

# *Abdurrahman Wahid's Interpretation of Islam As A Religion of Grace To The Universe of The Nature*

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**Abstract** – Textually, Surah al-Anbiya' verse 107 states that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to the universe. The commentators have different interpretations, especially in the classical and modern periods. Most classical commentators interpret the word grace in verse as the existence of the Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, in the modern period, many interpret the word grace in verse as the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad. Abdurrahman Wahid interpreted the word "rahmat" as a brotherhood. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a carrier of brotherhood for all humankind. Therefore, this research aims to find out the implications of Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation and the implications of his interpretation. The results of this study are; first, Abdurrahman Wahid did not interpret the sentence "*rahmatan lil' 'a>lamin*" as affection, but he interpreted "I have not sent you, Muhammad, except to carry out a mission of universal brotherhood". This interpretation happens because Abdurrahman Wahid interprets grace in verse following the primary word, which comes from the mother's "womb". Therefore, it implies having the meaning of brotherhood, and secondly, it has implications for people who respect plurality and encourage interfaith dialogue.

**Keywords** - Abdurrahman Wahid, Brotherhood, Interpretation of Rahmat lil 'Alamin,

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that is quite diverse in the religious beliefs of its population. There are at least six beliefs recognized by the Indonesian government, including Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.(*Agama*, no date) Besides that, there are also ancestral beliefs that the Indonesian government has not ratified; all elements of these beliefs blend into one package of social interaction, be it through economics or politics.

This diversity is very vulnerable to breaking if there is no good communication between believers; sincere acknowledgement of the differences in other people's beliefs becomes the foundation of religious harmony. Violence does not happen instantly. Everything starts from intolerance, namely hatred of those who are different, then moves to radicalism against differences. And an even more extreme act is terrorism, fighting against those who are different.

The division of society occurs not only between religious communities but also within their intra-religious communities. Before independence, Muslims were united in expelling the invaders, working hand in hand in the revolutionary movement, and realizing the ideals of independence. This is a different story after independence, after colonialism as a common enemy left Indonesia. The Muslims were divided into two camps. The first camp wants Indonesia to become an Islamic state and demands that Islam is the state ideology. The second camp is adamant in its stance that Indonesia is ideologically separate from any religion, including Islam in its formal form.

According to Abdurrahman Wahid, democracy is the most suitable at this time for Indonesia. The reason because there are no valid and unbiased arguments in Islamic religious sources that the state must be in a theocratic form. Furthermore, the fact that Indonesian society is heterogeneous does not the same as Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which consist of a homogeneous Muslim population, because democracy requires a climate of freedom of expression, equal rights for every citizen and equality of citizens before the law (the rule of law.(Wahid, 2006) Therefore, this study aims to find out how Gus Dur's interpretation of Surat al-Anbiya' number 107 and find out the implications of his interpretation..

## **II. BIOGRAPHY OF ABDURRAHMAN WAHID**

Abdurrahman Wahid, known by the nickname "Gus Dur". His full name is Abdurrahman ad-Dhakhil. <sup>1</sup>He was born in Denanyar Jombang, East Java, to be precise at the Pondok Pesantren Denanyar Jombang on 7th of September 1940.(Barton, 2016)

Gus Dur's elementary school was in Jakarta.(Johari, 2019) Then, he continued his junior high school education in Yogyakarta. He lives at the residence of his father's friend, Kyai Junaidi, who is one of the scholars in the circle of "Majlis Tarjih" or "Muhammadiyah Advisory Council". Gus Dur also ever studied three times a week at the Al-Munawwir Krapyak Islamic Boarding School under the care of KH Ali Maksum, who is famous for being egalitarian. He introduced three traditions at once in Yogyakarta, namely general education, Muhammadiyah family and "pesantren" life. This situation made him accustomed to dealing with various kinds of plurality, both the plurality of cultural cultures and the plurality of thoughts.(Johari, 2019)

