 48 verse is translated as below:

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute; (Madjid, , 2001, pp. 3-4).

Based on this verse, for Nurcholish, diversity in outlook and way of life of people is nothing to worry and is used as a starting point to compete in doing good instead, and that it is God who will explain the reasons for these differences when humans return to Him (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxv). In other words, God does not want human communities to be a monolithic arrangement because plurality is required for a healthy competition among them in order to achieve goodness as much as possible.

This is confirmed by Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 148, (Madjid, Ensiklopedi, 2006, p. 2698).

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things.

2. Believing the different religions as ways to God

According to Nurcholish, understanding true religion as “a way” is important. Idea of a way is basic idea of terms of shari’ah, sirah, sabîl, tariqah, minhâj, and mansak in Islam; tao in Chinese religion; and dharma in Indian religion. This is the basic idea of sacred expression of Îsa in the Gospel that he is “a way” because Îsa is an example that could be followed in good deed for humans through love and affection as mentioned in Q.S. al-Hadîd (57): 27.

Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our Messengers: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy.

Because religion is nothing but a way, believers are expected to move up from one stage to the next in such a way progressively towards a closer relationship (taqarrub) with God, the Absolute (Madjid, Interpreting, 2005, p.210).

Doctrine of religion as a way, for Nurcholish, is also demonstrated by Quran which confirms the existence of “a universal way” shared by all religions of all prophets and must be adhered to by their followers. The universal way consists of beliefs on the One God and virtues. The teaching is affirmed by Q.S. al-Shûrâ (42): 13.

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah- that which We have sent by inspiration to thee- and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:

namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than Allah, hard is the (way) to which thou callest them. Allah chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him).

Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. asserted that all religions are same and one. This is an affirmation of logic of Quran that the faithful must believe in all scriptures and all prophets without any discrimination between one and another, as confirmed Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 136:

Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam)." (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001, p. 4).

Because teachers of truth have been sent among human communities, the wisdom of God is universal and certainly not limited to a particular community at a particular time and place as confirmed Q.S. al-Nahl (16): 36, (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001)

For We assuredly sent amongst every People a messenger, (with the Command), "Serve Allah, and eschew Evil": of the people were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom Error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth).

According to Nurcholish, the principal base of the universal truth is notion of tawhîd or the Oneness of God. The notion became the belief of first human, Adam, whom is believed by the

Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) as first prophet and apostle (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 180).

a. Tawhîd and islâm inclusively as universal ways of religions

Tawhîd teaching, according to Nurcholish, has a consequence, namely islâm, total submission only to God. The total submission is the essence of all true religions (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 181). To explain the meaning of islâm, Nurcholish cited Ibn Taymiyah, as follows:

Word (Arabic) “al-islâm” implies “al-istislâm” (to surrender) and “al-inqiyâd” (to submit), and also contains the meaning of “al-Ikhlâs” (sincerity)... it is a must in Islam to surrender to the One God, and to leave the surrender to the other. This is the essence of our words “lâ ilâha illâ Allâh.” So if someone submits to Allah and (at the same time) to other than Allah, he is a polytheist (Taymiyah, t.t., p. 454).

Thus, the meaning of islâm in its generic sense is the core and essence of all religions of prophets and apostles. According to Nurcholish, further, from perspective of meaning of islâm above, confirmation of Quran that adherent to a religion other than islâm or who is not accompanied by a true surrender to God as false attitude can be better understood. In other words, even though a person is Muslim, if there is no sincerity in his/her islâm, he/she is among those whose religion is not true and, therefore, rejected (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 182). The assertion is confirmed by Q.S. Âlu ‘ Imrân (3): 19, “The religion in the sight of Allah is al-islâm.” To strengthen the meaning of islâm, Nurcholish quoted Muhammad Asad’s interpretation of the verse,

Most of the classical commentators are of the opinion that the people referred to are the

followers of the Bible, or of parts of it- i.e., the Jews and the Christians. It is, however, highly probable that this passage bears a wider import and relates to all communities which base their views on a revealed scripture, extant in a partially corrupted form, with parts of it entirely lost. ... All these communities at first subscribed to the doctrine of God's oneness and held that man's self-surrender to Him (Islam in its original connotation) is the essence of all true religion. Their subsequent divergencies were an outcome of sectarian pride and mutual exclusiveness (Asad, 1980, p. 69).

