

IBN 'ARABĪ'S THOUGHT ON WAḤDAH AL-WUJŪD AND ITS RELEVANCE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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Abstract: This article explains the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* and its relevance to the diversity of religions and beliefs. The idea of the unity of being developed by Ibn 'Arabī is an explanation about the existence of every entity which prevails in the universe. It means that nothing has essential substance except God. Therefore, all things that exist in the universe, including the diversity of religions and the pluralistic paths of faith, are rooted in God. The diversity of God's laws occurs only due to the diversity of the doctrines revealed to the different prophets and apostles. So, Ibn 'Arabī, who has the typical philosophical thought of Sufism manifested through *waḥdah al-wujūd*, is considered as the supporter of the idea about the unity of religions emphasizing the inner aspect and the qualities of faith. This idea will tighten the relationship among those who love each other "within" God.

Keywords: unity of being, religious diversity, *waḥdah al-wujūd*, *tajallī*.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v20i1.793>

THE HISTORY of the development of Islamic thought was tinged by the controversy of Sufi philosophical thinking developed by Ibn 'Arabī, a prime exponent of the doctrine of the unity of being (*waḥdah al-wujūd*). Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabī's thought led to various groups calling themselves an observer and student of these ideas. Henry Corbin had an important role in introducing Islamic philosophy to the Western world. One of the topics in Islamic philosophy explored by Corbin is the creativity of Ibn 'Arabi, a Sufi-philosophical figure in Andalusia (Islamic Spain designation under Umayyad era 756-1031). The argument for this is that because, according Chittick, Ibn 'Arabī is a thinker who is very familiar with the Peripatetic philosophy, i.e. the philosophy formulated by synthesis apocalyptic teachings of Islam, Aristotelian and neoplatonism, both patterned Athenian and Alexandrian.¹

The doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* that emphasizes on the sense of unity of the existence of this nature is based on the view that the reality of this nature is one, which then becomes the guideline for reality. Thus, the realities are mere appearances (*tajallī*) of the One, the essence of the original.² Therefore, the nature and all that is in it is only a shadow of the One who has *wujūd* that is intrinsic, absolute, unlimited and infinite, that is God. This is in accordance with the hadith *qudsī*: "I am at the beginning was a hidden treasure, then I want to be known, so I put myself being Me and through Me they also know Me." Based on the belief in the unity of being, Ibn 'Arabī inspired much thoughts that the real diversity or plurality of reality (*kathrah*) looked almost single when rooted in God. With the nature as a manifestation container (*tajallī*) of God, show the diversity of nature and the effect is shown, but that diversity is one because of the unity of being that manifests within it. Unity is the manifestation of everything while diversity dwells within its entities, which do not have their own existence. Therefore, God in His unity is synonymous with the manifestation of

¹Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Filsafat dan Spiritualitas*, translated by Suharso and Jamaluddin MZ. (Yogyakarta: CISS Press, 1995), 41.

²Abū al-'Ala 'Affīfī, *Dirāsāt fī al-Tashawwuf al-Falsafī al-Islāmī* (Mesir : Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1987), 63-64.

everything, but He is not synonymous with everything or diversity itself.³

In the discourse of Sufism, many concepts about the reality of unity (*al-waḥdah*), namely *waḥdah al-shuhūd* (unity of witnessing), *waḥdah al-wujūd* (unity of being), *waḥdah al-ummah* (unity of people), and *waḥdah al-adyān* (unity of religions), emerge. A discussion of one single entity and many entities have been started from the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd*. This then became the notion of Ibn 'Arabī as a continuation of the idea of *al-hulul* initiated by al-Ḥallāj. God cannot be understood except by combining two properties opposite to Him, that is the ultimate form of just one, *al-Ḥaqq*. Although his form is just one, God appears to him (*tajallī*) in many forms that are not limited to the nature. This paper aims to show that the idea of the unity of being which was initiated by Ibn 'Arabī has relevance to the religious diversities. This study is certainly different from the previous studies, which rarely show this teaching contribution to the efforts to create religious harmony in the modern era.

Ibn 'Arabī's Life and Works

Ibn 'Arabī, whose full name is Abū 'Abd al-Lāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-'Arabī al-Ṭā'ī al-Ḥātimī, was born in Murcia, Andalusia (Spain), on 17 Ramadan 560 AH (July 28, 1165 CE). He is also commonly known as the Grand Master (*Shaykh al-Akbar*) because his intellectual influences and controversy among Islamic and Western thinkers.

