

IMPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL THINKING CHARACTERISTICS OF 21ST CENTURY PALEMBANG SCHOLARS FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract: This study aims to analyse the implications of the characteristics of theological thought of Palembang scholars on Islamic education in Palembang city. This issue is important to discuss to see the transmission and transformation of the scholars' knowledge in building the consistency of Islamic theology teaching. This research is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The data were obtained from relevant documentation sources and in-depth interviews. Data analysis uses the flow of Miles Huberman analysis stages. This research succeeded in finding academic facts that the 21st century Palembang scholars have theological views characterised by Asy'ariyyah theology. The character of Asy'ariyyah theological thought internalised by Palembang scholars is able to maintain the transmission of theological knowledge and ensure the continuity of tradition and civilisation in Palembang City. The contextualisation of theological thought of the Palembang scholars has an impact on Islamic education institutions in Palembang.

Keywords: Implications; Islamic Education; Theological Thought.

INTRODUCTION

Theological issues are a discourse that is always interesting to discuss because it relates to religious beliefs. Theology as a religious issue is considered the core of one's religiousness. The flow of Islamic theology or the flow of Islamic

aqidah that is understood, believed, and taught by scholars today is a process of continuation of the same theological concepts and teachings that have been taught continuously. The existence of theological teachings recognised by the Islamic community is the fruit of the teaching and preaching activities of the scholars. Indonesian Muslims who are identified as adherents of the *ahlussunnah wal jamaah* sect in the majority have the construction of Asy'ariyyah and Maturidiyah theological views (Ramli, 2017).

Palembang as an area inhabited by the majority of Muslim communities is also identified as an adherent of Asy'ariyyah. The teaching of Islam that is characterised by Asy'ariyyah theology has long developed since the time of the Palembang Darussalam sultanate until now. Palembang scholars with various forms and articulations of Islamic teaching that are very diverse teach theological teachings with various approaches. Even the writings of Palembang scholars of the past have been known to colour the curriculum of Islamic education with references to books written and referred to by the scholars. Palembang scholars developed Islamic teaching through teaching in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools and madrasas as well as other informal

institutions such as taklim assemblies with a focus on the study of tawhid material.

Academically, there are several models and styles of theological thought such as Social theology emerged in Southeast Asia in the 20th century (Ibrahim, 2014). In addition, there are discourses of rational theology developed by Harun Nasution, transformative theology echoed by Moeslem Abdurrahman, humanistic theology, and theology of the oppressed (Ibrahim, 2014). Thus, theological discourse is no longer understood as a treasure of thinking about God alone, but has seen its implications for social treasures, rationalism, liberation issues, and so on. In modern times like today, the style of rational and contextual theological thought is quite much in demand as a theological perspective (Ramadhan, N. J. H., Haqi, M. Z., & Hanafi, Y., 2024).

The 21st century, characterised by fast-changing technological developments and massive religious literacy, affects the way Muslims understand religion. Cross-border confirmation of information allows the way Muslims access religious knowledge to change by utilising various digital platforms. In the current era, Palembang City is marked by the impact of globalisation in all aspects. In the social and cultural aspects, Palembang people experience a lifestyle transformation, Naissbit and Aburdance (1990) call it a global lifestyle. The global lifestyle has caused the cultural bases of Palembang society to be destroyed due to *social inequality, moral problems, bad culture*, and disruption of human rights and privacy (Damanik, Eron L., 2022). As a result of disruptive changes in this modern era, the Palembang civilisation has lost its

direction and is far from its Malay identity.

Rapid changes as a global impact need to be seen from the perspective of Islamic education as a social institution that is functional to educate and maintain religious values. Religious education can give rise to varied patterns of religious understanding in accordance with the teaching model used by Islamic educational institutions. In this context, religious pluralism emerged which resulted in the emergence of symptoms such as: *first*, Palembang Islamic scholars were divided into two groups, namely traditional Islamic-oriented scholars (kaum tuo and affiliated with the Nahdhatul Ulama organisational institution and modern Islamic-oriented scholars or kaum mudo and affiliated with the Muhammadiyah organisational institution (Peeters, 1998). *Second*, changes in religious traditions and changes in religious life. On the economic aspect, globalisation marked by the industrial revolution 4.0 polarised the economic system of Palembang society, from conventional to digital (*e commerce*). *Third*, on the political aspect, Palembang city is also preoccupied with the issue of terrorism and religious moderation.