The word of al-Islâm in Q.S. Âlu 'Imrân (3):19, said Nurcholish further, can be interpreted as the religion of Islam as it is known in general, the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad. Such understanding is certainly true in the meaning that indeed the religion of Muhammad is the religion of "surrender to God" par excellence. However, al-Islâm can also be interpreted more generally, that is, according to the origin or its generic meaning, "surrender to God," which is a spirit of teachings which became the principal characteristics of all true religions. This is the basic view of Quran that inclusively all true religions are Islam, in the sense that all teach the surrender to God.

b. The plurality of "ways as practices" in religions

In addition there is way as a principle shared by all religions, there are also diverse practical ways between one religion and other religion. However, these diversities should not become a barrier for the followers of all religions to maintain the principle by utilizing differences to competing in realizing good (al-khayrât) for the sake of general welfare (al-maslahah al-'âmmah). There must be also the awareness that it is not the

duty of humans to understand essentially reasons for differences and diversity of the way, as they hand it over to God's prerogative to explain when they return to Him. This is confirmed by Q.S. al-Mâidah (5): 48, (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001, p.5) To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute; The above verse is in line with the assertion consecutively in Q.S. al- Baqarah (2): 148; al-Hajj (22): 34; al-‘Ankabût (29): 69, (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001, p. 6) as follow:

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things. To every people did We appoint rites (of sacrifice), that they might celebrate the name of Allah over the sustenance He gave them from animals (fit for food), but your God is One God: submit then your wills to Him (in Islam): and give thou the good news to those who humble themselves, And those who strive in Our (Cause), We will certainly guide them to Our Paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right.

In the context of a variety of different paths, according to Nurcholish, Quran ensures that who follows the way of God will be guided to various roads of peace and right paths. This is

confirmed by Q.S. al-Mâidah (5): 16 (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001, p. 8), Wherewith Allah guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His Will, unto the light, guideth them to a Path that is Straight.

Moreover, the notion that Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, is seal of the prophets and apostles is indicative of continuity and improvement. The view is based on the existence of a command to Muslims to believe in all prophets without any distinction one another, as affirmed Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 136, Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam)."

According to Nurcholish, the principle of Quran of the unity of teachings, prophets, apostles, and religious people as previously described implicated in notion of religious plurality. In his expression, the notion is so, That teaching needs not be interpreted as a direct recognition of the truth of all religions in a tangible everyday form (in this case, a lot of real religious forms of "Muslim" are not true, because they are in contrary to basic teachings of Quran, such as to sanctify fellow humans or other beings, whether living or dead). However, the teaching of religious plurality emphasizes the basic notion that all religions are given freedom to live, the risk will be borne by the followers of each religion, both individually and in groups. The attitude can be interpreted as an expectation to all existing religions, namely because—as described above—all religions originally embraced the same principles, namely humans' necessity to submit to the

Almighty One, the religions. Thus, all religions, either because of their own internal dynamics or of their interactions of each other, will gradually discover the origin truths themselves, so that all will base on a “meeting point”, “common platform” or, in the word of Quran, “kalimah sawâ” (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 184).

3. Acknowledging the validity and the possibility of safety of different faiths

Belief that religion is a path that can deliver its adherents to God has a positive implication for validity and possibility of their safety. According to Nurcholish, all religious groups shall carry out their respective teachings and must be given religious freedom (Madjid, Ensiklopedi, 2006, p. 2701).

a. Safety of non-Islamic faiths

According to Nurcholish, Quran holds that any system of beliefs, while can lead to beliefs of God and the Last Day and action of virtue, can deliver its followers to God's rewards, namely the heavenly bliss without any fear and sorrow. The view is based on Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 62, (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 99)

Those who believe (in the Qur-an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

According to Nurcholish, the verse spontaneously gives an instruction that Jews, Christians, and Sabians—provided that they believe in God, the One the Almighty, in the Last Day, and do good— will “go to heaven” and “are free from hell.” The verse, for Nurcholish further, has caused controversies among commentators. For some commentators, the verse can not be

reconciled with logic of notion that all those who rebel against the Prophet Muhammad are “infidel,” and the infidels “will not go to heaven” and “are not free from hell” (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 186). In regard to the controversy, Nurcholish cited interpretation of al-Baydâwî who holds that the salvation is only for those who believe in Prophet Muhammad, and interpretation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Asad who believe the salvation without mentioning explicitly the necessity of faith in the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h.. Against the controversy of interpretation, Nurcholish tended to prefer the interpretation of Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali to the interpretation of al-Baydâwî. Nurcholish commented,

