**SAMSUDIN & MUMUH MUHSIN ZAKARIA**

# Controversy of the Liberal-Islamic Thought about Pluralism of Religions in Indonesia

**ABSTRACT:** *To enter into the religious pluralism of thought, in which the Muslims need to do, is to reinterpret the teachings of Islam, so that the Muslims do not happen with the authoritarian attitudes that consider the most of uncorrect in understanding of Islam. The word of plural and pluralism means diversity and plurality. Thus, the notion of pluralism can be defined as an ideology that recognizes diversity in its various aspects, for example in understanding of religion, culture, and geography. This study tries to elaborate the controversy of the liberal-Islamic thought about pluralism of religions in Indonesia. By using the qualitative methods, especially the historical approach with descriptive analysis, this study concerns on the controversy of Islamic liberal thought in one hand; and, in other hand, its relevances to religious pluralism in Indonesian's social and political context. The findings show that pluralism of religions by liberal Islamic group that all religions with its variations and levels of different depths are the same as the road of religious. This opinion has caused controversy, because there is criticism and there were strongly rejected the idea of pluralism of the liberal Islam. As K.H. Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002) and MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) issued a "fatwa" that pluralism is unlawful, because it has a tendency considers all religions that difference could be reduced or avoided, if the same understanding of pluralism.*

**KEY WORDS**: *Controversial Issues; Liberal Islamic Thought; Understanding of Islam; Pluralism of Religions; Indonesian Islam.*

## INTRODUCTION

Most Muslims agree that God is One. But, the reality shows that the belief of monotheism has spawned a wide range of flow or schools of *kalam* (Islamic theology), *fiqh* (study of laws pertaining to ritual obligation), philosophy, mysticism, and political orientation (Rahman, 1979; and Halim ed., 2001). So, every adherents differ in varying degrees thoughts. Attitudes understand this distinction, which was developed in pluralism.

Respect for individual differences, understanding that is called "pluralism" (DeMott, 2013). This is to be developed, because in a pluralistic religion that religion no longer be enforced, but it should be marketed. Indeed, almost a priori, to market the commodity to a voluntary consumer population without considering the wishes of those on the commodities they want. Because people now prefer religious production that

can be made in harmony, with community awareness and not aligned (Berger, 1991:172-173).

So, a pluralist society has the awareness of the need to bring the humanist understanding religions in accordance with the development of society. For that, M. Nurcholish Madjid (1992) has had the high attention towards pluralist ideas. He said that religion should be egalitarian (*cf* Madjid, 1992; and Muin, 2014). Such as Ernest Gellner (1992) also said that the central principle of Islam is pure and essentially egalitarian and scientific as well as helping to adapt to modern life (Gellner, 1992).

Egalitarianism, that has also been developed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) during his leadership in developing Madinah state, is a constitutional community (Haekal, 2015). Charter of Madinah generated through the social contract between the communities and the recognition of all members of society in the absence of their social background (*cf* Pribadi & Haryono, 2002:299; Walker, 2014; and Haekal, 2015).

This study tries to elaborate the controversy of the liberal-Islamic thought about pluralism of religions in Indonesia. By using the qualitative methods, especially the historical approach with descriptive analysis (Kartodirdjo, 1993; Kuntowijoyo, 2003; dan Sjamsuddin, 2007), this study concerns on the controversy of Islamic liberal thought in one hand; and, in other hand, its relevances to religious pluralism in Indonesian's social and political context.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

***About the Controversy of Islamic Liberal Thought on Religious Pluralism in Indonesia.*** To enter into the religious pluralism of thought, in which the Muslims need to do, is to reinterpret the teachings of Islam, so that the Muslims do not happen with the authoritarian attitudes that consider the most of uncorrect in understanding of Islam (Monecal, 2002). Therefore, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1989) presents a "face" of Islamic culture that has had characteristics typical of each region. For example, the Arab region, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, and Black Africa in the entire Islamic culture pattern of each region has had the diversities. This condition resembles the diversity in the universe that are mirror of Theopanic Almighty. The diversity of Islamic culture is also the spirituality of Islamic picture itself (Nasr, 1989:78).

Theologically, Islam is always present in a form that is never uniform, for example, in the forms of *Murjiah*, *Shia, Khawarijites, Mu'tazilites,* and the *Ahlu al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* or Islamic societies majority in the world (Halim ed., 2001; and Halverson, 2010). Later, in the scientific traditions have also a diversity on *fiqh* (study of laws pertaining to ritual obligation in Islam), for example in the form of schools, such as the Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hambali, and others (Lewis *et al.* eds., 1997; and Halim ed., 2001).