The concept of theology of civilisation in the context of educational development in Palembang City is quite interesting to analyse considering the many variables that influence it including aspects of religious understanding of Palembang society. *The trend of* modernity as a consequence of the development of the 21st century has raised various problems in society including the patterns of teaching Islamic theology. One of the important offers from the development of

modernity is the contextualisation and transformation of God's messages into human life so that God's teachings can be understood, interpreted, and grounded in human life (Hanafi, 1991). The contextualisation of this theology is able to respond to the problems that arise, because the "theology of civilisation" is seen to influence human behaviour and provide solutions to contemporary humanitarian issues. This theology of civilisation is contextual and able to dialogue with the context of space and time.

Theological perspectives that are nuanced contextually with the content of the development of civilisation that is rapidly changing towards the progress and welfare of mankind, the position of academic research on the models and patterns of theological thinking of the 21st century Palembang ulama is associated with the logical consequences of theological perspectives in the form of the emergence of articulation of educational institutionalisation in its various forms. Each ulama certainly has a unique form of articulation in manifesting its theological ideas in the pattern of educational institutionalisation. It is in this context that this research was conducted as an effort to find a common thread between the theological thinking model of Palembang ulama towards the articulation of education in Palembang City in the 21st century.

METHODS

This research belongs to the type of qualitative research. Specifically, this research uses historical methods and a social history approach. Because this research is included in historical research, social and intellectual aspects are the main

issues to be emphasised as a study or analysis. Social history can be called the history of *social movements* that emerge and develop in history; it is often interpreted as the history of a number of human activities such as *manners, customs* and *everyday* life (Abdurrahman, 1999).

This research is also a library study, which is research conducted by tracing data sources from various readings, either primary or secondary. The purpose of the library study is to collect data and information with the help of various materials contained in the library in the form of books, magazines, manuscripts, historical records and other manuscripts. The primary data sources of this research are the works of 21st century Palembang theologians consisting of the works of Prof. Dr. KH. Aflatun Muchtar, M.A.; the works of Prof. Dr. H. Ris'an Rusli, M.Ag.; the works of Dr. H. Reza Pahlevi, M.A., and the works of Drs K.H. Solihin Hasibuan, M.Pd.I..

The research analysis used descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, synthesis analysis, and induction analysis techniques. Descriptive analysis is intended to describe all data critically systematically, factually, and accurately, so that its meaning can be known. Meanwhile, comparative analysis is intended to compare one data with other data in order to find categories. Furthermore, synthesis analysis is intended to summarise all the data so that conclusions can be obtained as objectively as possible. Then induction analysis is intended to formulate data so that meaning can be drawn both in the form of statements and general conclusions.

RESULT

This research focuses on the theological thinking of Palembang scholars in the 21st century and sees its relevance to the articulation of the institutionalisation of Islamic education in Palembang City. Specifically from the theocentric aspect, the scholars of Palembang City understand matters related to Islamic theology that: (a) the high position of reason, (b) human free will, (c) freedom of thought is only bound by basic teachings in the Qur'an and Hadith which are very few in number, (d) believe in *sunnatullah* and causality, (e) take the metaphorical meaning of the text of revelation, (f) dynamic in attitude and thinking. This thinking can be seen in the writings of Ustadz. H. Reza Pahlevi in the book *Ampera Runtuh 2020*. A similar understanding is also held by Ustadz Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuhan, where he said that "*Human intellect must be productive in thinking to advance the civilisation of the people*". Furthermore, Prof. Dr. K.H. Aflatun Muchtar, M.A. also said that "*humans as khalifah fi al-ardh must advance the civilisation of the people, not Jabariyah*". A similar understanding was acknowledged by Prof. Dr. H. Ris'an Rusli, M.Ag by saying that "*humans must transform to the theology of sunnatullah to realise the civilisation of the people in line with the demands of the times*".