In 1963 Gus Dur received a scholarship to continue his studies at al-Azhar, Cairo, Egypt. After completing high school in Indonesia,(*Abdurrahman Wahid*, no date) While in Cairo, Abdurrahman often visited the American University of Cairo library, the French library and other libraries. He also has a busy life in the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) organization in the Middle East and works at the Indonesian Embassy.(Barton, 2016)

The number of activities outside the campus resulted in the fall of Gus Dur's academic scores, and he was declared an academic failure. Therefore, in 1966 he was offered a scholarship in Iraq, to be precise, at the University of Baghdad and graduated with a final study on the history of Islam in Indonesia. Upon his return from Baghdad in mid-1972, Gus Dur became a lecturer at Hasyim Asy'ari University and often became a resource person at various forums. Until entering 1978, Gus Dur became the National Syuriah Council.(Johari, 2019)

In 1984 Gus Dur was elected as deputy chairman of PBNU, accompanying Achmad Sidik in the 27th NU Congress in Situbondo, to be precise, at the Salafiah Syafiiyah Sukorejo Islamic Boarding School.(Johari, 2019) Then, he was re-elected at the NU Congress on 29th November 1989 in the election of the chairman of the PBNU Tanfidziyah period 1989-1994. For the first time in the history of NU as of this writing (2020) a person was elected chairman for the second time in a row. Gus Dur was re-elected at the 29th Congress in Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, West Java, for the period 1994-1999.(Shanda, 2010)

Gus Dur was also active in various organizations, including the Democracy Forum (FORDEM). This forum was formed in Cibereum Village, Bogor, West Java, on 16-17 March 1991, through an agreement called the "Cibereum I Consensus".(Gunawan, 2018)

During President Soeharto, political parties were limited to three, the Golkar Party, the PPP Party, and the PDI Party. After Suharto stepped down, the faucets of democracy were opened during the Habibie era. As a result, many parties sprang up, so Amien Rais formed the National Mandate Party (PAN), and Megawati formed the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), which was previously the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). After instigating several figures from NU, Gus Dur eventually formed the National Awakening Party (PKB). Gus Dur was reluctant to establish a party based on NU because he feared they would link religion with political parties. However, because there was no other choice because the NU mass had to be accommodated, and in order to prevent Golkar from winning, the PKB was finally declared, and Gus Dur took the position of chairman of the Advisory Council (Majlis Syuro).(Gunawan, 2018)

On Monday, 10th October 1999, the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) voted on the presidential election. Gus Dur's victory was a surprise because political observers favoured Habibie and Megawati. However, Habibie resigned from the

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<sup>1</sup> He is the 4th president of the Republic of Indonesia, the son of Wahid Hasyim, the first Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. At the same time, Wahid Hasyim is the son of Hasyim Asy'ari, the great ulama' and founder of Nahdlatul Ulama', the world's largest Islamic organisation.

presidential candidacy market after his accountability report (LPJ) was rejected by the DPR and votes from several Golkar factions led by Akbar Tanjung gave their votes to Gus Dur. Armed with the capital of the coalition with Amien Rais (PAN) and Golkar. Gus Dur was practically able to outperform Megawati in the presidential election and was sworn in on 20th October 1999. (Barton, 2016)

During his leadership, Gus Dur tried to carry out the reform mandate. President Gus Dur's concrete actions were more concerned with basic things in empowering the community and carrying out the democratization process, carrying out the ideals of independence as stated in the fifth precept of Pancasila, social justice for all people. In order to make this happen, Gus Dur, in March 2000, proposed the repeal of MPRS Decree No. XXIX/MPR/1966 prohibited Marxism-Leninism and apologized, on behalf of the heads of state and government to the PKI families who died (between 500 thousand-800 thousand) in the purge movement of the PKI by the New Order government. Furthermore, Gus Dur inaugurated the Confucian Religion as the sixth official religion in Indonesia, followed by lifting the ban on Chinese characters, displaying Chinese culture, and announcing that the celebration of Chinese New Year (Imlek) was made a national holiday. The following change is strengthening civil society-based governance by eliminating the dual function of ABRI and encouraging the military "go back to barracks", and using a persuasive approach to resolve conflicts in Papua and Aceh.(Gunawan, 2018)

