Liberalism in the Perspective of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi: A Descriptive Analytical Study

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Abstract: When the thought of religious liberalism entered Indonesia, some scholars regarded it as an idea for Islamic reform, resulting in confusion (*shubhat*) among the Muslim community. As the liberalization movement grew more widespread, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi emerged as one of the Muslim scholars at the forefront in rejecting the idea of liberalism through a rational and well-argued approach. Therefore, this article discusses liberalism from the perspective of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi. Through library research and descriptive analysis, it can be concluded that: *first*, liberalism is a Western worldview that presupposes absolute freedom whether in politics, society, economy, thought, or religion. *Second*, the liberalization of Islamic thought is a joint movement between missionaries, orientalists, and colonialists, which was later adopted by liberal scholars. *Third*, the challenges of liberalism encompass five aspects, namely: the doctrines of relativism, pluralism, feminism and gender, criticism of the Qur'an, and the deconstruction of Islamic law (*sharia*).

Keywords: *Liberalism, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, Relativism, Pluralism, Feminism.*

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Abstrak: Ketika pemikiran liberalisme keagamaan masuk ke Indonesia, sebagian cendekiawan menganggapnya sebagai ide pembaharuan Islam, sehingga muncul syubhat di kalangan umat Islam. Seiring masifnya gerakan liberalisasi tersebut, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi hadir sebagai salah satu cendekiawan muslim yang berada di garda depan menolak ide liberalisme dengan pendekatan rasional dan penuh argumentasi. Untuk itu, artikel ini akan membahas liberalisme dalam pandangan Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi. Melalui kajian *library research* dengan analisis deskriptif dapat disimpulkan, *pertama:* liberalisme merupakan pandangan hidup Barat yang mengandaikan kebebasan sebebas-bebasnya baik secara politik, sosial, ekonomi, pemikiran ataupun keagamaan. *Kedua:* liberalisasi pemikiran Islam merupakan gerakan bersama antara misionaris, orientalis dan kolonialis yang kemudian diadopsi cendekiawan liberal. *Ketiga:* tantangan liberalisme meliputi lima hal, yaitu: doktrin relativisme, pluralisme, feminisme dan gender, serta kritik terhadap Al-Qur'an, dan dekonstruksi syariat Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Liberalisme, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, Relativisme, Pluralisme, Feminisme.*

Introduction

Tracing back through the history of Islamic thought in Indonesia in particular, the liberalization of Islam had already been instilled since the Dutch colonial era.[1] However, from within Islamic organizations themselves, the systematic movement of Islamic liberalization in Indonesia can be said to have begun in the early 1970s.[2] On January 3, 1970, the Chairman of the Central Board of the Indonesian Muslim Student Association (PBHMI), Nurcholish Madjid, officially launched the need for the liberalization of Islam. In his paper entitled "The Necessity of Reforming Islamic Thought and the Problem of Ummah Integration", he emphasized the necessity of liberalizing Islamic thought through two closely interconnected actions: breaking away from traditional values (intellectual freedom) and seeking values that are future-oriented (ideas of progress and openness).[3]

Nurcholish Madjid's idea of liberalization became one of the key milestones in the history of Islamic thought liberalization in Indonesia. This idea was later utilized by various parties to expand the discourse of liberalization

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[1] Adian Husaini, *Liberalisasi Islam di Indonesia: Fakta, Gagasan, Kritik, dan Solusinya* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2015), 4.

[2] Husaini, 4.

[3] Nurcholish Madjid, "Keharusan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Umat," *PUSAD Paramadina* (blog), 3 Januari 1970, https://www.paramadina-pusad.or.id/keharusan-pembaruan-pemikiran-islam-dan-masalah-integrasi-umat/.

more massively, triggering unrest and a range of events in the realm of Islamic thought that became difficult to control.[4] By adopting the ideas of Harvey Cox in his book The Secular City,[5] Nurcholish Madjid at that time began to open the door to the currents of secularization and liberalization in Islamic thought by drawing lessons from Jewish and Christian traditions.[6]

However, what was meant by the reform of Islamic thought sparked controversy and drew much rejection from Muslim scholars in Indonesia.[7] Many viewed this idea not only as damaging to Islamic teachings but also as opening the door to the infiltration of values that contradict the fundamental principles of Islam.[8] One of the leading thinkers who stood at the forefront in opposing this liberal ideology was Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi.[9] Not only did he criticize it rationally, but Hamid also explained the essence and the deliberate movement behind the spread of this ideology. Therefore, this article will discuss liberalism from the perspective of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi.