From the anthropocentric aspect, the theological thinking of the scholars of Palembang City can be identified as follows: (a) Islam is involved in all aspects of globalisation, (b) Islam becomes the teachings that lead the future (*leading ism*), (c) using the ushul fiqh rule *muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhz bi al-jadid al-ashlah* (maintaining the

good old and taking the better new), (d) laying the foundations of Islam in the national context, (e) prioritising the Islamic mission (*rahmatan li al-'alamin*), (f) being a motivation in transforming society in the socio-political and economic fields, (g) trying to realise a just and prosperous society, (h) making Islam a dictum and spirit that is universal, (i) not recognising the dichotomy between nationalism and Islamism, (j) being rational, (k) being relevant to modern conditions. These facts are relevant to the ulama's thoughts in their writings in newspapers, journals and books.

Some of the above aspects can be confirmed through Ustadz. H. Reza Pahlevi as accessible in *Ampera Runtuh 2020* which states that "*civilisation will advance if humans are productive, optimistic, istiqomah, have an eschatological vision, sincere, and honest*". Furthermore, Prof. Dr. H. Ris'an Rusli in the book *Renewal of Modern Thought in Islam* states that "*civilisation will advance if humans reconstruct the entire building of traditional Islamic thought, relying on Islamic tradition and history, emphasising rationalism, contextual progressiveness*". In other writings, such as in the book *Tasawuf and Tarekat*, Prof. Dr. H. Ris'an Rusli states that "*civilisation will advance if it is based on tawhid, and makes tasawuf and tarekat as the spirit in carrying out social transformation*". In his article entitled *Islamic Moderation in Higher Education*, Prof. Dr. K.H. Aflatun Muchtar, M.A., Chairman of the MUI of South Sumatra Province and former Rector of Raden Fatah State Islamic University (UIN), stated that "*Islam functions as a liberating force, moderate, aims to achieve equality*

and justice, and performs social transformation". The same idea was also agreed by Ustadz Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan by saying that "*Islam is adaptive to the times, always strives to Islamise in all aspects, pays attention to issues of justice and social inequality*". As practitioners of da'wah and education, almost all respondents affirmed that the contextualisation of theology is concrete and seeks to renew, reconstruct Islamic teachings to foster society. The phenomenon of contextualisation of Islamic theology can take the form of the actualisation of traditions that depart from the traditional heritage of the Palembang community.

Referring to the theology of civilisation as described above, the scholars of Palembang City in the 21st century were able to show the form of contextualisation of the understanding of Islamic theology that gave birth to theoretical and practical forms of civilisation. As a demonstration of the articulation of the emergence of theoretical civilisation can be seen from the role of Prof. Dr. K.H. Aflatun Muchtar, M.A who is recognised as a figure and leader of the largest Islamic higher education institution in South Sumatra who initiated, programmed, and technically pursued the process of converting IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang into UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. In addition, he plays an active role in providing input to the Palembang City government and the South Sumatra Provincial Government in the development of socio-religious and educational fields. In another form, the role of Ustadz H. Reza Pahlevi in initiating the SIABU programme for civil servants can also be explained.

While the form of articulation of experimental civilisation can be traced through various activities of the scholars of Palembang City as follows:

1. Spiritual behavioural activities. This spiritual behavioural activity can be traced through the programme initiated and controlled by Ustadz Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan in forming and fostering dhikr assemblies and coordinating motor sports lovers through dawn congregation activities in various mosques once a month in the Palembang city area. In addition, the activities of Ustadz Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan can also be seen from the implementation of the Umrah and Hajj Travel programme. This spiritual behaviour activity can be found in the activities coordinated by Ustadz Hendro Karnadi through the Hadroh al-Nahla coaching activities which are quite famous in Palembang city.
2. Religious Group. The articulation of theological understanding that gave birth to the experimental civilisation can be traced from the activities of Ustadz Reza Pahlevi, Ustadz Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan who established majelis taklim and fostered its activities very effectively. Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan even established the *Solhas Centre* based in Palembang.
3. Educational Institutions. The emergence of Islamic educational institutions in the form of establishing Islamic boarding schools can be seen from the work of Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan who founded Izaatuna Junior High School and Izzatuna Islamic Boarding School. Ustadz K.H. Hendra Zainuddin, M.Pd.I founded the Insan Cendekia Islamic Boarding School, and