The complexity of the life journey of Ibn 'Arabī in general can be seen in three stages. The first stage is preparation and establishment of himself as a Sufi, which is characterized by migration to Seville and Cordova because of his admiration for the figure and thought of Ibn Rushd. He joined the Sufi group at the age of 20 years, and his odyssey to North Africa to learn Khal'an Na'layn by Ibn Qāsim, up to Almeria. The second stage is improvement and stabilization of himself as a Sufi, which is

³ William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn 'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 32.

marked by the course of the pilgrimage and compilation of the book *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, *Tarjumān al-Ashwaq*, and his journey to Baghdad, Medina, Jerusalem and many others cities in the Middle East. The third stage is maturity and steadiness of his spiritual and intellectual life as a Sufi, which was characterized by a move to Damascus, where he lived until his death on 22 Rabi' al-Thani 638 AH (16 November 1240 CE).⁴

Almost all scholars do not agree on the number of works of Ibn 'Arabī. Some of his works are published while the others are still in manuscripts (*makḥṭūṭāt*). Affifi mentioned that Ibn 'Arabī's works amounted to 251, based on writings that mention Ibn 'Arabī himself. Brockleman mentioned 239 works. 'Abdurrahmān Jami' pointed out 500 pieces. Whereas, Sha'rani mentioned that Ibn 'Arabī's works reached 400 pieces.⁵ Regardless of the debate, the book *Fūṣūs al-Ḥikam*, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* and *Tarjumān al-Ashwaq* are among the works of Ibn 'Arabī which has been the intense subject of study by Muslim and Western thinkers. Therefore it is not an exaggeration to say that Ibn 'Arabī was a very productive Sufi. He had a major influence on the development of Sufism and the other Islamic treasures, not just about Sufism but also theology, natural sciences, psychology, and exegesis.

Muslim Debates on the Unity of Being (*Waḥdah al-Wujūd*)

Linguistically, the word *waḥdah al-wujūd*, which is translated as unity of being, is derived from the Arabic, namely *waḥdah* meaning 'one' or 'unified' and *al-wujūd* shall mean 'being'. *Al-wujūd* uses *isim ma'rifah* which means concrete beings. In this sense, *al-wujūd* is God. The word *al-wujūd* only belongs to Allah and it is ascribed only to Him as *wājib al-wujūd* and owner of all existing beings. The word *al-wujūd* cannot be attached to a creature, because the thing is temporary, and its form will become extinct when the destruction of nature happens.

⁴ Harun Nasution, *Filafat dan Mistisisme dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1983), 92.

⁵Ibid., 51.

The terminology of *waḥdah al-wujūd* means the unity of being (God) or the only beings is God. In terms of theologians and Sufis, the form of beings is symbolic (*majāzī*), which is temporary or lent beings. This is because beings of the creature are not beings standing alone, but depending on the nature of God. Therefore, the exact definition for *waḥdah al-wujūd* is a disclaimer all entities that exist apart from the nature of God. This means purifying the oneness of God from the other beings. This definition is presumably intended by the Sufis, which is the term used by Nuruddin ar-Raniry called the term *wujūdiyyah muwaḥḥidah*.

The term "*wujūd*" used by Ibn 'Arabi refers to *wujūd* of God. The only *wujūd* is *wujūd* of God; no entity other than his *wujūd*. This means that nothing but God has no *wujūd*. Logically it can be concluded that the word *wujūd* cannot be given to anything other than God (*mā siwā Allāh*), nature and everything in it. However, Ibn 'Arabī also uses this term to indicate any other than God, but in a metaphorical sense to maintain that *wujūd* belongs only to God. That which exists in nature is essentially a form God lent him just as light belongs only to the sun, but was lent to the inhabitants of the earth. The relationship between God and nature are often depicted as resembling the relationship between light and darkness. Because *wujūd* belongs only to God, then its absence belongs to nature. Therefore, Ibn 'Arabi argues that *wujūd* is light, and its absence is darkness. The term *wujūd* also used by Ibn 'Arabī to refer to God (existence and finding), that there is no entity other than His *wujūd*.⁶ Thus, everything other than God has no *wujūd*. Ibn 'Arabī's idea of the unity of being (*waḥdah al-wujūd*) cannot be separated from the actual appearance of the concept of God (*tajallī al-Ḥaqq*), which in its manifestation cannot be detached from creatures (*al-khalq*) as a medium.