So, in other words, according to Muhammad Asad, the words of God were revealed to assert that anyone can obtain a “salvation”, as long as he believes in God and the Hereafter, and does good, regardless of whether he/she was a descendant of the Prophet Abraham as Jews (and the Quraish in Makkah) or not. This is of course in line with the affirmation of God to Abraham himself, when the Prophet was declared to be appointed by Him to be the leader of mankind, and when Abraham asked, with a pleading tone, “What about my descendants (whether will they also be appointed the leaders of humans)?” And God answered, “My agreement is not for those who do wrong!” (author—read Surah al-Baqarah (2): 124). So salvation is not gained by humans because of heredity, but based on faith in God, the Hereafter, and pious deeds or accomplishments, a principle stressed a lot in the Scriptures (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, pp. 187-188).

Thus, the above description shows that, according to Nurcholish, validity and safety of adherents of religions can not be taken for granted because of their religious identities, both within

Islam itself, or non-Islam. Salvation is not obtained on the basis of identity of a person in a particular religion, but on the basis of true faith in God and the actions or deeds of righteousness, which is based on a critical and honest attitude in search for the truth, both derived from the religion itself or from other sources. For this reason, the notion of religious pluralism initiated by Nurcholish can be called as critical religious pluralism.

b. Extension of the meaning of men of Books

The verse of Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 62 they fulfill criteria as mentioned. Furthermore, religions which may be in the possibility of salvation, according to some scholars, are not only limited to four religions. This is reflected, according to Nurcholish, in the expansion of the meaning of People of Book (ahl al-kitâb) in the history of Islamic thoughts. In political history of Islam as that of the Moghul Empire in India and views of some scholars of Islam, the concept of ahl al-kitâb is expanded to include anyone of human race who embraces a holy book (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 188).

The concept of ahl al-kitâb, according to Nurcholish, within range of its application is not limited only to People of Book in traditional form, which is composed of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and then Hindus and Buddhists. Into the concept of ahl al-kitâb at contemporary time, some Indonesian scholars, among others Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (Hamka) dan 'Abd al-Hamid Hakim entered Chinese and Japanese religions (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, p. 110). According to Nurcholish, Abdullah Yusuf Ali also held that the concept of ahl al-kitâb can be extended to all those who are genuine and honest among followers of Zoroaster, Vedas, Buddhism, Confucianism, and teachers of wisdom (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 189). The complete

quotation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali follows, The pseudo-Sabians of Harrân, who attracted the attention of Khalifah Ma'mûn al-Rashîd in 850 A.C. by their long hair and peculiar dress probably adopted the name as it was mentioned in the Qur'ân, in order to claim the privileges of the People of the Book. They were Syrian Star worshippers with Hellenistic tendencies, like the Jews contemporary with Jesus. It is doubtful whether they had any right to be called People of the Book in the technical sense of the term. But I think that in this matter (though many authorities would dissent) the term can be extended by analogy to cover earnest followers of Zoroaster, the Vedas, Budha, Confucius and other Teachers of moral law.

Indeed, the meaning directly referenced by the concept of *ahl al-kitâb* in Quran is Jews and Christians (Galib, 1998, p. 187). For this reason, the meaning that Nurcholish held is a consequential meaning (*mafhûm al-muwâfaqah*), meaning not directly designated by verses of Quran. The expanded meaning of *ahl al-kitâb* which covers all those who have holy books is based on the assertion that God has sent messengers who brought teachings of *tawhîd* to every human race. The messengers are a lot. Most of their names are mentioned and many others are not. The assertion implies that religions of non- Semitic not mentioned in Quran can be included in religions whose messengers' names are not mentioned. Thus, religions of India, Japan, and China which have holy books can be considered parallel to the People of the Book.

Pluralist Attitudes and Actions

Pluralist principles and beliefs above, in turn, according to Nurcholish, generate quite unique attitudes of Muslims among

followers of religions, namely attitudes based on awareness of the existence of religious diversity (religious pluralism), with attitudes of tolerance, openness, and fairness prominent in the history of Islam (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 188).

