Strengthening Cultures of Peace

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I share in faith with Elise Boulding[1] that religious communities are able to create cultures of peace. It definitely does not an easy project. There are challenges and obstacles crossing the path of peace. But it has to be started and carried out.

Why?

I think, in the plurality of religious thought and faith, spirit of the time has directed humanity towards new stage of religious understanding which is more egalitarian and tolerant in engaging the difference. Here what that seems to be needed is openness, empathy, and sincerity of each tradition to learn and share its knowledge and wisdom with others. Sharp critics upon religion seem to be relied mostly on phenomena of religious transgressions from humanized conducts. It obviously makes assumption on the survival of exclusive and intolerant religious understanding plausible in contemporary world. Recent manifestations of religious hatred become undeniable proofs of it. Then this inevitably implies the necessary of new paradigm in understanding religions. This paradigm cannot be other than the paradigm of peace, not violence.

To me, on the contrary of the paradigm of peace which is supported to be alive by the soul of religious love, the paradigm of violence in its very basic assumption is lived by the soul of religious hatred. So, first of all I will begin this explanation with a brief overview about what the religious hatred is.

I see religious hatred as a discursive reality. It means that many factors play within. It occurs not only by the influence of religious factor, but it may be motivated by others beyond religion itself like politic, social, or economic. Even though, religion is often –if not always-- used to justify the hatred in its public articulations. Religious hatred refers to the hatred whether attitude or action which is showed or performed against persons or groups whom are identified as the others based on the differences of their religious affiliation. Those differences may appear in three following possible forms: First, difference of established religious tradition such as between Muslims and Christians. The second is difference of religious school in the same religion like between Sunni and Shiah in Islamic tradition. The third is difference of religious understanding pattern, e.g. between liberal and conservative in Sunni Islam. More formal definition of religious hatred is found in *Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006* ratified by United Kingdom Parliament. Religious hatred in that document was meant *"hatred against a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief."*[2]

According to the context, if religious hatred is recognized as manifest dimension of religion, so here understanding religious texts which is related to theological status and ethic dealing with different person or group based on religious references must be as its latent dimension. That is the later is the real target of this struggle, namely, religious understanding which

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[1] Elise Boulding, "Cultures of Peace and Communities of Faith" in Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman-Herr (eds.), *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking* (Scotdale, PA and Waterloo: Herald Press, 1998), 95-104.

[2] United Kingdom Parliament, *Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006* (Norwich: TSO, 2006), downloaded from www.tso.co.uk/bookshop.

inspires or constitutes manifestations of religious hatred. Khaled Abou El Fadl says that meaning of a text will be as moral as its reader. He said, *"If the reader is intolerant, hateful, or oppressive, so will be the interpretation of the text."*[3] At this point, religion texts have equal chance to be interpreted tolerant or intolerant. Now, the challenge is what kind of interpretation we do have.

Challenge and Obstacle

I keep insist to lay down the cause of religious violence on the problem of interpretation or, generally speaking, religious understanding. The misinterpretation or misunderstanding emerges from the abuse or the transgression of understanding from the heart of religion as the source of love, wisdom, and peace. It is then strengthened by the fact that many religious concepts are fragile to be used in articulations of religious hatred. For instance, in Islamic studies particularly Kalam, 'Ulum al-Hadits, and Fiqh many concepts concerning categorization of human being based on their religious references or conditions can be found easily such as *kafir* (infidel), *murtad* (apostate), *munafiq* (hypocrite), *mubtadi'* (heretic), *murtakib al-kabair* (big sinner), *kadzab* (big liar), *muttaham bi al-kadzb* (charged as liar) and many more. Those concepts in practice classify and divide human being into different "sacred boxes" with each certain theological, legal, and eschatological implication. They often play actively in religious hatred articulations as stereotyped schemas or patterns of thought. Drew Westen stated that stereotypes can lead to automatic activation of prejudicial thoughts and behaviors toward people based on their different attributes. This is what can contribute to prejudice, discrimination, and religious hatred.[4]

Unfortunately, these stereotypes are imprinted into human mind from the beginning of human intellectual and emotional development. Edward T. Hall ever stated that all aspect of human life is touched and altered by culture including the way of thinking and acting.[5] If this thesis is taken for understanding religious phenomena, so certain religious performance is not only a product of normative attraction of religion teachings but is also created by its society culture. For example, when a man was destined to be born in Muslim family, he will grow up with tending to identify himself as Muslim. Cultural process will accompany and suggest him to conceptualize his identity as a Muslim. This model seems to be opened to being derived into sub cultures of diverse religious understanding.