It is based on the tradition of *aktsaru min qaulayn* (over dual opinions), which means there is always the possibility of another truth beyond that we have.[1] Sociologically, Islam was also present with her diverse. Precisely, because it is said by Ahmed Akgunduz (2010), who said that sociologically Muslims could not speak about one Islam (*cf* Nasr, 1989:121-122; and Akgunduz, 2010).

There are lots of Islam in the modern world, such as: Islamic *ummah* of NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama* or Islamic Scholars Awakening); *Muhammadiyah* (Followers of Prophet Muhammad); FPI (*Front Pembela Islam* or Islamic Defender Front); *Gerakan Wahabi* (Wahabi's Movement); *Laskar Jihad* (Paramilitary Troops of Islamic Struggle); *Islam Liberal* (Islamic Liberal); and others in Indonesia. Also in the region of Indonesia, there are Islamic communities based on ethnic identities, such as Islamic Javanese, Sundanese, Malays, Makassar, Madura, Maluku, and others (Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta, 2003).

On this occasion, it seems necessary to present K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Hasyim Asy'ari's thoughts in a treatise entitled *Al-Risalah al-Nahy'an Muqata'at al-Arham wa al-Qarub wa*

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[1]See, for example, "Why We Need to Go Beyond Religion". Available online at: http://www.beyondreligion.com/su_about/needtogo.html [accessed in Bandung, Indonesia: July 3, 2017].

*al-Ihwan*, which cited also by M. Nurcholish Madjid ed. (1984); Ahmad Khoirul Fata & M. Ainun Najib (2014); and A. Ginanjar Sya'ban (2017), who stated that there was Imam Shafi'i and teachers have different opinions about a thousand problems. Also between Abu Hanifah and Imam Malik different opinions about thirteen thousand problems. But, there is no hostile, cursing each other, and there is no mutual stating that others as heretical matters (Madjid ed., 1984; Fata & Najib, 2014; and Sya'ban, 2017). So, again according to M. Nurcholish Madjid (1992) states, as follows:

> [...] imagined by us different thirteen thousand problems. Therefore, if we disagree with anyone, the numbers have not reached one issue with it is nothing compared to them. For that, we must respect the diversity of opinion or pluralism (Madjid, 1992).

Diversity or pluralism of Islam, according to Ulil Abshar Abdalla (2002), will lead reinterpretation on Islamic teachings in the context of cultural domain, as an Arabic context, Malay, Central Asia, and so on; but the forms of contextual are merely local culture and not obliged to follow it (Abdalla, 2002:4). This is imperative to translate Islam in accordance with the context of the place or regional itself, so that fellow Muslims, although different in cultural regions, but should respect each others (*cf* Rahman, 1979; Glassé, 2001; and Abdalla, 2002).

Understanding of pluralism in Islam like this that tries to pass along to the community through public service ads "Colorful Islam", when it graced the screen faces two largest national telivisions in Indonesia, namely RCTI, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia* or Indonesian Television Image Eagle; and SCTV, *Surya Citra Televisi* or Television Image Sun (Kitley, 2000). Issued by the KIUK (*Komunitas Islam Utan Kayu* or Islamic Community of Utan Kayu) in Jakarta, which is an office address or name of Secretariat of JIL, *Jaringan Islam Liberal* or Liberal Islamic Network (Miswar, 2015).

Intent "Colorful Islam", according to one of the inisiators who also as member of JIL, Luthfi Assyaukanie ed. (2002), is a phrase

that is found not only by selection of exotic mere words, but also by the arguments of *kalamiyyah* (Islamic theological matters), *fiqhhiyyah* (Islamic laws pertaining to ritual obligational matters), and *ijtimaiyyah* (sociological matters), which in reference when it created ad designs (Assyaukanie ed., 2002). In other words, this slogan is the result of reflections on the essential doctrines of Islam and the true history of Islam itself (al-Anshori, 2003:121).