Gus Dur's career in holding the leadership chair did not arrive until 2004 as it should have been. Because of his political manoeuvring and persistence in upholding the principles of reform, Gus Dur had lost the trust of his coalition. In October 2000, Amien Rais publicly opposed Gus Dur; Amien considered Gus Dur "to have lost his grip on how to govern" even when Amien spoke at one seminar "I will pay for my sins by the remaining chairman of the MPR" this explained that he had regrets pushing Gus Dur to become president the previous year and considers this a 'sin'.(Barton, 2016)

Gus Dur's mandate was revoked on Monday, July 23rd 2001, through the Special Session of the MPR, after a second memorandum was issued regarding Gus Dur's inability to become president. As with the allegations of corruption, this second charge does not have reliable evidence, and until now, the allegations of corruption have not been proven in court. Therefore, Gus Dur called his removal only a political fallout, not a constitutional one.(Gunawan, 2018)

After falling from the presidency, Gus Dur lived his life as a respected figure. His name is kept clean, and he is still loved by society. Gus Dur's activities were still friendly, welcoming journalists, lectures around the Islamic boarding school and filling in discussion activities; after all, Gus Dur was still the nation's teacher; Emha Ainun Najib said, "back off, it won't reduce your degree Gus" hearing the suggestion, Gus Dur replied in a dark joke package "I just go forward and still be led, let alone backwards". What Cak Nun said was entirely true when Gus Dur died at 69 on Wednesday, December 30th 2009, at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital. Hundreds of thousands of people took him to his final resting place, not only from NU circles who felt lost. The whole of Indonesia also mourned his passing; condolences came from abroad. The New Year's celebration at Taman Impian Jaya Ancol changed the concept of the 2009 turn of the year celebration, initially "Explore Your Imagination" to "Peace Indonesia". All performers wore mourning clothes, and all the organizers wore black ribbons on their arms to signify mourning.

### **III. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID'S INTERPRETATION OF VERSE 107 OF SURAH AL-ANBIYA'.**

Gus Dur's interpretation of verse 107 of Surah Al-Anbiya' lies in three articles. The first article is "Islam and the orientation of the nation". He used this verse to reject the idea of formalizing Islamic teachings. He said further that "The grip of the formalist group in Islam is the verse: "you enter into Islam as a whole (udkhulu fi al-silmi kaffah)" (al-Baqarah: 208). If you surrender to God, do it seriously and not half-hearted. The formalists interpret the word 'al-silmi' here to mean Islam as a system, says an Islamic system. However, this interpretation only gained a small number of followers, while most Muslims (especially Indonesian scholars) held Islam as a protector. Our tolerance is demanded by the holy book that we believe in, that Islam is the protector of all people, including non-Muslims. This is following another verse which reads, "I have not sent you except to connect the ties of brotherhood with fellow human beings (wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan li al-alamin)" (Surah Al-Anbiya':107). The commentators interpret al-'alamin with mere human beings and not all creatures in this world".(Wahid, 2006)

The second article is entitled "Islam: Ethical Struggle or Ideological?" Gus Dur explained that Islam if misinterpreted, would breed extremism and terrorist movements and not produce moderate voices. It is Islam that carries the message of eternal brotherhood between mankind. Gus Dur further explained: "The Qur'an says, Prophet Muhammad was sent nothing but to carry the mandate of brotherhood in life (wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan li al-alamin)" (Surah Al-Anbiya':107). The word "grace" in verse comes from the mother's "womb"; thus, all humans are brothers. The word "al-'alamin" here means all human beings, not all

living creatures, so the task of a prophet is a mission of brotherhood that is needed to maintain human integrity and avoid acts of violence; violence can only be done if Muslims are fought religiously and expelled from his residence.(Wahid, 2006)