In other words, according to Nurcholish, what Islam prefers to is a system that benefits all people, including those who are not Muslims. Islam does not impose beliefs on others; gives freedom to worship; appreciates cultural heritage of other groups, has positive and open attitudes towards sciences; avoids thinking of superstition or myth; avoids an exclusive social system (Madjid, Cendekiawan, 2009, pp. 15-17). Following sub-chapters will explain some actions relevant to and consistent with pluralist beliefs of Nurcholish.

1. Seeking and finding common ground

One realistic attitude in the face of socio-cultural pluralism is a search of common ground in similarity of all existing groups. According to Nurcholish, seeking and finding common ground is a part of important Islamic teachings. The teaching can be found in the command of God to the Prophet Muhammad to invite the People of the Book towards the same view (*kalimah sawâ'*), that is a belief in The One Almighty God. The teaching is affirmed by Q.S. *Âlu 'Imrân* (3): 64 (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. lxxvi) as follows:

Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."

According to Nurcholish, despite an invitation to another party is rejected, the basic principle of searching for common ground should be implemented of all time. In this context, Nurcholish put forward examples of implementation of the basic principles in the history of Islam. The first example is of the Prophet Muhammad who tried to find some meeting points with various groups in Medina, by the document recognizing the existential right of each group. The Prophet practice was enshrined in the Constitution of Medina. Second exemple is of 'Umar bin al-Khattâb who continued Sunnah of The Prophet in addressing residents of Jerusalem. The practice was documented in the Charter of Aelia (Jerusalem was at the time known as Aelia). The practices of the Prophet and 'Umar were continued by Muslims' caliphs, among others caliphs of Umawi in Andalusia. They consistently pursued admirable policies of diversity. In this regard, Nurcholish cited Max I Dimont's statement that pluralist policy of Islam in Spain was a grace that ended the Christian religious tyranny (Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin*, 2005, p. lxxvi).

In the context of Indonesian political life, according to Nurcholish, Pancasila—viewed from the teachings of Quran—is a point of intersection between different religious groups. Viewed from Quran which makes doctrine of tawhîd as a meeting point of religions, the meeting points between religious groups in Indonesia formulated in five principles of Pancasila were certainly better because they cover more than one meeting point. Therefore, Pancasila became a solid foundation for the development of religious tolerance and pluralism in Indonesia. Furthermore, Nurcholish cited statement of Adam Malik, a former vice president of the Republic of Indonesia, who considered that Pancasila has a parallel spirit to a political document drafted by the

Prophet Muhammad with the community of Medina, which is commonly called the "Charter of Medina." The Charter confirmed that all groups in Medina, including Jewish people, are one nation (ummah) with Muslims and that they have equal obligations and rights. Nurcholish agreed with Adam Malik who interpreted the document as formulation of a state based on social and religious pluralism (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, pp. 98-99).

2. Competing in goodness

Goal of religious diversity is that God makes a test for humans to what has been bestowed upon them. Thus, God has sent varying revelations down as basis of different religions to examine who is most obedient to Him (Madjid, Interpreting 2005, p. 209). According to Nurcholish, what is expected from citizens of every pluralistic society is to accept diversities and to foster health attitudes within the framework of diversities itself. In Quran it is literally stated that the healthy attitude is "to use aspects of our respective advantages to optimally encourage each other in an effort to realize a varieties of goodness (al-khayrât) in the community." Meanwhile, an explanation of problem of human differences is a prerogative right of God in the hereafter. It is not human authority to explain human differences and to abolish the existing diversities. The idea is based on the Q.S. al-Mâidah (5): 48 (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 160) of which the translation follows:

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would

have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute;

When Quran teaches interfaith meeting point on one thing only, namely the Oneness of God, said Nurcholish, the five principles of Pancasila as meeting points of Indonesian nation is a bit better manifestation of the teachings of Quran. According to Nurcholish, agreement of Indonesian Muslims on Pancasila and the 1945 : first, the values contained in it are justified by the teachings of Islam; and second, its function as points of agreement between our peoples to realize political unity of the country (Madjid, Cita-Cita, 1999, pp. 56-57). According to Nurcholish, Muslims' cooperation with people of other religions spawned treaties and agreements, and Muslims should be "faithful to the agreement, if they have made binding agreement" (Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 177). Subsequently, "it is the duty of Muslims to live according to the teachings of their religion, as it is their legitimate right guaranteed by the agreements, and it is their religious obligation as well to invite all groups to carry out collectively the agreements (Madjid, Cita-Cita, 1999, p. 93).