Muslims should be able to distinguish those elements in it, which is the creation of Arab culture or cultural creations of local and which are not that should be done by Muslims is to seek universal values. Value is what becomes the basis for Islamic obligation practice. That must be noted that the value of kindness, wherever the place, is a true Islamic values as well. Including those in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Taoism, other sky religion, local belief systems, and so forth; and it could also be the truth of Islam in the Marxist philosophy (Assyaukanie ed., 2002). As stated by Ulil Abshar Abdalla (2002), following here:

> For that I do not look at the form, but the content. Islamic beliefs held by people in the name of Islam is a "garment". The main thing is not clothes, but the value hidden behind it. For that, very "ridiculous" people bicker over the different "clothes" is used, while forgetting that the core wear "dress" is the preservation of human dignity as being cultured.
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> All religions are clothes, tools, *wasilah*, tool toward the ultimate goal: the surrender to the Almighty. Every doctrine is intent on separating wall between "us" and "them", between *Hizbullah* (party of Allah) and *Hizbusyaithan* (class of Satan), a narrow separation between the two words, to separate groups of Western and non-Muslims with Muslims. It is a disease that will destroy the basic values of Islam itself (Abdalla, 2002:4).

Similarity with having God, it turns out almost all religions have elements, like: theology or divineness, *natural ghaib* or metaphysical universe, *insaniah* or humanity, liturgy, salvation, eschatology, and others. Then, all major religions were born equally in mainland Asia, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Western Asia; Zaratustra,

Brahmins, Buddhists, and Sikhs in Central and South Asia; and Sihinto, Confucianism, and Taoism in East Asia (Sou'yb, 1996:123-125).

On this basis, the liberal Islamic group seeks to defend the rights of non-Muslims (minorities) as one of its main ideas. They got bases historical argument, through a deal of *Piagam Madinah* (Madinah Charter) in the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him). In this charter, regulating social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims is openly. Historical model is, then, developed by a liberal Islam to build a discourse thinking liberatively between relations of equality in a democratic state (Kruzman, 2001:268-272).

In addition to the examples in the Medina Charter, it can also be seen in relation Prophet Muhammad SAW married with Shofiyah, a daughter of Huyai as an expert of the Jewry's holy book and come from Bani Quraiddhah in Khaibar. Although Shofiyah converted to Islam, but her family remained as a Jew to death. The marriage of two families reconcile different beliefs and quite harmonious interaction occured. So that, it can be concluded that the Prophet Muhammad SAW opened in association with non-Muslims (Yaqub, 2003:11). It is a proof that Prophet Muhammad SAW did not shut down with non-Muslims, where Judaism was a minority religion in Madinah. So, this step describes a form of protection against non-Muslims (Rahman, 1979; and Haekal, 2015).

Following a Renaissance in the West countries was not allowed nobody to oblige the believe in his/her religion, without should own. No one convicted of a particular religion or become atheistic, due to in a free and democratic country like in Western countries, the religion is purely private matter. The government should not be forced to lift a religion became the state religion, because when the domination of the Church in government, it did not work to protect individuals differ with the state religion (USI, 1991:9-10).

Ulil Abshar Abdalla (2002) also claimed that all religions are right to be in the way, a long way towards the Righteous. Thus, all religions are true to the variety, extent,

and degree of depth that varies the road of religious. All religions are also in the same extended family, the family of lovers of the road to truth is never ending. Then, the task should be entailed by the Muslims are competing in the road of religious (Abdalla, 2002:4).

Along the above opinion, religion pluraisme, according to Budi Munawar-Rachman ed. (2016) as one of the contributors for Islamic liberal group, is a belief that recognizes all religions are equally authentic, valid, correct, and has a value to change the character of the people to safety. It should be recognized that all religions are a good way of salvation, which was awarded the Lord, so that should be respected and there should be no discrimination (Munawar-Rachman ed., 2016:xii).

Thoughts of Ulil Abshar Abdalla (2002) and Budi Munawar-Rachman ed. (2016) are the result of their own *ijtihad* (individual interpretation and judgment), which is based on Islamic thought before, particularly expressed by Mukti Ali (1989) that all religions are true, who had been a discourse of the government for political purposes (Ali, 1989; Munhanif, 1996; Abdalla, 2002; and Munawar-Rachman ed., 2016). But that opinion is received sharp criticism from some people that think its discourse is not widely used as a public discourse again, both by government and by Islamic intellectuals.

Liberal Islamic thinking described above caused controversy, as it gets refusal explicitly that pluralism is banned, just as MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Indonesian Ulema Council) issued a *fatwa* (advice on religious matters) that secularism, liberalism, and pluralism are unclean, because pluralism especially has a tendency considers that all religions are equal and true, but received a plurality or distinctness (MUI, 2005).