- K.H. Sofwatillah Mohzib, M.Pd.I who founded the IGM Islamic Boarding School in the Gandus area. Including ustadz Hendro Karnadi who also founded the Jami'atul Qurro Islamic Boarding School.
4. Objects. The articulation of theological understanding that leads to the realisation of practical civilisation or experimental civilisation can for example be found on the site of al-Qur'an Akbar initiated and founded by Ustadz Syofwatillah Mohzaib, M.Pd.I. Similar traces can also be found in the construction of the Arofatuna Palace initiated and founded by Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan.
 5. Social Interaction. Another form of experimental civilisation that can be explained as the impact of understanding the theology of civilisation is in the form of social interaction built by the scholars of Palembang City in the 21st century. This fact can be found through the track record of Drs. K.H. Solihin Hasibuan who has built Islamic-based social interactions in the Arafatuna Palace residential complex in the Tanjung Api-Api area. Also Ustadz Hendro Karnadi who has established an Islamic educational institution and Hadrah an-Nahla art group that is widely accessed by the people of Palembang City. Likewise, the activities established by Ustadz H. Reza Pahlevi have socialised Islamic social interaction within the Palembang City government. This is in line with the statement of R, one of the employees at the Mayor's office who confirmed the role of Ustadz H. Reza Pahlevi in implementing Islamic social interactions such as habituation of

greetings, Muslim dress, polite speech, *qoaulan layyinan*, *ma'rifan*, *sakilan*, *balighan*" in the environment of employees in the Palembang City Government.

Various forms of articulation of Islamic theological understanding from the scholars of Palembang City in the 21st century are generally educative and even specifically in the form of establishing educational institutions. This fact further confirms that the theological understanding of Palembang City scholars has implications for educational aspects in Palembang City.

DISCUSSION

In the theocentric aspect, the theological context of civilisation relies on philosophical and academic thinking on the *kauniyah* verses, namely the Qur'an and al-Hadith, and is bound to clear and firm dogmas as *qaht'i* verses. This theological thinking is built based on logical-rational arguments (vitality of rationalism), so that the proof of God and the process of creation of the universe has a rationalistic argument basis. This theology tends to adhere to *qadariyah*, which understands humans as *khalifah fi al-ardh* who are tasked with building human civilisation based on revelation and relevant to the times, science and technology (Harun Nasution, 1994). Civilisation theology tries to interpret Islamic doctrine in a language formulation that is acceptable to the modern mind, so as to present Islam in a form that is in accordance with contemporary developments. Each figure has an interpretation and understanding that refers to certain social theories differently according to their educational, economic,

social, and political backgrounds. The variety of backgrounds is related to the patterns and models of articulation of thought as a foundation.

In the anthropocentric aspect, civilisation theology seeks to adapt Islamic teachings to the demands of the times, the development of science and technology. This kind of theology creates positive bonds between Qur'anic thought and modern thought (Rachman, 1994). This anthropocentric theology of civilisation makes Islam a *leading ism*, dictum, and spirit that is universal in all aspects. Therefore, the adage that develops in the ushul fiqh rules is *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhz bi al-jadid al-ashlah*, namely maintaining the good old ones and taking the new ones that are better so that the civilisation of a prosperous, just and prosperous society is realised.

The contextualisation of civilisation theology is to reconstruct the entire edifice of traditional Islamic thought so that it functions as a *liberating force*, rests on Islamic tradition and history, uses phenomenological methods, emphasises rationalism, radicality, contextual progressiveness, resistance to hegemonic currents, is based on *tawhid*, aims to realise equality and justice, and social transformation. Such theology by Masdar F. Mas'udi is called populist theology (Rachman, 1994). However, Moeslim Abdurrahman calls it transformative theology, and Budhy Munawar Rachman calls it emancipatory theology (Rachman, 1992; Muntaha, 1983).

