DISTINCT SECTS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INCLUSIVE-PLURALISTIC ISLAM

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Abstract:
The pluralities such as of race, of ethnic, of religion and of -ism are the God’s laws (sunnatullah) whose existence cannot be ignored. Accordingly, the existence of the sects, in regard to the history, is a part of religious pluralities. For that purposes, this article tries to emphasize the need for all people to be aware of the pluralities as well as the inclusive attitude to the existence of the pluralities. As a result, we are able to develop constructive dialogues in the society so that the existence of the sect will not lead to a bloody conflict but a blessing for the humanity.

Key words: dialog, distinct sects, inclusive-plurality, sunnatullah.

A. Introduction

It has always been God’s law (sunnatullah) that human beings all over the world are different from one another, in any aspects of life. History has also shown that in terms of religion, especially for Moslems, difference is very natural. Differences in Islam can be based on the different experience in the religious life,

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or different understandings on the one law-source, i.e. Al-Qur’an and Al-Hadits. Viewed from this, the diverging sects in Islam constitute a part of the pluralities whose existence which cannot be ignored. To face this phenomenon, the pluralistic-inclusive Islamic thoughts seem appropriate as the paradigm in living with Islam. The pluralistic-inclusive Islamic thoughts, has been said, offer a way of how Islam can answer the challenge of time and answer every social problems as manifestations of Islam as blessing to the world (rahmatan lil’alamin).¹

Considering the recent phenomenon which is contradictory to Islamic thoughts in handling the existence of diverging sects, this study tries to review what the inclusive and pluralistic Islamic thoughts offer in seeing it. With this inclusive-pluralistic perspective, hopefully we can find which way or attitude is actually suitable to the Islamic values in facing the differences. Therefore, it is a must for Moslems to make the plurality as a basis to behave, so that Islam can be truly the belief with rahmatan lil’alamin.

B. Distinct Sects as a Must

The first concept to be understood is that plurality does not uniquely belong to a certain nation or community only, because in reality there is no one community which is really homogenous or unitary, without any differences in it. Al-Qur’an itself strongly admit that plurality is a must, a destiny (taqdir) from Allah, from God the Almighty.² Plurality, then, is a sunnatullah that must exist in

²For example, in the Holy Qur’an, surah al-Hujarat 13 it is stated that “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)…” See Nurcholish Madjid, Islam
any community. We are aware that each person is a unique individual who lives together with the uniqueness of other individuals, so people share the life in diversity and each one is different from the other. This awareness can be the basis to develop inclusive and pluralistic attitude. This attitude does not merely admit the fact about the existence of diversities, but is more as an attitude to be “actively involved” in the pluralities.

Actually, if we look back at the history, pluralities is not a new phenomenon, as it has existed even since the time of the Prophet Muhammad saw (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), although it didn’t turn to conflict because the disciples can faithfully accept the rules and decisions taken by the Prophet. It was in the second century of Hijriyah calendar that the different opinions started to form in dispute among Moslems. Nevertheless, this difference was never in question of the oneness of God, the place of Prophet Muhammad as the final messenger and prophet, the certainty of the Judgment Day. Later, however, the difference grew and varied, so that the Moslems became separated in groups. Then emerged the groups such as Asy’ariyah, Maturidiyah, Mu’tazilah, and so on.

It is quite clear that the difference in tribes, nations, opinions, understanding, and even beliefs and religions, is a must and cannot be ignored.

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Remember that Al-Qur’an itself admits the existence of different religions, and there will never be, theologically, conformity between Islam and the other religions. Surely it also admits the difference of opinions within Islam, which often started only from the different ways in understanding the Al-Qur’an and Al-Hadits, and which later turned to be different “movements” or “distinct sects”. It is clear then, that Al-Qur’an also admits the existence of those “distinct sects” in terms of diversity which, theologically, without any fundamental discrepancy with, for example, “orthodoxy” or the “mainstream”. If this diversity is understood, every member of the community is hoped to behave accordingly so that before taking something into action they can consider what the background of the difference is.