Furthermore, as firmly with the MUI's *fatwa* is the opinion of K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002). According to him, pluralism developed by Islamic thinkers, who present Islam in some local historical context and, as the context of Malay, Arab, African, and other countries, this shows the lack of clarity and tends to obscure Islam itself (Da'i, 2002). Because of Islamic liberal

thinkers, Islamic *ummah* (society) and people will canalize Islam in a particular context is wrong, Islam was present with clear guidelines treatise and real be queathed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) to the Muslims, namely *Al-Qur'an* (holy book in Islam) and *Al-Sunnah* (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad SAW). K.H. Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002), then, states as follows:

> [...] if the *Qur'an* and *Hadith Rasulullah* inherited to create perception or create many different means the same as accusing the Prophet unfinished convey his message. Because Islam is delivered through the Prophet was already perfect. As affirmed at the valedictory moment Farewell Pilgrimage, when people cling to the explanation of it will not be mistaken, because there is no Islam as such and Islam (Da'i, 2002:44).

Furthermore, if Islam is very much influenced by the social, political, and cultural context, then, at some point could also emerge an understanding that prayer is Arabic culture, so that it does not being followed. Even, perhaps a time will anyone say what is the need pilgrimage to Mecca, because it just Arabic culture, and why Muslims do not make any *Kaaba* in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia, for example? (cited in Firdauis, 2002). So, pluralism would obscure the understanding of Islam, what more if not doing clear restrictions on the criteria of pluralism (Benda-Beckmann, 2002).

K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002) admits to a certain extent of pluralism. As the differences that occur between NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama* or Islamic Scholars Awakening), *Muhammadiyah* (organization of Prophet Muhammad followers), PERSIS (*Persatuan Islam* or Islamic Unity), HTI (*Hizbut Tahir Indonesia* or Party of Indonesian Liberation), MMI (*Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* or Indonesian Council for Defenders of the Faith), and FPI (*Front Pembela Islam* or Islamic Defenders Front) are only *furuiyah* or branch matters and not essential, so that not different in the main principles of Islam, such as in the field of sound belief and both use the *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Hadith* as the basis (Da'i, 2002).

Any differences to the millions are not a problem, during the same and basically sound belief in the *Al-Qur'an* (holy book in Islam) and *Al-Hadith* (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad SAW). So, for many Islam scholars, pluralism is allowed only on the issue of *furuiyyah*, while the problem of the main principles remain not allowed (*cf* Rahman, 1979; Da'i, 2002; and Haekal, 2015).

When the concept of pluralism concerning the main principles of Islam, would obscure the understanding of Islam was perfect and universal, this pluralism also leads to a relativistic understanding. Due to unclear distinction between truth and untruth, so that the truth will be changed to apostasy, heresy becomes the truth, confidence will be doubt, doubt be a belief, and finally that *haq* or truth would be vanity or otherwise (Armas, 2003:xvi).

So, finally thought pluralism into understanding of *madzhab* (school of thought) is "abstention" for the entire proofing familiarize Islam, which causes neutral to the truth. Worse yet entered on an eviction understanding that atheism is the authority of God by the domination of human passion as well as pluralism, the opinion will arise religions who believe that all religions are good and right (Isma'iel, 2002:25; and al-Anshori, 2003:99). So, unfamiliarity pluralism could eventually move to the extreme atheists, who reject all the truth of God; and this can accept all the truth of all religions.

Though of Islam is a religion that believes in one God (monotheism), one religion, and not colorful. Diversity is her Islamic followers, due to differences in race, skin, culture, and so on are social reality, but the most precious in the sight of God is the most pious to Allah. In this context, Fauzan al-Anshori (2003) said as follows:

> Therefore, there is not reason to recognize the existence of God or considers that all religions are true. When you understand that developing countries will undermine the most fundamental Islam, i.e. Islamic monotheism joints (al-Anshori, 2003:25).

It is understanding to said that there is no authority of God in human life; or commonly

called "atheist" was influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, as cited by Adnin Armas (2003), where they explain that in the life of this world needs to do emptying of spiritual values and religion (Armas, 2003:24). Then, science will develop and progress if world emptied of religious traditions, because of the power of religion (unseen) will limit the exploitation of natural humans in performing optimally. Adnin Armas (2003), again, explains in the context to criticize the pluralism in religion, as follows:

> So if you want to advance, religious teachings should be eliminated, because it would limit the role of man/woman in the world who is not a holy etentitas. Then, this concern relative pluralism of thought that could lead to abandon their religious beliefs and his/her God (Armas, 2003:25).