In the third article entitled "Islam: Principals and Details" in this article, Gus Dur relies on this interpretation to break the arguments of groups supporting the formation of an Islamic state. He further explained: "Proponents of the 'Islamic state' always use the two words of Allah in the holy book the Qur'an as a basis for their thinking. On the one hand, they always argue that the scriptures state: 'Enter to Islam/peace as a whole (udkhulu fi al-silmi kaffah' (QS. Baqarah: 208) which clearly must be interpreted by adopting Islam should not be piecemeal, even though Islam also rejects the attitude of distinguishing a group of people from other groups. In this case, they can be declared 'affected' by the word of Allah in the holy book: 'Each group is very proud of what it has (*kullu hizbin bima ladhaihim farihun*)' (QS. Al- Baqarah: 53) by focusing on their 'property' they forget another word of Allah: "I have not sent you, O Muhammad, except as a carrier of brotherhood for mankind (*wa ma arsalna ka illa rahmatan li 'al-amin*)" (QS Al-Anbiya ':107) This is a noble principle, but the Muslims pay very little attention to it.(Wahid, 2006)

#### **IV. INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS**

The classical and medieval Mufassirs discussed this grace almost all the same way, namely the personification of the Prophet Muhammad as a form of God's love, as expressed by al-T{abari>, (al-T{abari, 2001) al-Ra>zi, (al-Ra>zi, 1981) Ibn Qayyim, (al-Jauziyah, 2007) and al-Zamakhshari>. (al-Zamakhshari>, 1998) The four interpretations are uniform in calling the manifestation of mercy the Prophet Muhammad as a person. This opinion is supported by narration from Ibn Abbas "God's love in this world and the Hereafter has been perfected for believers, and unbelievers are only freed from what befell the previous people". (al-T{abari, 2001) People who disbelieve continue to receive this form of grace as long as the Prophet Muhammad exists. beside them, or a city with them. (al-Ra>zi>, 1981)

The location of the point of difference is whether the scope of grace is only limited to Muslims or outside Islam. Classical and medieval commentators, such as Abu Zaid quoted by al-Tabariy, that the scope of mercy is only for Muslims; this is based on the word of Allah in the following verse, "and I don't understand, maybe it is a trial (postponing the arrival of torment). for you and pleasure until a time" (Surah Al-Anbiya': 111). (al-T{abari, 2001) In addition to Abu Zaid, al-Zamakhshari said that mercy is only for Muslims, like Allah when flowing abundant springs, some people use the flow of water for their crops and livelihoods, so they rejoice. Some other humans do overexploitation so that the water source is dry. The source of the spring is essentially a blessing and pleasure for the people around, but carelessness invites disaster for the owner. (al-Zamakhshari>, 1998)

In the modern era, the author finds that modern commentators have begun to enrich the meaning of this grace, not only as a personal identity for the Prophet Muhammad but also in the context of Islamic teachings or sharia which is also a blessing for the universe. Ibn' Ashur, in his commentary, states that Islamic law is a blessing because Islamic teachings touch all aspects of human life and are intended for all mankind. This is based on the letter Al-A'raf verses 156-157: "And my mercy covers all things. So, I will establish My mercy for those who are pious, those who pay zakat and those who believe in our verses. That is, those who follow the apostle, the Prophet who is umm". (Ibn 'Ashu>r, 1984)

Husain Taba'taba'iy stated that the form of mercy is manifested into two things, namely the religion conveyed and the life example of the Prophet Muhammad. The example of the Prophet Muhammad is undoubtedly different from that of the Prophet Muhammad in his context. If the Prophet Muhammad personally, this form of mercy only applies when the infidels are in the same city with the Prophet Muhammad to prevent the coming of torment in the world. At the same time, the example of the Prophet Muhammad documented through the books of Hadith will last forever until the end of the world. (T{aba't}aba'i, 1997) Meanwhile, Hamka explained Islam as a mercy for the universe in great detail, explained by him because Islamic law is a mercy for the universe. Among them are Islamic teachings that can survive at all times and places, teachings on the principle of freedom of thought, teachings on spiritual and physical balance, and teachings on equality of values in God's judgment, which distinguishes only piety and the principle of the rule of law. (Amrullah, no date)