3. Being tolerant by not contending with others and not deviding religions

As a consequence of the recognition of the unity of teaching, prophethood, and nationhood of religions, according to Nurcholish, believers are forbidden to be at odds with fellow believers from other religions because wisdom teachings given to all nations come from the same primary source, namely God (Madjid, The Qur'anic Principles, 2001, p. 4). Based on the teaching of tolerance, Quran teaches that Muslims must respect all

followers of scripture (Madjid, Ensiklopedi, 2006, p. 3448). One form of tolerance is that they are forbidden to engage in unhealthy disagreement with the People of the Book unless they act aggressively (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 193). This is confirmed by Q.S. al-‘Ankabût (29): 46 :

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)."

Based on the principle of religious unity, according to Nurcholish, to divide religions into divisive sects and denominations is in defiance of the teachings of God, and those who engage in such act are considered as parts of pagans because they incorrectly sanctify their own thinking as right thinking as affirmed in Q.S. al-Rûm (30): 30-32.

So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not. Turn ye back in repentance to Him, and fear Him: establish regular prayers, and be not ye among those who join gods with Allah, Those who split up their Religion, and become (mere) sects, each party rejoicing in that which is with itself!

4. Not Imposing Religion to Others and Acknowledging Freedom of Religions

Implication of the belief that religions can actually deliver its adherents to salvation is necessity to respect religions

and not to impose one religion to others. The reason is that imposition of religion is a tyrannical action (*tughyân*) and its perpetrators belong to tyrants (*tâghût*). The acts are completely on the contrary to teachings of true religions. The idea is supported by Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 256 (Madjid, *The Qur'anic Principles*, 2001, pp. 6-7). Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.

The verse, according to Nurcholish, illustrates that eventhough Muslims are obliged to bring as many people into path of Allah, they are not allowed to do it in wrong way, that is, to force others to accept truth (Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin*, 2005, p. 196). The verse of Q.S. al-Baqarah (2): 256, according to Nurcholish, is in line with Q.S. Yûnus (10): 99, as follows:

If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed,
all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind,
against their will, to believe!

According to Nurcholish, the reason of why there is no permission to impose a religion is that human beings are already capable of and should be given freedom to differentiate and choose for themselves what is right and what is wrong. In other words, humans are now considered as adults so that they can determine their own ways of life and does not need further to be imposed like immature children. Therefore, God has believed in human capacities, has no longer sent a messenger or messengers to teach them about the truth. Rows of prophets and apostles had been closed with the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. as the last apostle. The Prophet Muhammad brought the basics of doctrine that could constantly be developed

for all times and places. For this reason, now it is up to humans who have “grown up” to creatively capture messages of the principal teachings of the Prophet and to make them work in their real life (Madjid, Pintu- Pintu, 1994, p. 218).

The verse above, according to Nurcholish, also confirmed that tyrannical life (an attitude “over the limit,” said A. Hassan) is opposite of the life of faith in God. That means that a way of life based on faith in God is opposite of coercion. Conversely, faith in God as a way of life generates an attitude of moderation or middle attitude (‘*adl* or *wasat* and so on) and without extremities (al *ghuluww*). Faith in God, as opposed to tyrannical attitude, generates an attitude that always provides a space for common sense consideration to make an honest and fair assessment of any issues (Madjid, Pintu-Pintu, 1994, pp. 218-219).

5. Avoiding The Attitude of Absolutism and Exclusivism, and Prioritizing The Attitude of Internal Relativism

An attitude that can undermine pluralist beliefs is an attitude absolutism. Nurcholish discussed the absolutism in the context of discussion on *ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*. According to him, absolutism is an attitude that should be avoided by the believers in order to realize *ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*. Reason to ban absolutism is “just in case they were better than ourselves.” The view is based on Q.S. *al-Hujurât* (49): 9-13 (Madjid, *Ensiklopedi*, 2006, p. 2698). In the explanation of Nurcholish, the verses give practical guidance on how to maintain brotherhood among the believers. Nurcholish provided a complete explanation as below:

1. All believers are brothers one another.

2. However, the believers are not all the same in all respects. The differences may give rise to disputes, in which peace must always be sought.
3. Peace between two rival groups is in the framework of piety to Allah.
4. And with the piety God will bestow His grace which underlies spirit of brotherhood.
5. Then there should be mutual respect, by not degrading another group.
6. Each group should be humble enough to admit the possibility of wrong doing, and on the contrary, of other group's good doing.
7. In line with that it is prohibited to insult fellow believers.
8. Also it is forbidden to ridicule each other, especially it relates to crime.
9. All who do not follow that are all wrongdoers.
10. Believers should avoid a lot of prejudices, because they can be nasty.
11. Also it is prohibited to find faults.
12. And also it is prohibited to do mudslinging (*ghībah*, back biting), that is to speak ill of each other when about whom is talked is not present in the talks.
13. Doing backbiting is like eating flesh of dead bodies of your own brother, because people whose ugliness are talked about, being not in place, are unable to defend themselves, let alone to fight. So backbiting is a double crime, a crime above crime.
14. Once again, we the faithful are called to always fear Allah, that is being aware of scrutiny of God who always present wherever we are, so that it is not proper to a believer to do anything that is not allowed by Him.

15. Piety to God produces guidance toward noble characters, so that God will forgive us and give us His grace.
16. Further, we are reminded that all mankind were created by God differently, because of differences of nations and tribes.
17. The design is in order that we do know each other with mutual respect (the broad meaning of Arab word ta'âruf).
18. We must not divide people into low and high because of hereditary considerations, such as nationality, ethnicity, and others.
19. It is because that in the sight of God, man of high or low is just based on level of piety that has been gained. Humans will not know and are not allowed to judge or measure levels of piety of neighbors. God is All-Knowing and All-Conscientious (Madjid, Masyarakat, 2000, pp. 31-32).

The verses above, according to Nurcholish, contains "basic teachings of brotherhood concept in Islam, completed with practical implementation guidance that is associated with a plurality of Muslims, and then completed with brotherhood of humanity" (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, pp. 174-175). The divine instructions in the verses confirm that for the sake of the fundamental fraternity, relationships among secondary different Muslim ideologies or behaviors (while in primary understanding and behavior of course they are the same) must not occur within the framework of such an absolutism attitude, such as "I must be true and others must be definitely wrong!" Instead, it should be within the framework of relativistic attitude, such an attitude of (as quoted from Imam Abû Hanîfah) "I am right but could be wrong; and others are wrong but could be right!" In "an ideological interaction" with fellow Muslims, what must be done is an attitude of "healthy skepticism", a backup attitude in mind and

readiness to admit the truth of others if indeed it is true and recognize that myself is wrong if it turns out wrong. It is not an easy matter because it requires a high level of sincerity and honesty while an average human tends to be controlled by his/her lust to feel right and want to win for him/herself. Thus, Islamic fraternity requires an open attitude among Muslims, as it was demonstrated well by the Salaf. Meanwhile, a closed attitude is main enemy of the principles of Islamic brotherhood (Madjid, Pintu-Pintu, 1994, pp. 239-240).

Furthermore, according to Nurcholish, opposite attitude of absolutism that leads to sectarianism and cultism is attitude of internal relativism. God's commandment "Let no one group degrade another group, as perhaps the degraded were better than the degraders" means the doctrine to apply principle of internal relativism without claim of absoluteness for myself and my own group. The attitude is basis of brotherhood among Muslims and humanities. Brotherhood is needed because it is impossible to eliminate differences among humans, including Muslims themselves. Among those who sincerely seek the truth, differences also can not be avoided. Such differences occur because of uncountable causes, such as level of personal ability, life experience, and socio-cultural background. Therefore, for Nurcholish, freedom of expression, of assembly, and of association in a community should always be kept, without any suspicion and hostility (Madjid, Masyarakat, 2000, pp. 41-42).

Internal relativism, according to Nurcholish, applies to theology as a science. As a science, theology is result of dialogue between Muslims and times and places and, therefore, is a form of legacy of challenge and answer to a form of social change in history. One's view of a religion of course will be recognized by

him/herself as the most appropriate and true view of religion. However, as an entity upon other entity, it is absurd to see both as identical and interchangeable. An understanding of a person or a group of a religion is not in itself worth the religion itself. This is even more true if a religion is believed to come only from God (revelation or heavenly religion) and is not a result of a historical and sociological process (Madjid, Pintu-Pintu, 1994, p. 242).

However, the attitude of internal relativism, according to Nurcholish, must be distinguished with relativistic tendencies in spirit of syncretism. Relativistic syncretism opens the door for entry of foreign ideologies without careful filter because it causes dullness to recognize truth from falsehood. Everything is seen as a soft gradation, of which its composition and parts can be exchanged with no serious consequences. The relativism as this kind would cause stumbled ethics. It would make a nearsighted eyes so that criteria of right and wrong would become blurred (Madjid, Cita-Cita, 1999, p. 88).