Then, it is also understanding that all religions are good and right. According to K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002), this clearly violates the *Al-Qur'an*, chapter *Ali Imran*, verses 19 and 85, that states that verily, Allah blessed religion is Islam, and whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it once at this time will not be accepted (the religion) thereof, and in the hereafter, he/she is among those who lose (*cf* Depag RI, 1983; and Da'i, 2002).

So, Islam never teaches must recognize all religions are the same, it remains the single absolute truth, there cannot be two. God could not have lowered some religious truths with different teachings, but it should not be saying that only he/she would go to heaven and others will go to hell (Da'i, 2002:205). Furthermore, K.H. Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002) criticizes pertaining on the pluralism in religion, as follows:

> [...] it is mistaken as an excuse to make pluralism tolerance toward religions. This is a mistake, because the tolerance should not be sacrificing the basic principles of the Islamic faith. For that, Islam teaches tolerance, giving rights to others to different beliefs. So, if there is a question whether the belief other than Islam does? I will answer astray. So, all beliefs outside of Islam is misguided, if they remain with the misguided belief, it was right he/she should be rewarded, that is tolerance. So, if the meaning of tolerance

justify their beliefs were never propogated in Islam (Da'i, 2002:44).

On the basis that, there is no tolerance for Muslims in the belief system of the truth of Islam, even if it is permissible, but, according to K.H. Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002), in certain things are prohibited, including the marriage between Muslim women with unbelievers, although Muslim men are allowed to marry a gentile women on the condition of women of *Ahli Kitab* or monotheism religions like Christian and Jewish, but not for the *musyrikin* (people who not belief in One God). Moreover, when Muslim women married to men infidels, it is prohibited. If there are opinions that allow mating religious differences between Muslim women with male infidel is a mistake, because obviously stated in the *Al-Qur'an* (Da'i, 2002; and Firdauis, 2002).

Among Islamic scholars are not disagreement about the illicit nature of a Muslim woman married to a man of non-Muslims, regardless of their religions, whether Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian. As long as the man did not embrace to Islam, it is forbidden to marry a Muslim woman. It's never been exemplified by Umar bin Khatab, who rejected and not kosher wedding male of non-Muslim with a female Muslim (Rahman, 1979; and Zeitman & Elsanousi eds., 2007). In this context, Syamsul Bahri Isma'iel (2002) states as follows:

> So ask separated Hanzalah bin Bishar about married to female infidel, it is based on the *Al-Qur'an,* chapter *Mutahanah*, verse 10 that: "O people of faith when it comes to emigrate to you women of faith, then you should test (faith) Allah knows them about their faith. And if you already know that they (really) believers. Then, do not return them to their (husbands) of disbelievers. They are not lawful for the disbelievers and infidels was not *halal* or allowed well for them" (cited in Isma'iel, 2002:25).

All attempts to relativize religious pluralism and the teachings of Islam, which led to doubts about the truth of Islam, it is the influence of Orientalists and Christian missionaries. As conducted by *Pastor* (Priest) Suradi, in an interview with a magazine of *Gatra* in Jakarta,

edition of 20 March 2001, he stated that the *Al-Qur'an* (holy book in Islam) is not a revelation; and this continued by liberal thinkers, such as Muhammad Arkoun (1994 and 2002), who tried to criticize the existence of the *Al-Qur'an* (*Gatra*, 20/3/2001; Arkoun, 1994 and 2002; and Armas, 2003:61).

Muhammad Arkoun (1994 and 2002)'s thoughts proved to be very influenced by the historical experience of the Christian West. In his opinion, if Muslims wanted to get out of intellectual stagnation, then, they should follow Western societies that have made significant changes since the 16th century AD (*Anno Domini*). Western thinking has made a great revolution by providing a large part of the reason, even dare to put the above scripture. Instead of Muslims failed to make the revolutionary process like that and still be under control of Medieval Islam age alike (Arkoun, 1994 and 2002). That is why Muhammad Arkoun, according to Adnin Armas (2003), then spares Muslim scholars who do not want to follow the Christians Western (Armas, 2003:71).

The pluralistic tradition of thought developed in the Western world by Leonard Binder (1988) is a good idea, but it is not a practical program (*cf* Binder, 1988; and Piscatori ed., 2000). So, the doctrine of pluralism often mixed between who reject pluralism and acceptance, while they use the same approach to pluralism. Therefore, it should be possible to be used by certain groups for their own interests, because of practical criteria and the fact of pluralism are not clear (Armas, 2003).