Tajallī concept as a pillar of doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* is also synonymous with *al-fayḍ* (emanation, transmitting, devolution), *ẓuḥr* (appearance) and *tanāẓul* (decrease) and *al-faṭḥ*

⁶Kautsar Azhari Noer, *Ibn 'Arabi Waḥdah al-Wujūd dalam Perdebatan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), 42.

(opening). But Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes two types of sightings (*tajallī*): first, the most holy emanation (*al-faydh al-aqdas*) is also referred to as an essential emanation (*al-tajallī al-dhātī* or *tajallī al-gayb*). Second, the emanation of the sacred (*al-faydh al-muqaddas*) is commonly known as an existential manifestation (*al-tajallī al-wujūdī*) or sensory manifestations (*tajallī al-shubūdī*).⁷

The first type of *tajallī*, before the second type, is only in the order and not according to the logic of existential reality. This stage is the initial stage that determines the appearance of God. God does not reveal Himself to something else. The existence of God is a substance that is absolute. Therefore, He cannot be understood and imagined, for He is the One in terms of the philosophy of Plotinus.⁸ In more detail, Ibn ‘Arabī in *Risālah Ahādīyyah* mentions that:

“... There is not anything unless He mastered His own, besides He cannot master Him. Nothing will be able to see Him, whether apostle, prophet, guardians and angels, though that is close to Him. Prophet is Himself, His word is Himself, and His messenger is Himself. He sends His word as a manifestation of His with Himself, of Himself, on His own, without intermediaries or agents, in addition to Himself.”⁹

In the first type of *tajallī*, God is in the presence of pure, absolute depths, there is only substance alone. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, God at the time of this level is not after, not before, not above, not below, not far, not close, no how, no when. He is now as it is, God's manifestation of his own, in isolation, must *wujūd* his own because of his substance. He is timeless and One. He is a backrest for everything else. God cannot be communicated, also cannot be known. According to Affifi, *tajallī* in this stage is a manifestation of the Essence of the One absolutely to himself, that his form potentially shaped (*bi al-qumwāh*) and not actual (*bi al-fi‘li*).¹⁰ In other words, the oneness of God is not tangible in nature that can be sensed. He is just a

⁷Ibid., 57.

⁸Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah Filsafat Barat I* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1983), 28.

⁹Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (England: Thorsons, 1976), 28.

¹⁰Noer, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 6.

reality of rational beings, called by Ibn 'Arabī as permanent nature (*al-a'yān al-thābiṭah*). Permanence in the form of the potential of this diversity will reveal the actual shape of the second type of *tajallī*.

The second type is *tajallī al-wujūdī*, or *al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*, a self-manifestation of the One, into forms of diversity. *Tajallī* at this stage is the embodiment of the essence of permanent nature (*al-a'yān al-thābiṭah*) as rational to the sensuous nature, in which God reveals Himself in the diversity of forms that are not limited in number, in the form of a concrete nature, and does not only include the substances, but also the properties, actions and events.¹¹ Thus, this type describes that God is in His actuality. In this aspect, the notion of *waḥdah al-wujūd* means that there is an ontological relationship between God (*al-Ḥaqq*) and creatures (*al-khalq*).

Harun Nasution provides an interesting illustration on the relationship between *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq* that God wants to see Himself outside Himself, and so He made the universe.¹² When He wanted to see Himself, He saw the nature and objects that exist in nature. Because in the everything, there is a divinity, and God sees Himself. This creates the unity (*waḥdah*). There are many, but this one is actually the one; this is like a man who sees himself in a mirror at which he looks a lot, but he actually is one.

The nature is a mirror for God and through the mirror God shows and introduces His face. Meanwhile, God is mentioned as a "stash hidden treasures" that cannot be known except through the nature. Hiddenness results silence and loneliness, making *al-Ḥaqq* longing for the unknown, and that He created the world, so that He can be known and recognized.

In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, as cited by Kauthar Azhari Noer,¹³ Ibn 'Arabī explains the issues of *tajallī* in the second phase by asserting:

"..... Because it's nature becomes visible as a living, who hear, who saw, who knows, who willed, powerful and talk. He (nature) work according to His way, as it is said:" everything things work according to His ways

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹² Nasution, *Filsafat*, 43.

¹³ Noer, *Ibn al-Arabī*, 47.