It is necessary to realize, that the “distinct sects”, not to say the “deviating sects” do not only exist in Indonesia, but also in other countries. Why the “distinct sects” in Indonesia are closely related to Islam is because the majority of Indonesian people are Islam believers. In the United States, however, since the majority of its people are Christians, very often there appeared the

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\( ^6 \)For example, in the Holy Qur’an surah Yunus, verse 99, Allah states “and 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?”

\( ^7 \)As has been stated that “in order to mutually understand the God’s will, all the believers of Islam and Christian can cooperate positively. For the first step to create the cooperation, each part is expected to correct the wrong and mistaken image and impression about the other believers that may be in their hearts. The fundamental difference between these two religions is unwaived, but the dialogs between the two believers should not be aimed at the doctrinal-theological difference which always turn to dead-end. In order to achieve a better, wider understanding, the dialogs should focus on the similarities and shared concepts between the two religions. Among the similarities are the creation of civilized life which gives high respect to religious values in all aspects of human life.” See Alwi Shihab, Islam Inklusif: Meniju Sikap Terbuka dalam Beragama, (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), p. 117.

\( ^8 \)Compare, for example, between NU and Muhammadiyah which represent the “mainstream” with Darul Arqam, Islam Jamaah, “Gerakan Usrah”, tasawuf beliefs with their concept of wahdatul wujud, and the others which represent the “distinct sects”; theologically, all of them have no fundamental difference.
“distinct sects” who claimed themselves as the truest believers of Christianity, such as the People’s Temple sect headed by Jim Jones, who committed mass suicide with all his 900 followers in Guyana in 1978. Such “distinct sects” have also emerged in Japan and in other countries. Concerning with this, Martin has once stated that the appearance of many kinds of sects and movements, such as “mysticism” is not something uniquely related to the developing countries, even in the developed and modern countries such as the United States, this phenomenon is very protruding.

As a social phenomenon which emergence is very natural, we need to understand what the “distinct sects” are and why this group appeared, especially in the context of Indonesian people. Waryono noted that “the distinct groups” (gerakan sempalan) could be said as “sects”. Psychologically, a sect is a group of individuals who express their religious experience and thoughts which are different from the general religious experience and thoughts. Such a definition, according to Waryono, gives some understandings that first, a sect appears and emerges in a religious organization, second, a sect grows and develops as an inherent part of the religion, which wants to separate from the hegemony of well-established group, and third, a sect separates because they have a different belief or experience from what the majority have practiced so far.

This definition of “distinct sects” above seems close in meaning with that of Martin. According to Martin, objectively, the “distinct sects” are those

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groups who consider themselves truer and more genuine than the others. Usually they feel more confident and sure to the truth of their beliefs or opinions.\textsuperscript{12} Further, it is said that discussing about “distinct sects” cannot be separated from the concept of “orthodoxy” or “mainstream”. In this case, the “distinct sects” are those who separate or are deviant from orthodoxy in common, so that to understand which groups are the “distinct” we first should define which are the orthodox mainstream. In the case of Moslem community in Indonesia, according to Martin, the mainstream can be considered represented by the outstanding ulama organizations, MUI, Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah, and Syuriah NU.\textsuperscript{13}

Meanwhile, based of observation, there are some factors causing the emergence of “distinct sects”. According to Martin, in this modern era, everybody have more interactions with other people, but, unfortunately, this relationship is very narrow and brings no significant responsibility. Therefore, many people feel isolated and tend to feel that nobody can be trusted, because, on the one hand, the social control system with all its sanction is no more available, and on the other hand, people put their own individual interest over other priorities. In such situation, then, the emergence of religious movement can fill in the empty area due to the missing extended family community in the community.\textsuperscript{14} This is in line with what Waryono states, that first, a sect may raise in the group of people who experience the relatively same social alienation. Second, the existence of a sect is

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Martin van Bruinessen, op. cit,} p. 19.
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid,} p. 17.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid,} p. 25.
related to the crisis of life value, due to the lack of religion functions to answer the life problems and to give meanings to life itself.  