As for previous studies, several scholarly works related to the figure of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi have been identified. First: a thesis titled *"Religious Pluralism According to the Thought of Dr. Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi M.A., M.Phil in the Context of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia"* by Wahyuni Usman, published in 2017.[10] Second: a master's thesis titled *"The Thought of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi and His Contribution to the Development of Higher Education at Gontor"* by

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[4] Husaini, *Liberalisasi Islam di Indonesia: Fakta, Gagasan, Kritik, dan Solusinya*, 5.

[5] See, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2013).

[6] Husaini, *Liberalisasi Islam di Indonesia: Fakta, Gagasan, Kritik, dan Solusinya*, 5.

[7] Cahyaningrum Tri Agus Tina, "Pergerakan Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) di Indonesia Tahun 2001-2005" (Skripsi, Surakarta, Universitas Sebelas Maret, 2012), 14.

[8] Mujahid Imaduddin, "Dampak Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam Terhadap kehidupan Sosial," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 1 (2017): 92–93, https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v15i1.837.

[9] Adib Fattah Suntoro, "Liberalisasi Pemikiran islam di Indonesia dalam Sorotan Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi," *CIOS* (blog), 16 Januari 2025, https://ciosunidagontor.com/liberalisasi-pemikiran-islam-di-indonesia-dalam-sorotan-hamid-fahmy-zarkasyi/.

[10] See, Wahyuni Usman, "Pluralisme Agama Menurut Pemikiran Dr. Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi M.A., M.Phil dalam Konteks Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia" (Skripsi, Semarang, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, 2017).

Anton Ismunanto, published in 2018.[11] Third: a master's thesis titled *"Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi's Critique of Hermeneutics in the Islamization of Knowledge (From the Perspective of Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge)"* by Rajendra Rahmat Ramadhan, published in 2024.[12] Although these studies explore the same figure, the present study differs from the previous ones as it focuses specifically on Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi's views on liberalism. Nevertheless, the previous studies are valuable as additional data and further demonstrate that this figure is highly worthy of scholarly exploration.

This research is a qualitative library study and employs analytical methodology.[13] In analytical methodology, the researcher observes the research object in detail by breaking down and organizing its components for further examination. The process involves questioning, comparing, and withholding conclusions until strong evidence is obtained.[14] The primary data sources are the works of Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi related to liberalism, such as his work *"Tantangan Sekularisasi dan Liberalisasi di Dunia Islam"* (first published in 2004);[15] *"Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)"* (first published in 2008);[16] and *"Misykat: Refleksi Tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam"* (first published in 2012).[17] These are supplemented by several related journals, books, and articles as secondary data. All the data will be analyzed by connecting, describing, and occasionally comparing with other perspectives in an integrated and systematic manner to produce a

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[11] See, Anton Ismunanto, "Pemikiran Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi dan Kontribusinya Terhadap Pengembangan Pendidikan Tinggi Gontor" (Tesis, Yogyakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2018).

[12] See, Rajendra Rahmat Ramadhan, "Kritik Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi Tentang Hermeneutika Dalam Islamisasi Ilmu (Perspektif Arkeologi Pengetahuan Michel Foucault" (Tesis, Yogyakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2024).

[13] Mestika Zed, *Metodologi Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2004), 24.

[14] Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 22–25.

[15] See, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, Adnin Armas, dan Adian Husaini, *Tantangan Sekularisasi dan Liberalisasi di Dunia Islam* (Jakarta: Khairul Bayan, 2004).

[16] See, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)* (Ponorogo: CIOS-ISID, 2008).

[17] See, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam* (Jakarta: INSISTS-MIUMI, 2012).

comprehensive understanding. The data will be analyzed using content analysis techniques.[18]

Discussion

Liberal Ideology and Theology

The word *liberal* is derived from the Latin word *liber*, which means free and not a slave, or a condition in which a person is free from the ownership of others.[19] This notion of freedom later became an attitude adopted by the educated class in the West, characterized by the opening of the door to freedom of thought (*the old liberalism*).[20] From this concept of freedom of thought, the term *liberal* evolved to encompass various meanings.[21]

In the political context, for example, liberalism can be understood as a political ideology centered on the individual, who is regarded as the bearer of rights in governance—including the right to equal treatment, freedom of expression and action, and freedom from ideological and religious constraints.[22] In the social context, liberalism can be interpreted as a social ethic that generally upholds liberty and equality.[23] In the economic context, liberalism refers to an ideology that emphasizes individual freedom in enterprise, the right to own wealth, freedom in economic policy-making, and the freedom to enter contracts, while opposing the welfare state system.[24] Beyond these three contexts, there also exists liberalism in the realm of thought (intellectual), including religious thought.

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[18] See, Hamzah Amir, *Metodologi Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Literasi Nusantara, 2020).