(Q. 17:84). Nature is his work, because it's nature becomes visible with the properties of *al-Haqq*. If you say something about nature, he is *al-Haqq*, you have to tell the truth, for God says: "... and God has thrown". And if you say something about him, he is a creation (*al-khalq*) you have to tell the truth, for God says: "... when you throw" (Q.8: 17). Therefore he uncovered and covered, affirming and negating. So nature is him and not him. He is unknown and known. And the most beautiful names belong to God (Q.7: 180). While the appearance through that names, while the names of perceiving Him (*takhalluq*) belong to nature."

From the above statement, it is understood that the real God and nature are two faces of one nature, which is in terms of the outside is called nature, and in terms of the mind is called God. Thus, the natural *wujūd* is the essence (*'ayn*) *wujūd* of God and God is the essence of nature. In this regard, Ibn 'Arabī describes in his poem quoted by Mustafa Hilmi:¹⁴

"Servant is God, God is the servant
for the sake of feeling, who *mukallaf* (burdened law),
If you say the servant, and he God
or you say God while He was given *taklif*."

In another poem, Ibn 'Arabī also explained:

"In one aspect, *al-Haqq* is *al-khalq*, think! on other aspects, God is not *al-khalq*, then ponder!
Anyone who considers what I say, then the vision will not be blurred.
No one caught him, except those who are endowed with vision.
Combine and contrast, true nature is one. But He is that much, which is fixed and not fixed."

Carefulness and high imaginative ability is needed to understand the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd*, especially regarding the ontological relationship between God (*al-Haqq*) and nature (*al-khalq*) that finally is synonymized with pantheism. Many Muslim scholars judge Ibn 'Arabī as a pantheist. A.E. Affīfī, for example, considers him a pantheist, and views this type of sufism as perfect pantheism. Fazlur Rahman¹⁵ also says that the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī are a system entirely monistic and

¹⁴ Muhammad Mustafā Hilmi, *al-Hayāt al-Rūḥiyyah fī al-Islām* (Mesir: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah al-Kitāb, 1984), 182.

¹⁵Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1978).

pantheistic contrary to the teachings of Islamic orthodoxy. The same view on this matter is given by Hamka¹⁶ and Ahmad Daudy.¹⁷

Proponents of this doctrine such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mir Valiuddin and Titus Burckhardt disagree that *wahdah al-wujūd* is identified with pantheism. Nasr, for example, considers that the term pantheism and monism cannot be used to equate with *wahdah al-wujūd*.¹⁸ This is because God, according to the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī, transcends nature, even as the nature and level of its manifestation *tajallī* cannot be completely other than God. This is in line with Nasr, Mir Valiuddin,¹⁹ who assumes that Sufism retains distinguishes between God and nature, including humans. Sufism still maintains the transcendence of God. Thus, implicitly Valiuddin denies allegations that Ibn 'Arabī adopts pantheism. Titus Burckhardt²⁰ also does not agree if the term pantheism equated with *wahdah al-wujūd*. Titus' reason is that in this doctrine, God is still different and not comparable with nature even though nature is His *tajallī* media and impossible nature is "out" or by his side. Harun Nasution also seem to mind if *wahdah al-wujūd* is classified as pantheism which is clearly contrary to the teachings of Islam.²¹

In fact, *wahdah al-wujūd* is one of the most important concepts in *tasawuf* which has been recognized in Islamic tradition. So far, many controversies toward the school of thought is caused by societal misunderstanding which causes tasawuf to be negatively seen and be accused of being apart of Islamic teaching. Many scholars often equate *wahdah al-wujūd* with pantheism, namely the existence of two (God and Nature) conjoins into one. Evidence that *wahdah al-wujūd* is not

¹⁶ Hamka, *Tasawuf Perkembangan dan Pemurniannya* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nurul Islam, 1984), 156.

¹⁷ Ahmad Daudy, *Allah dan Manusia dalam Konsepsi Syekh Nurudin ar-Raniry* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1983), 80.

¹⁸ Syed Hossein Nasr, *Ideal and Reality of Islam* (London: Onwin Paperback, 1979), 137.

¹⁹ Mir Valiuddin, *The Qur'anic Sufism* (Delhi: Motilal Bannarsidas, 1981), 48.

²⁰ Burckhardt, *An Introduction*, 81.