6. Being fair to different groups

According to Nurcholish, intergroup tension is a necessary part in any social interaction, both in community who share same religion as well as in diverse religious communities. Quran insists that it is unfair to generalize other communities, and it is an obligation of Muslims to cooperate with all those who are committed to improving quality of human life. The idea is confirmed by Q.S. Âli 'Imrân (3): 113-115; Q.S. al-Hujurât (49): 13; Q.S. al-Mumtahanah (60): 8-9; dan Q.S. al-Rûm (30): 22 (Madjid, Mencari Akar, 1999, pp. 111-112). The translation of Q.S. al-Mumtahanah (60): 8-9 follows:

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out, of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.

To explain Q.S. al-Mumtahanah (60): 8-9, Nurcholish quoted the interpretation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali as follows, "Even with unbelievers, unless they are rampant and out to destroy us and our Faith, we should deal kindly and equitably, as is shown by our holy Prophet's own example" (Ali, 1430 H, p. 1534).

It must be recognized, said Nurcholish, that relationship between Muslims and other religions is quite complicated (Madjid, Cita-Cita, 1999, pp. 62-64). Apart from the complexities, Muslims have showed attitudes based on the principles of equality and fairness. The attitude of justice to those non-Muslims, according to Nurcholish, got the evidence in Muslims' history. Nurcholish explained,... the fact that the entire Muslim world, except complex of Holy Land of Mecca-Medina, recognize important groups of non-Muslim minorities. The minorities are living proof of openness, mutual respect, and tolerance of Muslims since classical times to the present. Muslims, as evident from pure teachings of the religion, are "mediators" (Arabic: *wasit*; Indonesia: *wasit*) between various groups of mankind, and are expected to be just and fair witnesses in intergroup relations. This is what caused classical Muslims so open and inclusive, so that as political authorities they have behaved fairly upon other factions (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, pp. 190-191).

Furthermore, according to Nurcholish, the open policy implicated religious freedom in the Muslim world. Though not identical to those of the modern era, the principles of religious freedom in classical period are the same as they are today. In other words, it is not an exaggeration to say that freedom of religion in modern times is as consistent development of that existing in the classical period of Islam (Madjid, Islam, Doktrin, 2005, p. 193).

Toward Critical Pluralism

Notion of critical religious pluralism is what is reflected in attitudes of Nurcholish upon his own religion, Islam, and other religions. Nurcholish's critical attitude upon Islam related especially to dominant political thoughts of Muslims, or at least to be a tendency, in Indonesia. In the early 1970s Nurcholish's critics was against stagnation of political thoughts which did not give a room for political articulation of younger generation of Muslims especially outside of Islamic political parties. In the era appeared a popular slogan that had been later a marker of political thoughts of Nurcholish, namely "Islam yes, Islamic parties no." With the slogan, Nurcholish revealed the fact that Islamic political parties were not the only channel of aspirations of Muslims. In line with this fact, Nurcholish then built up his thoughts on Islamic aspirations in the context of Indonesian political life. According to him, Islamic aspiration is common good (justice and welfare) of all citizens of the nation of Indonesia, not only limited to Muslims. The thinking is also a basis for his criticism against ideas of Islamic state, which he consistently put forward up to the 1980s. The core idea is that Islam as a religion can not be retracted only as a state ideology though Muslims still can formulate an ideology of a state that is inspired and energized by teachings of Islam. State ideology

has rational and social dimension on the basis of mutual consent of citizens while Islam as a religion has individual spiritual-transcendental dimension.

As continuation of previous though, in the 1990's Nurcholish's criticism were against fundamentalist tendencies of Muslims in the context of industrial society. Religious fundamentalism which leads to cultic attitudes that are absolute and antisocial, for Nurcholish, is on the contrary to tawhîd doctrine which teaches openness, tolerance, and egalitarianism in social interaction.