Further, Ridwan’s observation is also interesting to consider. In his opinion, first, the “distinct sects” in Islam usually appear from the people who don’t have sufficient Islamic background. Usually, they use the practical logics to give reasons to their group. Second, the “distinct sects” constitute a trend to rupture the tie of ukhuwah (brotherhood) in Moslem community by presenting counter Islamic symbols, so it can deceive those who don’t have enough knowledge about Islamic teachings. If this is the problem, it sure needs a revision and betterment to the teaching strategy of the “mainstream” groups, so that, for example, the Moslems community in general can obtain sufficient knowledge about Islam in order not to be trapped on practical logics.

C. Islamic Actions over the “Distinct Sects”

“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety, and fear Allah, for Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.” (Q.S. 5: 8).

The existence of “distinct sects” as a social phenomenon is a must and cannot be ignored. Therefore, the most important thing to consider now is how to behave regarding with this social problem, and what actions to take. Is that true, for example, that Islam allows or even suggests the violence to be taken to handle the difference, or on the contrary prohibit it. From the quoted verse, actually, it is

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clear that actions which put forward justice and peace is the main actions to be taken in Islam. There is no violence in Islam dictionary for such social phenomenon, instead there is always a request for peaceful solution. Therefore, dialogs or discussion should be put forward to gain the best result.

Another thing to consider is that Islam as a universal-humanistic religion is inclusively open to receive any kinds of correct and suitable thoughts wherever they come from and whoever wants to carry them out. In this case, universality of Islam covers all aspects of geography, climatology, race, ethnicity, culture, language, etc. Therefore, taking one concept or ideology blindly as the truth is an attitude which becomes jumud-exclusive or counter-productive and conflicting to development and advancement in Islam itself. On the contrary, inclusive attitude is a form of readiness to collaborate with and give respect to anybody without any barrier in ideology, religion, race, party, language, etc. It is necessary to know that the relationship between Islam and pluralism has a strong fundamental argumentation. It is based on the humanity and universality of Islam as human (fitrah) religion, or in other words, Islamic ideals is in line with the universal humanistic ideals. Pluralism has been strongly rooted in Moslems, awareness, that Islam is universal teachings given to all human beings all over the world. This means, the universal teachings of Islam is suitable to all nations with no limitation to the place, culture, religious institutions, ethnicity, and so on.17

Unfortunately, however, in facing the existence of different principles, especially the “distinct sects”, these pluralistic teachings faces dilemma. It is due

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to the fact that on the one hand, pluralism is an –ism which regards freedom of thinking, giving opinions, belief, or even to keep the faith, so that when facing the “distinct sects” which have contradictory vision, i.e. a group of people who have very exclusive opinion. As stated by Martin, objectively, the “distinct sects” viewed themselves as more correct than the other group. They are more confident and sure with their belief or concepts. Later it is said that the “distinct sects” are typically groups or movements who intentionally separate themselves from the "mainstream”, tend to be exclusive and often critical to the well-established ulama.\textsuperscript{18} They are exclusive (deny or get away from relationship with other people outside their groups) or gnostic (claim that they have a special teaching which is not understandable by lay persons) and they conduct bai’at system.\textsuperscript{19}

Along with that, Amin Abdullah once stated that the founders of sects in Moslem community, such as the sects of Khawarij, Syia’ah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and in Indonesia, like Islam Jama’ah, Dar al-Arqam, and the ustadz (Islamic teacher)s founding the usroh belief all possessed exclusive attitude. They were the sects who tried hard to with many reasons and argumentations (hujjah) to make their ijtihad (decision) the only truth.\textsuperscript{20} However, even if they are the exclusive sects, could it be true if violence was addressed to them, whereas they never physically attack the “mainstream” groups? If a more polite way is still open in the form of dialogs or discussion, why don’t we try to do that?

\textsuperscript{18}Martin van Bruinessen, \textit{op. cit}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 21.
As a reminder, in 1992, Martin once grouped some examples of the notorious “distinct sects” such as: Islam Jamaah, Ahmadiyah Qadian, DI/TII, Mujahidin’nya Warsidi (Lampung), Syi’ah, Baha’i, “Inkarus Sunnah”, Darul Arqam (Malaysia), Jamaah Imran, Usroh movement, the tasawuf beliefs with their concept of wahdatul wujud, Tarekat Mufarridiyah, and Bantaqiyah movement (Aceh). Meanwhile, some groups who have different religious belief emerged lately, and they are principally different from the “mainstream”, such as Yusman Roy (Malang), Lia Eden (Jakarta), Pondok Nabi (Bandung), Ardhi Hussein (the Cancer and Drugs Foundation Cahaya Alam) in Probolinggo, Madi group in Palu, Hari Kiamat (the Judgment Day) sect in Bandung, and Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah, which was founded by Ahmad Mushaddeq, in Bogor. This phenomenon shows that the movements or groups which are then categorized the “distinct sects” will always appear from time to time.