²¹ Nasution, *Filafat*, 92-95.

pantheism has been proposed by scholars since the 12-17 century AD. Two works that explain these fully are *Idāh Maqṣud min Waḥdah al-Wujūd* by Abdul Gānī al-Nābulusī and *Kifāyat al-Muhtajin ilā al-Muwahhidīn Mashrab Qā'ilīn bi Waḥdah al-Wujūd* by Abdurrauf ibn Ali al-Jāwī al-Fansūrī. In these two works, the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* as initiated by Ibn 'Arabī is not synonymous with pantheism. Both these thinkers also oppose pantheism, as it is considered not to have roots in the traditions and teachings of Islam.

'Thinkers' disagreement is understandable because, in fact, in this doctrine there are still two *wujūd*, namely *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq*. That which actually has *wujūd* is *al-Ḥaqq*, while *al-khalq* does not have a *wujūd*, because it is only a medium of the immanence of God, whereas the true God was transcendent. The process of sightings occurs at the level of the immanence of God and not in His Essence. Therefore, there were originally two *wujūd* (*al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq*) but appears in the same *wujūd*. This is different from the pantheism which states that all (God or creature) is immanent and transcendent.

At least, there are two reasons that can be understood in the controversy of *waḥdah al-wujūd* as being equated with pantheism. First is the difference between the understanding of the sense of pantheism used in the perspective of philosophy and Sufism. In the perspective of philosophy, pantheism perceives that God is immanent, God is nature and nature is God. This is different from the perspective of Sufism, which sees God as remaining transcendent and not immanent. God remains "outside" nature and not "in" nature. Thus, viewed from the perspective of philosophy, the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* is identical to pantheism, but when viewed from the perspective of Sufism, this doctrine cannot be identified with pantheism. Second is the controversy surrounding this doctrine, due to a misunderstanding in its meaning. This is because the visits may be only from the aspect of similarity (*tashbīh*) and the immanence of God, by neglecting the sanctity (*tanẓīh*) and His transcendence. Even if it is returned to the Sufi doctrine, which is seen is something that inner (inside) and not outside. Thus, this nature is the essence of the transcendence of God, and not

from the side of his immanence. The position of *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq* can be linked to a tree and its shadow. *Wujūd* is actually a tree, while the shadow is depends on (the) tree. Shadow is being united with the tree because there can be no shadow without tree.

By noticing the immanence and transcendence side of God, the doctrine of *waḥdah al-wujūd* is the highest expression of monotheism. This doctrine recognized that God is really the one, because no one other than the ultimate manifestation of His *wujūd* exists. No *wujūd* of the essential, absolute, all-encompassing *wujūd*, unless the form of God is the Absolute. Thus the absolute manifestation of God sinks other *wujūd*.

Margaret Smith expresses his admiration for the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī by translating the ideas that: "He is He and none before or after him, no one above or below, not far away and do not close, together and not separate, not how and not where. He is one without unity and single without singleness. He is the sole existence of the first and last single existence, the existence of a single outer and inner sole existence. So there is no first or last, outward or inward besides Him...."²² Although Smith's reviews seem full of ambiguity, but still understand that God is the ultimate manifestation of the transcendent, while only in the aspect of immanence alone is a reflection and manifestation of His *wujūd* in nature.

Ibn 'Arabī argues that humans are the only beings in which the principle of Nur Muhammad is manifested by a very high degree. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the caliph (representative of God) and the image of God. Ibn 'Arabī said that the being is one, but He has the appearance close to natural form and its hidden side naming, have a divider called *barzakh* which collects and separates between the inner and outer which is called a perfect human being (*insān kāmil*).

²²Margareth Smith, *Mistikus Islam: Ujaran-ujaran dan Karyanya*. Translated by Ribut Wahyudi (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2001), 149.

The Unity of Being (*Waḥdah al-Wujūd*) and its Relevance to Religious Diversity

Based on the belief that everything in nature essentially shows God, then all roads in this world are also the way of God. This means that any path taken by different humans will still boils down to the One, namely God. William Chittick provides an interesting illustration responding to Ibn 'Arabī's notion about religious diversity. This idea has always returned to the belief that everything is interconnected and dependent as well, through the similarities between their roots in the reality of God, as well as religious diversity. Diversity of this universe is the manifestation of the names of God, in which His face is reflected in His creation. Names of God in revelation are the key to the door that gave the world of the unseen. Even religion and belief are different, their goal is one, because God is a place for everything tied to Him. Every human being recognizes and believes in the power recognized authoritative truth. This does not mean that the gods are false, because people worship what they see as *al-Ḥaqq* (God) and is based on God's self-disclosure. Thus all forms of faith are rooted in reality the truth.²³