The interpretation that is close to Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation is the interpretation of Sayyid Qut}ub, which states "the call for human unity transcends gender differences and civilizations of nations" and denial of the claim that "people who have high and noble social status feel they come from different origins. then the origin of the creation of slaves." However, there is still ambiguity when Qutub states that such unity must be within the scope of "one belief and the same social order". (Qut}ub, 1972)

The difference between Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation and the scholars of interpretation from classical to contemporary lies in the meaning of grace. Different from the scholars of interpretation who interpret it as "love" or as "unity" which still carries the frills of similarity in religion and belief, Gus Dur interprets grace as "derived from the root word "rahim" mother".(Wahid, 2006) Therefore, the implications of this meaning is a brotherhood, when juxtaposed with al-'alamin which is defined as all human beings beyond the boundaries of differences in beliefs, territories and cultures. The above verse is an affirmation that the mission of the Prophet Muhammad by Allah amid the earth is to bring a message of brotherhood to all. Why can this difference occur?

Based on the reference book of various Arabic dictionaries, namely, the book Lisan al-Arab the meaning of grace is basically to love, cherish and be gentle. Sometimes it means fortune, as in His words below:

"And if we feel for mankind a mercy (sustenance) from Us, then We take it away from him, surely he will become hopeless and ungrateful".(Bahasa, 2008)

According to the Arabic language, if the word grace is associated with humans, it means to love and tenderness of heart. If it is associated with Allah, it means His love, goodness, and fortune from Him. However, there are alternative derivations of text other than those mentioned above: namely (الرَّحْم) and (الرَّحِم), which have the meaning of the baby's place in the mother's womb. Examples in classical Arabic poetry are below:

أعاقر كذات رحم، أم غانم كمن يخيب

"Is it the same as a barren woman with a womb, or is it the same as a rich woman and a bankrupt?"(Faris, 1979)

Ibn Faris stated, "the relationship of the word 'womb' to the grace which has the meaning of 'love' because it is in the womb that the mother's love for her children is centered. Because the city of Mecca is suspected to be the place where the mother of mankind, Sayyidah Eve, descended, the city was nicknamed Ummu Ruhum. (Manz)ur, no date)

It can be concluded here that classical and contemporary interpretations interpret grace in the first alternative meaning, namely compassion, according to what appears on the surface. Meanwhile, Abdurrahman Wahid defines grace as brotherhood because in verse 107 of Surah Al-Anbiya' the meaning of grace is more accurately interpreted following the bare word "womb" which implies universal brotherhood; the message is the same as the first verse of Surah An-Nisa, verse 32 of Surah Al-Maidah and verse 13 of Surah Al-Hujurat. However, verse 107 of Al-Anbiya' says about the goals to be achieved, not the reality that must be realized, as in the three verses.

According to Gus Dur, this brotherly attitude is manifested in a different loving attitude (plurality) in life. This applies to people of different religions, even more so to people of the same religion. Even against the fundamentalists and radicals, because according to Gus Dur, what must be opposed is not the fundamentalists themselves but their actions. They "fight" in different ways for the sake of Islam. Differences in the way of fighting do not require accusations of mutual disbelief.(Wahid, 2008)

## **V. IMPLICATIONS OF ABDURRAHMAN WAHID'S INTERPRETATION.**

Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation of verse 107 of al-Anbiya' in three of his writings in the book Islamku Islam Anda Islam Kita. It will have implications and impacts if it is practised. The author finds at least two, namely, forming a pluralistic society and encouraging interfaith or interfaith dialogue.

### **A. Religious Pluralism.**

Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation which refers to the interpretation of the verse of rahmatan lil 'alamin, will have implications for the relationship between adherents of different religions, a positive, sincere relationship without any tendency towards one another and can even colour each other in the context of the relationship. We can call this social pluralism religious pluralism.