The subject matter of the theology of civilisation is the spirit and efforts to renew thinking that has an impact on the birth of theoretical civilisation and

experimental civilisation. The contextualisation varies, including the actualisation of traditions, exploring and interpreting the treasures of Palembang culture that do not conflict with Islamic teachings, and have an eschatological vision. Contextualisation of theological understanding like this then gave birth to the Palembang City civilisation that is distinctive and different from other regions, because it is more visible culturally (Ali & Efendi, 1986).

The different educational, social, political and economic backgrounds of the ulama as theologians in Palembang City gave birth to different civilisations. Arnold Toynbee in the *challenge and response* theory states that the progress and decline of civilisation is caused by humans as a creative minority and the environment. The environment challenges the creative minority to use their minds so that civilisation emerges. The more rational the mind of the creative minority, the more advanced the formulated civilisation (Sharqawi, 1992). As a creative minority, the scholars of Palembang City in the 21st century have shown symptoms of active thinking and building civilisation in Palembang. They create unique programs, innovate, and create quality objects that ultimately advance the civilisation of theory and experiment. This method of civilisation formulation in Gordon Childebeer's theory (1986) is called *urban revolution* theory.

Contextualisation of theological thought can be seen in several forms of appearance in various aspects, namely: *first*, theoretical civilisation. According to Rene Sedilot, civilisation is a treasure of knowledge and technical skills that continues to increase from one generation

to the next and is able to continue continuously. The contextualisation of theoretical civilisation is science, Islamic architectural art (in the form of mosques, school buildings, residences), literary art (Islamic novels as a medium for da'wah), sound art (hadrah, nasyid, recitation of recitation and murattal al-Qur'an), religious systems and religious ceremonies, community organisation systems, and knowledge systems. The theoretical civilisation in Palembang City in the 12th century was unique and diverse. This is relevant to Huntington's thesis that every civilisation has plurality and distinctiveness, due to the distinctiveness of its cultures (Imarah, 1999). Thus, the civilisation of Palembang City is a continuity of the previous civilisation. According to S Czarnowski, the content of a past civilisation is maintained or even becomes a kind of reference for the next civilisation period.

The theoretical civilisation born in Palembang City in the 21st century gave birth to human values and humanitarian life. Sayyid Qutb mentioned that civilisation can lead humanity, leading to development and progress (Qutb, 1983). According to Rene Sedilot, civilisation is a treasure of knowledge and technical skills that continues to increase from one generation to the next and is able to continue continuously in the form of a "cycle of civilisation", in Ibn Khaldun's terminology called the cultural cycle (Khaldun, 1999).

Experimental civilisation as a contextualisation of theological thinking on Palembang City civilisation in the 21st century can be seen in articulations such as: *religious* activities, social groups, social systems, and social institutions,

objects, social interactions based on imitation, suggestion, identification, and sympathy. A clear example of the contextualisation of this experimental civilisation can be found in the social institutions and advanced Islamic architecture. Advanced Islamic architecture can be seen in the emergence of the Qur'an al-akbar site, the Great Mosque of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin Jayo Wikramo, Cheng Ho Mosque Palembang, and Arofata Palace Palembang as Islamic buildings. In addition, Palembang City Icons such as the Belido Monument, *Light Rail Transit*, Musi IV Bridge, Musi VI Bridge, Jakabaring Love Anjungan, and Sudirman Pedestrian, are a form of modern articulation of the understanding of the theology of civilisation.

CONCLUSIONS

The structure of civilisational theological thought from the ulama of Palembang City in the 21st century can be identified into two theological thoughts, namely theocentric theology and anthropocentric theology. The subject matter of theocentric theology is always normative-metaphysical, while anthropocentric theology is a practical reflection of the teachings of tawhid in all aspects of life. The contextualisation of civilisation theology thought shown by Palembang City scholars in the 21st century can be classified into two categories, namely theoretical civilisation and experimental civilisation. Theoretical civilisation is in the form of science, ideas for the development of government and education systems, the art of building and architecture, literature and sound. Experimental civilisation takes the form of

objects, buildings, religious activities and social interactions. The analysis of this research also confirms that the theological thinking of the Palembang City ulama specifically takes the form of articulation in the institutionalisation of Islamic education. The scholars of Palembang City are proven to initiate and establish various Islamic education institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, taklim assemblies, and recitation groups.

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