The views of Ibn 'Arabī about religious diversity can be found in the Chittick review about the meaning of Shariah.²⁴ For Ibn 'Arabī, the term Shariah literally means path and is translated as revealed religion, stating that all religions were brought by all messengers of God, not merely in the form of regulations, social and ritual. This can be seen in the expression of Ibn 'Arabī, based on Q. 17:15:

As the truth of knowledge and mystery
Religion Revelation
Physically and spiritually
And the name of God
Which caused Him to be Existence

Ibn 'Arabī's thinking about the meaning of shariah, can also be seen in his understanding of the Q. 1: 5-7, that "... show us the way: (1) the straight (right) and not (2) the way they are you

²³Chittick, *Imaginal*, 283-284.

²⁴Ibid., 219-220.

angry for, nor (3) those who you astray". One of the meanings of the three roads above is the straight path (right), while two other streets are straying road (one). Nevertheless, from a certain perspective, all the roads are straight (right), because every road stretched and comes from God, and always come back to Him because He is the end of every street (Q.42: 53). All roads are good, because there is no crime in being.²⁵

From Ibn 'Arabi's statement, it can be concluded that all ways (religions) come from God despite the different Shari'a law. The difference is because God gave to the apostles, each of whom is also different. In short, the way of God is the way in which things go in leading to God. Religious belief that is manifested in love makes every faith emphasize the quality of the faith as the basis of its relationship with other religions. This is because the real human relationship with God in the doctrine *waḥdah al-wujūd* understood that the emanation (*tajallī*) of God, which is based on out of love and God's desire to be known and recognized by his creatures, is actually the most important messages. This should be always practiced by those who believe in a life filled with this diversity. Even for Sufis, love poems can reflect an experience that God is intact and coherent, which fosters depth of experience and contains infinite qualitative which can penetrate the boundaries of religious formalism for upholding and deep inner meanings.²⁶

Al-Taftazānī understands the thoughts and ideas of Ibn 'Arabi about the unity of religions as a consequence of the doctrinal unity of being.²⁷ Therefore, he gave a high appreciation of the doctrine by stating that:

"My heart has been able to accept all forms and shapes; he is like a pasture for a herd deer, convent for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Kaaba for the pilgrims, and the sheets Torah and the Qur'an.

²⁵ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 164.

²⁶ Idries Shah, *Mahkota Sufi: Menembus Dunia Ekstra Dimensi*. Translated by M. Hidayatullah and Roudlon (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2000), 192-193.

²⁷ Abu al-Wafā' al-Taftazānī, *Al-Madkhal Ilā Tasawwuf al-Islām* (Kairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah li al-Tibā'ah wa al-Nashr, 1979), 204.

I profess a religion of love, whichever way taken camels, religion and my faith, this is a true religion.”

All different and diverse religions are connected with each other in terms of the relationship and the meeting point and unity as it comes from the One God. Thus, the religious diversity comes from the same Essence, allowing one another to fuse. The unification of religions is possible on esoteric aspect, but not on the exoteric aspect. This can be achieved through a dialogue, which could be an opportunity for the realization of a tolerant understanding and living in peace. A genuine dialogue will bring new hope to all religious communities. When people do not have hope, then the dialogue will open up new possibilities. Dialogue also provides the possibility of religious communities to build a harmonious society based on the values of truth, justice, love and freedom. Dialogue opens the room to maintain and develop the right relationships between God, human beings and the natural environment. Closing the path of dialogue with running exclusively religious life will result in conflict and hostility. Differences on religious forms are caused by the interaction between God and the human response to Him. Responses are based on the capacity and knowledge suggesting that humans are free to choose religious beliefs and attitudes that would be held accountable. In the context of Indonesia's diversity, religious views on tolerance and inclusiveness need to be pursued and promoted. The majority of Indonesian Muslims are known as polite and tolerant. This could be good social capital for the creation of religions harmony.