Further, will this always-appear phenomenon be sentenced as “diverging”, which implies to a violent action to stop them as the only way out? Isn’t it possible to find a more polite, more smooth, and peaceful way, such as inviting the “distinct sects” to have dialogs and discussions in order to find the shared principles, similarities, not to say asking them to return back to the right path. Perhaps, one thing to hold on tight, as pluralism is known indispensable, is that to create peace and tolerance, the dialog among different religions is highly supported, let alone a dialog with the “distinct sects” which are still from the one

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21Martin van Bruinessen, op. cit., p. 16.
23“Aliran Sesat dan Penyadaran”, loc. cit.
belief or religion (akidah), only different based on the different understanding of Al-Qur’an and Al-Hadits. Indeed, as stated before, the “distinct sects” are so exclusive that it is difficult to have them on the same table for a dialog, and even when there was a dialog, it turned out to a dead-end. Nevertheless, such a way should always be prioritized. On the contrary, the violence way out will never be a solution, even it can trigger to other problems.

The emergence of “distinct sects” in the society will be one after another. One problem has not yet been finished in one area, another problem already emerges in the other area. And it makes the heavy agenda of Islam struggle become heavier, especially in Indonesia. On the other hand, Moslem community is still burdened with the classical problems of overcoming the illiteracy, poverty, and underdevelopment. Finally we can almost say that it is difficult for the Moslems to formulate the development of Islam struggle in Indonesia, due to the endless internal conflict. So, according to Ridwan, taking a solution by stating a decree (fatwa) like those of MUI, to say that a sect of movement is diverging will not suffice anymore. Moreover, if the ulama institution states such a decree too often, there will be an impression that this institution is no more powerful in preventing the growth and spread of the “distinct sects”.²⁴

Therefore, as has been stated by Novrianto, the “mainstream” groups of Islam do not necessarily worry about the emergence of development of the “distinct sects”. The “mainstream” groups do not need to get away from the

²⁴M Ridwan Lubis, loc. cit.
“distinct sects” either, nor to state them as “diverging”, nor beating them violently. It seems that as long as the dialog between the orthodoxy or the “mainstream” and the “distinct sects” can be carried out, this phenomenon will still have positive function.

The lack of communication and the alienation of the “distinct sects” will instead bring harmful consequences. If the orthodox groups are not responsive or communicative, and only react by prohibiting (or just ignoring), the orthodox groups themselves can be one cause of the “extreme deviation”. Concerning with that, the quotation below is important to be examined:

Every individual is unique, a uniqueness which grows together with other people’s uniqueness, which in turn will clarify our uniqueness. We live together in diversity, and we are different in togetherness. One who cannot accept and give respect to other people’s uniqueness is the one who failed to understand himself and his fellows. Further, the process of dialog is necessary to be taken, because life is a process of continuing dialogs. In a dialog someone will be able to give and receive. To be able to perform a dialog maturely and productively, of course we need patience, experience, self confidence, and individual maturity.

In facing the “distinct sects”, it is necessary to consider an illustration by Ra’fat Sa’id. He stated that certain attitudes we need to do in facing the emergence of “distinct sects” are: first, be patient, because patience is the attitude shown by Rasulullah (the Prophet) and his disciples in facing all kinds of challenges. In this case, Rasulullah often asked his disciples to furnish themselves with patience. This order is often mentioned in the Holy Qur’an, for example: “Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) messengers of inflexible purpose; and