[19] Jamil Shaliba, *Al-Mu'jam al-Falsafī: bi al-Alfādz al-'Arabiyyah wa al-Faransiyyah wa al-Iklīziyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Banani, 1982), 461.

[20] Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam*, 105.

[21] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 25.

[22] See, Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[23] C.A.J. Coady, *Distributive Justice, a Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy, edited by Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit and Thomas Pogge* (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 440.

[24] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 31.

Liberalism, in the context of intellectual freedom, refers to independence in thought, broad-mindedness, frankness, and openness.[25] This intellectual freedom actually developed in parallel with the rise of political, social, and economic liberalism in the West at the end of the 18th century, although its roots can be traced back a century earlier, to the 17th century.[26] During that time, the Western world became obsessed with freeing itself intellectually, religiously, politically, and economically from moral order, the supernatural, and even from God.[27] As a result, the principles of the French Revolution in 1789 were regarded as the *Magna Charta* of liberalism. These principles encompassed absolute freedom in thought, religion, ethics, belief, speech, the press, and politics. The consequence was the abolition of God's rights and all authority believed to be derived from God; religion was pushed out of public life and reduced to a personal matter. Thus, liberalism indicates a rejection of all genuine authority, because authority in the liberal view implies a force that exists outside and above humanity, to which one is morally bound.[28]

Intellectual freedom that seeks to break away from religion and God is, logically, a form of religious liberalism. Initially, what emerged was intellectual liberalism, which aimed to be free from religion and God; but from there arose and grew the liberalization of religious thought, also known as *theological liberalism*.[29] The development of liberal religious thought can be classified into three phases. The first phase began in the 17th century, led by the French philosopher René Descartes, who promoted the doctrine of rationalism or enlightenment, which lasted until the mid-18th century. This doctrine was primarily based on belief in human reason, the primacy of the individual, the immanence of God, and the conviction that humans can and should be improved (*meliorism*). The second phase began at the end of the 18th century with the doctrine of Romanticism, which emphasized individualism—meaning that the

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[25] Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam*, 108.

[26] Muhamad Fajar Pramono dan Amir Sahidin, "Implementation of al-Attas's Islamization on the Impact of Desacralization of Politics," *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 157, https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v1i2.26.

[27] Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam*, 108.

[28] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 31.

[29] Zarkasyi, 31.

individual can become the source of values. The final phase began in the mid-19th century and extended into the 20th century, marked by the spirit of modernism and postmodernism, which emphasized the idea of progress (*notion of progress*).[30]

Religion was then positioned as something that evolves progressively, adjusted to modern scientific knowledge, and expected to respond to issues raised by modern culture. As a result, the study of Christian doctrines transformed into the psychological study of religious experience, the sociological study of religious institutions and traditions, and philosophical inquiry into religious knowledge and values.[31]

Meanwhile, in the 19th century, liberalism in Roman Catholic religious thought took the form of a movement that supported political democracy and church reform, while theologically still maintaining orthodoxy. In contrast, in Protestant Christian thought, liberalism became a trend of intellectual freedom that emphasized the ethical and humanistic substance of Christianity while reducing emphasis on dogmatic theology. As a result, the entry of liberalism into religious thought led to the transformation of many fundamental religious concepts.[32]

Islam and the Challenge of Liberalism

Because liberalism is a worldview or ideology rooted in the West, Islam is viewed by the West as a challenge to their liberalism. Conversely, liberalism also poses a challenge to the Muslim community. Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History and The Last Man*, clearly places Islam alongside the ideology of liberalism, although he acknowledges that Islam possesses its own moral values as well as doctrines of politics and social justice. According to him, because Islamic teachings are universal in nature, they pose a challenge to liberal democracy and liberal practices. On the other hand, he also recognizes that

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[30] *The New Encyclopedia of Britanica* (Chicago: Universitas of Chicago, 1991), vol. 11, 693.

[31] Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam*, 110.

[32] Nicholas F. Gier, *Religious Liberalism and The Founding Father, in Pater Caws, ed. Two Centuries of Philosophy in America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1980), 22–45.