Efforts to articulate a theology of religious tolerance is badly needed to create harmony among religious believers, which sometimes is still very expensive for the Indonesian context. Religious violence recently took place in various places in the country, as if confirming the adage *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to each other).²⁸ To avoid religious exclusivism, each community of religious group is required to realize that

²⁸ Paskalis Edwin Nyoman, "Agama dan Kekerasan", in *Agama Kekerasan: Membongkar Eksklusivisme* ed. Armada Riyanto CM (Malang: DIOMA, 2000), 135.

heterogeneity is the will of God. Religious diversity is not only a sociological fact, but it is also the truth. Each religious community should have awareness that the heterogeneity of religion, race, ethnicity, and social class is a gift from God. Grateful for God's grace means to treat His bounties and blessings in fair and proportionate ways. Therefore, there is a need for a complete and comprehensive understanding of the teachings of their respective religions. This is necessary to prevent the erosion of faith. In contrast, a deep awareness of diversity should strengthen the faith and the quality of religions.

Maturation of faith is paramount needs to be done because it is the main basis for the deeds of each person, as mentioned in Q.38: 24 QS.41: 8 and Q.42: 26. Faith demands realization in the form of positive work. Therefore, people who claim to have faith but whose behavior is negative is not living up to his faith correctly, is not living up to God's presence in every niche of life, and does not understand the theological and sociological nature of the function of religion itself. As an advocate of pluralistic theology, Nurcholish Madjid explores further Ibn Taymiyya's formulation about the idea of universal Islam. Citing the Qur'an, 3: 83-85, Madjid stated that Islam is the submission, obedience and surrendering of the universe to God. This doctrine was brought by the prophets, which in essence is faith in God Almighty, despite its socio-cultural manifestations of historically different contexts. This faith must be based on a conscious rejection of the god-worshiped false (pseudo-gods) in the false belief systems.²⁹ The fact that society itself is divided into various groups and communities in which they have their own individual life may incite conflicts. They are expected to accept the diversity by allowing others to have freedom and opportunities to live according to their own religions and beliefs.³⁰

²⁹ Nurcholis Madjid, "Dialog Agama-agama dalam Perspektif Universalisme Islam," in *Passing Over: Melintas Batas Agama* ed. Komaruddin Hidayat and Ahmad Gaus, (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1999), 5-20.

³⁰ Nurcholish Madjid, *Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 62.

Awareness of the diversity could be achieved by intensifying the dialogue, sharing, communication and consultation among all religious believers who do not only depart from the social reality but also departs from the theology itself. Therefore, Nurcholish Madjid, cited by Budhy-Munawar Rachman,³¹ warned that pluralism is not only understood by saying that our society is pluralistic, diverse, consisting of various races and religions but it should be well-understood and implemented. And, pluralism is part of a genuine affinity diversity in the bonds of civility (genuine engagement of diversities within the bond of civility). Therefore, expected theology of religions could explain the theological reason why religion should go in interreligious dialogue, in which it will be understood together with dialogue partners. Therefore, theology of religions could explain the theological reason why religion should go in interreligious dialogue, in which it will be understood together with dialogue partners. Ibn 'Arabī's idea of the unity of being indicates that religious diversity is an integral part of God *tajalli* which can be understood and accepted its existence through a proportional understanding.

The Qur'an gives an appreciation that society consists of various communities which have their own individual life. These communities must accept the reality of diversity as an evidence of being tolerant. They need to compete with each other in the pursuit of virtue, because they will be collected by Allah to obtain a final decision. The appreciation of pluralism is illustrated in the Qur'n, 16: 36, 13: 7, 35: 24 and 14: 4. God wants His people diverse because diversity is part of the laws. This was proved by the given choices that can be taken by humans whether to believe or deny the truth of God (Q. 18: 29), and the nature of God's love which is not limited to (Q. 5: 118). The explanation of this commandment is contained in the Qur'an, 2: 148 regarding opportunity for every community to compete in goodness. If this order is complied, it might help directly solve the problem of religious pluralism.

³¹ Budhy Munawar Rachman, *Islam Pluralis: Wacana Kesetaraan Kaum Beriman* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon argue that every religion is basically formed by the formulation of faith and the experience of faith. Islam requires a person to have faith (*tamhīd*) followed by the experience of faith (deeds). Meanwhile, the Christian perspective holds that one must firstly have a new experience of faith followed by the formulation of his faith. The goal of the proponents of the pluralist theology of religion is not a uniformity of shape, because the idea of religious pluralism stands among a plurality of unrelated and monolithic unity. Parallelism express the phenomenon of the God of many religions, which means tolerate to each other way to God, or many paths to salvation. According to Schuon, a mystic and initiator of perennial philosophy, every religion in a pluralist view is an expression of faith in the same God, by mapping the area of religion in exoteric and esoteric aspects.³² In the esoteric level, each religion is different from other religions, but in esoteric level they are in common.