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be in no haste about the (unbelievers).” (Q.S. Al-Ahqaf: 35). Second, give correct explanation to those who does not yet know Rasulullah (the Prophet). This can be seen from the statement of Ja’far bin Abi Thalib, in front of the Najasy king, when one of the representative from Quraisy tribe wanted to humiliate the essence of teachings and described Rasulullah with bad characteristics which did not belong to him. Ja’far denied that accusation in a polite way. Third, reply rationally and objectively whatever statement question given by Islamic enemies. It can be done by explaining the magic contained in the Holy Al-Qur’an.27

Similarly, in facing the difference of the emergence of the “distinct sects”, we should not use the Al-Hadits which stated that “The Jews has separated into 71 groups, the Christian has broken into 72 groups, and my people (Islam) will be splitted into 73 groups, all will be in hell except one...” to be our guideline. If we hold this as the principle, mankind seems to only have two alternatives, be diverged or be blessed, and then, is he was diverged, he will be but in hell, and if he was blessed, he will be in heaven. If this is the case, as explained by Muhith, someone will easily list all the groups in Islam and stated them as diverged, except one, his very group to be the blessed. In other words, one can count the census of the inhabitants of heaven and hell much more earlier, i.e. when they are still living in this accelerative world. This, of course, is not appropriate, because it will not open any opportunities for a death of one sect and

the emergence of another sect. They forget that the phenomenon of emerging sects in Islam is a reality and cannot be denied by whomever in whatever way.  

The Hadits which states “my people will be grouped into 73 groups and all will be in hell except one. Which group is the one? (the disciples asked). The Prophet replied” “The one which is in accordance with me and my disciples” often influences the vision of the various groups. Therefore, if this Hadits is taken as the principle or guideline, someone will tend to blame all groups except his own groups. If this is the case, we can be sure that it will make the fragmenting more severe, and not create peace and tolerance. However, if this hadits about sects is still to be principle, the attitude towards the hadits should be like that exemplified by Muhammad Abduh. Here, as a person who set free himself from fanaticism, Muhammad ’Abduh explained the hadith as “all the 73 groups will be safe (not taken to the hell) as long as the believe in the main principles (ushul) in the religion, such as the oneness of God, the Muhammad saw as the final prophet and messenger, and the existence of Judgment Day.  

Peaceful, then, can take place if all religious organizations, especially the government, do not only give the label of “diverging” to the “distinct sects” but also approach by dialog and discussion to train and make conscious the founders and the disciples of the “distinct sects”. As a basis, the quoted verse below needs to be understood, or even taken into heart:

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29 M. Quraish Shihab, op. cit, pp. 362-163.  
31 “Aliran Sesat dan Penyadaran”, loc. cit.
“It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah’s) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment)…” (Q. S. 3: 159).

D. Conclusion

If the values of plurality and inclusiveness are taken by whoever from whichever party, or by groups with whatever belief, to act and interact in the context of community, what will happen is, of course, the culture of giving respect to one another, tolerance, creating peaceful condition, without necessarily any violence action, no problems with the differences, and there are always dynamic dialogs between social groups. This is actually the essence of Islamic teachings, the religion which speak about the value of justice, peace, and universal religion. In this way, for the Moslem believers, there is no problem with the “distinct sects”, because these sects are not totally different from that who holds a different religion. The problem is how the culture of dialog can be given priorities or held out to find the best solution. We can be sure that, dialog or “arguing” in the constructive context is part of Islamic teachings for the “mainstream” groups. The case of a “distinct sect” Al Qiyadah Islamiyah perhaps can be taken as an example, that due to the smooth dialog and discussion with several leading figures from the “mainstream” groups, i.e. Head of PBNU, KH Said Agil Siradj; Head of MUI, H Amidhan; the former ambassador of RI in Egypt, Bachtiar Ali; a Moslem intellectual, Nazri Abdul Hamid; and some other leading figures, finally the leader and founder of this movement, Ahmad Moshaddeq, claimed himself guilty and returned to the right path by saying:
I deny my own statement to be the messenger and prophet of Allah. I state here now that I am just a human being, an ordinary man like you all. I believe that the only religion before Allah is Islam.\(^{32}\)

In this case we can say that the dialog taking place was part of the Islamic lesson given by the “mainstream” groups to take him back to the “right path”. And there was also a deep blessing that solution could be taken without necessarily triggering any new problems and successfully brought the leader of the “distinct sect” and his followers back to the “right path”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