The author disagrees with MUI, which defines religious pluralism as an understanding that teaches that all religions are the same and, therefore, the truth of each religion is relative. Therefore, all adherents should not claim that only their religion is right while other religions are wrong. The MUI further said that pluralism teaches that all believers will enter and co-exist in heaven. This definition leads to relativism, which is both rejected and impossible. A believer, regardless of any religion, will not be able to accept this.(Anwar, 2012)



Pluralism is not synonymous with syncretism, let alone understood as nihilism. Pluralism is social awareness, as someone who embraces religion believes that his religion is the most correct. At the same time, he must also realize that other people also have such beliefs, but with different beliefs and religions.(Rachman, 2011)

Pluralism also does not mean that one has to accept other religions as the true parallel to one's religion or to let go of the belief in the truth claims of their respective religions and consider their religion to be as authentic as other religions. The correct definition of pluralism is the willingness to accept, respect and even respect those who have different religions and beliefs from themselves. Accept the reality of pluralism, live side by side and work together to advance the nation and humanity. They are aware of each other's differences, without assuming what each other believes to be accurate, but rejoice in each other's existence. Despite different beliefs, synergy in building a fairer, more qualified, safer and prosperous life must be done together. The question of who is finally right, let us leave it to Allah, the Most Just and Exalted, Allah will have no trouble taking account of every one of us in the hereafter.(Suseno, 2014)

The concept of religious pluralism is not new in Islamic history. According to the observations of atheist orientalist, Bertrand Russel honestly said that the past Islamic history reached its golden peak with pluralism and tolerance. Russell says: "The religion of the Prophet Muhammad is a simple monotheism, uncomplicated by the convoluted theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The Prophet did not claim to be divine, and his followers did not make such claims on his behalf. The faithful must conquer (read: liberate) as much territory as possible for Islam, but there should be no persecution of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. It was only thanks to their less fanatical attitude that a small number of (Arab Muslims) warlords were able without much difficulty to rule over a vast population of higher civilizations than foreign nations."(Madjid, 1998)

#### B. Interfaith Dialogue.

The dialogue, according to Amin Abdullah, is not meant to have the slightest desire or intention to aggressively attack, ridicule, look down on one another, let alone seize or force adherents of one religion to another.(Naim, 2014) However, a dialogue that brings peace and mutual understanding's differences from the other side.(King, 2013)

Mukti Ali added that the dialogue between followers of religions is to bring together people or groups of different religions or ideologies to arrive at a common understanding on a particular issue to agree and disagree with an attitude of appreciation and, therefore, to work together with them to discover the secrets of the meaning of life. This dialogue is a process in which individuals and groups seek to dispel each other's fears and distrust and develop new relationships based on mutual trust. Dialogue is a dynamic contact between life and life (not only between one rational view that contradicts each other) aimed at building a new world together.(Ismail, 2019)

Human relations have two motives: harmony and conflict. The conflict is motivated by individual or group egoism which ends in an anti-dialogue attitude. Conflict will only make human culture and civilization stagnant and even destroyed. Individuals or groups become closed to each other so that they do not learn from each other and get to know each other. The other groups and individuals are branded as enemies who must continue to be suspected even if they need to be destroyed as a pre-emptive attack.

The opposite harmony, working with reciprocal relations between individuals and groups based on trust, mutual respect and respect. Reciprocity only occurs when individuals or groups voluntarily build bridges of dialogue and cooperation. Dialogue is the first door to building cooperation, without which harmonious relations become stifled by negative tendencies that lead to aggressiveness and hostility.(Somantri, 2011)

### VI. CONCLUSION

As already explained, in this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Islam teaches its adherents a doctrine of brotherhood. Islamic sources Al-Qur'an and Hadith classify the form of brotherhood into three kinds. Namely religious brotherhood, compatriot brotherhood and universal brotherhood binds all human beings. Abdurrahman Wahid's interpretation which says verse 107 of Surah Al-Anbiya' means that the mission of the Prophet Muhammad was to bring a message of brotherhood to all humans. Because Abdurrahman Wahid interprets grace according to the root of the word mother's womb.

The implication is the presence of a pluralistic society that respects religious and cultural plurality, harmonious relations between religious communities certainly do not reach syncretism and there is also no need to erase the valid claims of each

religion. And also the opening of interfaith dialogue, not to win and lose, but to find solutions to life problems that are faced together and help build empathy for each other so that the nature of mutual understanding, respect and respect is open.

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