This view of the unity of the religions is in line with the Theo-centric approach in the Christian tradition of the modern era. The Theo-centric approach considers that God is the center of everything and therefore all religions walk around God. The theory, that was initiated by John Hick³³ and developed by Paul Tillich and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, uses the analogy of astronomy, declaring that God is the center of the universe of human faith, with all religions, including Christianity, serving and surrounding Him.³⁴ It is also reinforced by a dialogical approach, namely a view and the idea that Christianity should recognize other religions as Christian development, and is the result of dialogue and direct contact with other religions. This idea was developed by Stanley Samartha and Raimundo Panikkar, among others. Panikkar idea of the need to understand other religions is not only meant as an understanding

³² Fritjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1993), 33.

³³ John H. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1988), 12.

³⁴ Harold Coward, *Pluralisme Tantangan Bagi Agama-Agama* (Jakarta: Kanisius, 1989), 59.

of the level of knowledge, but understanding in faith and spiritual experience.³⁵ Awakening a profound awareness about religious diversity is an expression of human knowledge and belief of the power of God. It is the highest expression on Oneness of God, embodied in a diversity of creatures, creed, and religion. Realizing that the nature of beings belongs only to God, then there is no place at all for the growth of religious arrogance, because actually they are one and the same.

The idea of *wahdah al-wujūd* in the context of religious relationships means that this concept originated from the translation that virtually all religions have the same aims and serve the same God. The difference is only the outward aspects, namely performance and ordinances of worship to draw closer to God. In this concept, there is no superiority or inferiority of religion, because all religions come from the same source that is God. Thus, the concept of *tawhīd* "*lā ilāha illā Allāh*" has profound implications for religious life. This concept universally explains exactly how one views oneself, fellow human beings and the natural surroundings in the context of its relationship with the Absolute Reality (God).³⁶ For the Sufis, the word "god" in the sentence *lā ilāha illā* is meaningful reality, so the *shahada* means to be no actual reality except Allah. They understand that only God is real and Absolut, while the other is relative. Thus, it can be concluded that the universal truths in the teachings of religions is the principle of monotheism which recognizes the One God and the unity of the people, as described in Q. 21:92. God cannot be understood except by combining two properties opposite to Him, that the ultimate being is only one, namely *al-Ḥaqq*. Although his being is just one, God appears to him (*tajalli*) in many forms which are unlimited to nature, but also on beliefs and of religions.

In the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd*, recognition and respect for religious traditions and other beliefs as a similar tradition is imperative. No religion is the "golden boy" with all its privilege.

³⁵Raimundo Panikkar, *Dialog Intra Religius* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1999).

³⁶Fatimah Usman, *Wahdah al-Adyān (Pluralisme Agama): Penemu dan Latar Belakang Sosialnya dalam Tasawwuf dan Kritis* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001), 203.

Every religious tradition and belief has the same position, and therefore it has the same right to life. This idea is also confirmed that the seriousness of religion should not be accompanied by an arrogant attitude that assumes other religions as inferior and false. *Waḥdah al-wujūd* can also eliminate the boundaries and barriers that hinder dialogue and transformation of universal values of religions. Thus, it can be stated that *waḥdah al-wujūd* is a very fair concept because it upholds the principle of respect for other religious people; there is no distance between one another, presupposes the creation of religious climate that is open, mutual learning, mutual acceptance, without the suspicious of one group over another.

Conclusion

Ibn 'Arabi is the originator of the doctrine *waḥdah al-wujūd* that has sparked controversy and debate. However, this doctrine also provides scientific and theological blessing that is needed in the form of the Oneness of God that makes the diversity of nature as a place of His immanence. This idea raises awareness and theological insight that all things in the nature, including the diversity of religions and beliefs, are the ways leading to God where everything starts and ends. The reason for this is because all realities that exist in the nature are essentially devoid of intrinsic form and because the ultimate manifestation belongs to God (*la manjūda illā Allāh*). The diversity of natural reality exists because God's love and desire are known and unknown. Therefore, love is the inner aspect of the underlying human relationship with God, and the religion of love is precisely what Ibn 'Arabi has promoted. With love, the boundaries of esotericism of religions will lose. Thus, the adherents of religions can do passing over to know God more deeply.

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