Criticism of pluralism above and dissent submitted by liberal Islamic groups, and figures who reject it, attributed to differences in understanding and grasp the essence of pluralism. According to Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif (2009), as cited also by Budi Munawar-Rachman ed. (2016), that the meaning of pluralism is not only each other, but rather implicitly to exchange the values of civilization, to give and receive pluralism or plurality (Ma'arif, 2009; and Munawar-Rachman ed., 2016).

But many misunderstood by certain people, as expressed by Ulil Abshar Abdalla (2002) and Budi Munawar-Rachman ed. (2016) were over, that pluralism was regarded that all religions are valid and authentics. In this context, again Budi Munawar-Rachman ed. (2016) said that, of course, any body understands that kind of messed up and with that opinion, people should cross convert (*cf* Abdalla, 2002; and Munawar-Rachman ed., 2016:187).

Furthermore, according to Azyumardi Azra (2005), pluralism is acknowledged in the life of society and nation-state; there are not only Muslims, but there are people of other religions. It must be recognized that every religion, by its each followers, has had the same rights to existence, so that must be built is a feeling of mutual respect, but not syncretism. If anyone considered that accepting religious pluralism means doing syncretism, then, the view is as chaotic existence (Azra, 2005).

Accepting pluralism, according to Djohan Effendi (1989), had started out from the assumption that religions are basically the same; and, therefore, pluralism is needed to address the reality of a pluralistic society (Effendi, 1989). It is necessary to be plural, i.e. accept and appreciate. This is an essential message of pluralism also to accept differences that occur in diverse communities, not equate all religions (*cf* Effendi, 1989; Effendy, 2001; and Muzakki, 2007).

M. Quraish Shihab (1992) has also accentuated that pluralism is to appreciate and recognize the different groups, as in the teachings of Islam said, as follows:

> *O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes, that is in order ye may know each others, and do not despise each others. Verily, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious among you* (cited in Depag RI, 1983; Shihab, 1992; Kruzman, 2001:238; and Munawar-Rachman ed., 2016:1057).

Opinion of Islamic leaders in the top of Indonesia related to the pluralism, starting with Djohan Effendi (1989); M. Quraish Shihab (1992); Azyumardi Azra (2005); and Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif (2009), all of them considered a senior figure and often to be

contributors to liberal Islam, but they have had a different meaning on "pluralism", when compared to liberal Muslim figures' activists ownself. They all agreed to reject the same for all religions, since pluralism was not equalize for all religions, but appreciate the differences (*cf* Effendi, 1989; Shihab, 1992; Azra, 2005; and Ma'arif, 2009).

However, understanding the pluralism, as described by Islamic top figures in Indonesia, there would be no controversy about the pluralism, until MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Indonesian Ulema Council) issued a *fatwa* (advice on religious matters), and K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Atiyan Ali M. Da'i (2002) has explicitly expressed the opposition, it has been giving rise to prolonged debate in the Islamic community in Indonesia, since the 2000s to the present time.

**CONCLUSION**

The differences of opinion on Islamic liberal thought pluralism is motivated by differences in understanding the meaning of pluralism, especially from JIL (*Jaringan Islam Liberal* or Liberal Islamic Network) that considers pluralism is a belief to recognize that all religions are equally authentic, valid, correct, and has a value to change the character of the people to safety. Then, according to JIL, all religions are right to be in the way, a long way towards the Righteous. Thus, all religions are true to the variety, levels, and the levels of different depths in the road of religious.

Understanding of Islamic liberal pluralism, as a school of thought in Islam, then generate a strong reaction from K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Atiyan Ali M. Da'i in 2002, and also *fatwa* or advice on religious matters from MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Indonesian Ulema Council) in Jakarta, which lead to criticize the relativism and syncretism concepts, so there is no absolute truth. As its implication, it could even cause the process of religion conversion, or merging and mixing system of beliefs of different religions.

The differences could be reduced or avoided, if the same understanding on pluralism. If the substance of pluralism is mutual understanding otherness or plural,

not to equate all religions and would survive in the afterlife, so that it will not be raised concerns by some Indonesian Muslims, who were emerging worries on relativism and syncretism concepts in Islamic religion affairs.[2]

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[2]**Statement:** We, hereby, declare that this article is our original academic work, so that it is not product of plagiarism, due to all sources used and cited in the analysis are showed clearly and available in the References. This article is also not submitted, reviewed, and published yet in other scholarly journals.

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