Nurcholish's critical attitudes are not only addressed to Muslims' thoughts, but also to non- Muslims. In his some writings, Nurcholish criticized Christian history which showed a mythological and anti-knowledge tendency. Citing the explanation of Carl Sagan and Campbell, Nurcholish showed some tragic events that happened among Christian scientists. Among the events were murder of Hypatia (born 370 AD), a woman scholar, and burning of Alexandrian library on order of Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria. This was done because sciences were regarded paganism dangerous to Christians faiths. Another event is judgment of the Church against Galileo in 1616 because his view of universe was on the contrary to Biblical view. Nurcholish quoted Campbell's statements as below: The journey of the Church in part was indeed a history of struggle between science on the one hand, 1981 to Hawking, the struggle has been running about 15 centuries, since Archbishop Cyril ordered the burning of the Alexandrian library in the year 415, and in the year 529 ordered the closure of pagan schools (read: schools of science and Greek philosophy), especially the legacy of Academy of Plato, which he founded in the year 387 BC. Campbell said, 1

and 2 as well as the delay of science over a thousand years to reach maturity, not only for our own civilization (the West), but also for the whole world” (Campbell, h. 14).

Even Nurcholish's criticism against non-Islamic religions, particularly Jews and Christians, made some his colleagues at Paramadina University upset. They assumed that criticism—though scientific—is not necessary if it can offend other religions. A polemic of Nurcholish with Christian and gave birth to a long correspondence with Father Magnis Suseno was also regretted by some his colleagues. Father Magnis felt offended by Nurcholish's discussion on Christianity in a discussion in 1995 at University of Indonesia, referring to books that tarnish sacred value of Christ, like the work of Michael Baigent-Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (New York: Touchstone, 1991). The book mentioned that Jesus did not die on the cross as believed by Christians. Jesus married to Mary Magdalene and had children. The book also mentioned that the Gospel that exist today is result of 4th century AD, *al-Kitâb* whose manuscripts had been destroyed by earlier pagan emperor, Diocletianus. Another thing also regrettable was the description in *Religious Journey of 'Umrah and Hajj* (1997) which was offensive against faiths of Christians and Jews which ultimately had been eliminated at the time of publication. Kautsar Azhari Noer, a lecturer at State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta, expressed his exasperation, “Why does Cak Nur like talking bad against other religions. If (he prefers) pluralism, it should be taken for granted.”

Conclusions

The notion of pluralism proposed by Nurcholish based on verses of the Quran has differences with the notion

expressed by other thinkers. Pluralism according to Nurcholish is understood as a value system which looks positively at plural realities and acts also positively on the basis of the realities. Pluralism in Nurcholish's explanation includes notion of pluralism in many fields of studies: cosmological-ontological, social, cultural, political, and religious. However, the main point of Nurcholish is on fields related to human life, especially social, cultural, and religious.

Pluralism as defined by Nurcholish rests on his view on basic faiths in Islam, namely beliefs about God and human. Plural realities are implication of the oneness of God or *tawhîd*. When reality outside God is single, the fact will be aligned with the nature of God. It is logically impossible. Plurality in turn is in effect for human realities. Plurality of human realities in various dimensions (social, cultural, political, and religious) is God's will. To the will of God, human must submit and view it positively. This is in line with human nature itself which—despite its weaknesses and limitations— has positive potentials.

Two basic beliefs that become foundations of Nurcholish's concept of pluralism also have implications to uniqueness of his concept of religious pluralism. Religious plurality is a positive reality desired by God. However, this does not mean that truth of religions is same and equal. Religions are considered true when their exoteric and esoteric aspects are in line and in accordance with universal values that become the meeting points of all religions. The meeting point is the attitude of submission to the One God without allies (*islâm* and *tawhîd*). Another universal value which is also the meeting point of religions is human values, namely human moral obligation to do good because he/she must be accountable for all his/her actions. In the technical language of

Islam, the value of humanity is expressed by the term “righteous deeds and belief in the Day of Judgment.”

Two basic beliefs that become the foundation of the concept of pluralism also imply positive attitudes and actions to humanity. The most important attitude is internal relativism as opposed to absolutism and exclusivism. Internal relativism is an attitude that we do not sanctify what is considered correct by ourselves (in all aspects of human life, including religion). The attitude is accompanied by an open attitude to dialogue with others in order to jointly find the truth. The attitude is important because absolutism and exclusivism can encourage people to act tyrannically onto others. Meanwhile, to become tyrant can be categorized as rival of God. However, it is important to note that internal relativism is different with attitude to treat all religions alike (in a term called syncretic-relativism). In this context, Nurcholish proposed the notion that assumes that the truth believed by humans is an existential truth. The existential truth serves as a starting point to explore and discover constantly and openly the essential truths.

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