So, here we can see that the challenge has risen from the early time of human life and been preserved by tradition of religious understanding that having violated paradigm.

How to Overcome?

By paying attention to the brief explanation above we can conclude that religious violence is supported by such kind of religious imagination. It is felt in line with religious teachings. Hence, any of criticism which will be carried out to express objection to the deed have to represent valid arguments that, according to religion, the hateful interpretation is unacceptable. This is the way I can see in its very basic step and also vital. In my opinion, American Amish has given us a practical example in the case of Charles Carl Roberts to answer the challenge.[6]

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[3] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 23.

[4] Drew Westen, *Psychology: Mind, Brain, & Culture* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, and Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 674.

[5] Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Book/Doubleday, 1977), 16.

[6] Sally Kohn, "What the Amish are Teaching America", published on Friday, Oct 6, 2006 by CommonDreams.org.

Religion here should be treated and interpreted as a dynamic force to develop intercultural understanding and to bridge diverse communities for resolving conflicts and living in peace and mutual respect. It surely can not be done without digging up wisdom of religion teachings from their very basic and legitimated sources and exploring the nature of recent religious understanding particularly its transgression phenomena. The former effort can be recognized as a reconstruction of the past, while the later is a reconstruction of the present age. From the fusion of understandings, horizon of the future may rise more promisingly.

T.M. Scanlon had warned us to beware that religious toleration is *"a risky policy with high stakes, even within the framework of a stable democracy."*[7] The project should be conducted by entering scientific endeavor to discover alternative understanding of religion. Hence the intellectuals especially have to involve with commitment, risk, boldness and vulnerability.[8] Through this devotion, a "new-world" is hoped to be created on the same plains, seas, forests, mountains, skies, and stars of "old-world" which are viewed and treated by different. And human being will embrace a "new-religion" with God, sacred scriptures, prophets, and rituals of "old-religion" which are approached and believed by different. Pursuing religious salvation here is not longer by sacrificing the followers of different religions in the name of God, but that will be attained by love and interfaith brotherhood.

On the basis of that awareness, concern, hope, expectation, dream, and 'obsession', I believe that the "new-world" with its "new-religion" is already on the making.

Is this possible?

In the light of illuminative article presented by John Howard Yoder,[9] I can say it very possible. It is taken under consideration that a struggle to reform society toward better stage should be preceded by adequate understanding of contemporary reality of the society itself. That way, potential aspects of existing society can be appreciated while its bothering aspects are criticized, or changed, or negated.[10] In addition, a certain religious construction is not impossible to be changed or modified. A culturally-constructed identity is very possible to be revised or redefined in social interaction. Richard Jenkins explains that identity is grown up through dialectic process between self image and public image. He called it *internal-external dialectic of identification*.[11] So identity is a result of continuum process there with a man looks himself and reflect other's views on him. Tan Malaka, an Indonesia hero and leftist scholar, by his own words, admitted that everyone inevitably is a student of others who may come from the same or different community. So anybody, whoever he/she is, must be influenced intellectually by somebody else. They may be his/her school teachers, ideological friends, or even enemies.[12] Thus, this is not impossible.

For further elaboration, I can show Islam as a case. It is easy to be guessed that Muslims commonly seek normative basis for their religious arguments from their past. It may be suggested by assumption that the best parameter to measure quality of performing Islamic teachings is what belongs to classical period of Islam particularly era of Muhammad the prophet and his guided-companions. As equivocation, imagination of having coherence with views and practices of the classic is often utilized in order to argue for correctness of certain

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[7] T.M. Scanlon, *The Difficulty of Tolerance: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201.

[8] See: Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 12.

[9] John Howard Yoder, "What Would You Do?", Section 1: *Taking the Question Seriously*, pp.11-42.

[10] See: Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 264.

[11] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 29-30.

[12] Tan Malaka, *Madilog: Materialisme, Dialektika, Logika* (Jakarta: Pusat Data Indikator, 1999), 15.

contemporary religious performance. Unhappily, that imagination is conducted superficially and quite without criticism. It clearly depends on unhistorical perceptions of time. As a result, they become stutter when dealing with reality of changing epoch. In fact, according to Fazl al-Rahman, *"Islam is the name of certain norms and ideals which are to be progressively realized through different social phenomena and set-ups. Indeed, Islam, understood properly, ever seeks new and fresh forms for self-realization and finds these forms."*[13]

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[13] Fazlurrahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Delhi: Adam Publisher & Distributors, 1994), 189.