Western liberal values are a threat to Muslim societies.[33] In relation to this, Fukuyama affirms:

> *Indeed, the Islamic world would seem more vulnerable to liberal ideas in the long run than the reverse, since such liberalism has attracted numerous and powerful Muslim adherent over the past century and a half. Part of the the reason for current, fundamentalist revival is the stregth of the perceived threat from liberal, Western values to traditional Islamic societies.*[34]

In that statement, Fukuyama clearly positions Islam and liberalism as ideologies that each have their own doctrines, which are mutually opposing and threatening, based on the fact that liberalism and Islam are fundamentally different. However, the issue is not merely the difference between the two, but rather the fact that liberal Western civilization claims its worldview to be "universal" and applicable to all of humanity.[35]

The problem is that what the West considers "universal" is not seen as such by Muslims. In reality, there are irreconcilable differences between Western and Islamic concepts. At the level of social life, these differences lead to conflict, clashes, and a collision of perceptions (collision of consciousness). At the individual level, they result in inner turmoil and intellectual struggle, while at the conceptual level, they cause overlap and conceptual confusion. This intellectual struggle at the individual level is what Muslims in Indonesia are currently experiencing. Thus, the larger-scale battle of ideas today is taking place between Islamic civilization and Western culture, or more precisely, between the Islamic worldview and the Western worldview.[36]

However, the West has attempted to impose its concepts onto the thinking of the Muslim community. This imposition is known as the project of Westernization and globalization.[37] The use of terms such as "fundamentalist Islam," "liberal Islam," "traditional Islam," "modern Islam," and so on are just a few examples of how Western terminology and concepts are forced upon Muslims. For the dissemination of cultural ideologies and beliefs, the projects of

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[33] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Avon Book, 1992), 45–46.

[34] Fukuyama, 45–46.

[35] Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, dan Islam*, 112.

[36] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 43.

[37] See, Serge Latouche, *the Westernization of the World, the Significance, Scopee and Limits of the Drive toward Global Uniformity, Trans: Rosemary Morris* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 5.

Westernization and globalization are employed; for the spread of Islamic thought, the Orientalist movement is used; for expanding the acceptance of Western culture and beliefs, the missionary movement is utilized; and for the domination of the Islamic world in various fields, colonialism is applied.[38]

The Challenge of Liberalism in Indonesia

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the liberalization of Islamic thought had already been planted since the Dutch colonial era. The principle of a secular liberal state became the foundation for a government that maintained neutrality toward religion—neither siding with nor interfering in religious affairs.[39] After the arrival of Snouck Hurgronje, the Dutch East Indies government adopted a clear policy regarding Islam. For Snouck, the enemy of colonialism was not Islam as a religion, but Islam as a political doctrine.[40] The Ethical Policy further entrenched liberalism in Indonesia. One form of this policy was known as "unification," which aimed to bind the colony and the colonizer by introducing Western culture to Indonesians. As a result, Indonesians would share the same perception in social and political aspects, even though they differed in religion.[41]

Although liberalism had existed since the Dutch colonial period, it was only in the early 1970s that it began to systematically enter Islamic organizations.[42] On January 3, 1970, the Chairman of the Central Executive Board of the Indonesian Islamic Student Association (HMI), Nurcholish Madjid, officially launched the call for the liberalization of Islam. In his paper titled *"The Necessity of Reforming Islamic Thought and the Problem of Ummah Integration"*, he emphasized the need to liberalize Islamic thought by breaking away from traditional values and seeking values that are future-oriented.[43]

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[38] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 44.

[39] Aqib Sumito, *Politik Islam Hidia-Belanda* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 27.

[40] H. J. Benda, *Bulan Sabit dan Matahari Terbit: Islam di Indonesia Masa Pendudukan Jepang* (Bandung: Pustaka Jaya, 1980), 45.

[41] Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Moderen Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1991), 183.

[42] Husaini, *Liberalisasi Islam di Indonesia: Fakta, Gagasan, Kritik, dan Solusinya*, 4.

[43] Madjid, "Keharusan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Umat."

Nurcholish Madjid's idea of liberalization became one of the key milestones in the history of Islamic thought liberalization in Indonesia. His ideas were later utilized by various groups to expand the discourse of liberalization on a larger scale, which triggered unrest, confusion (*shubhat*), and various events within the realm of Islamic thought that became difficult to control.[44] Since the late 1990s, a group of young Muslims emerged, calling themselves *liberal Islam*. These young individuals sought to respond to the issues that arose at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. While scholars during the New Order era were reluctant to openly label themselves as liberal Muslims, the youth who emerged in the late 1990s (during the reform era) boldly identified themselves as *liberal Muslims* with various agendas; agendas that could be linked to the liberal ideology originating in the West.[45]

Therefore, Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi stated that the agendas and applications of liberal ideology can be grouped into five main areas: the dissemination of the doctrine of relativism; religious pluralism; the promotion of feminism and gender ideology; criticism of the Qur'an; and the deconstruction of Islamic law (*Shariah*).[46] A brief explanation of each is as follows:

First: **The dissemination of the doctrine of relativism.**

The first application of liberal ideology is the doctrine of relativism. This doctrine originally came from Protagoras, a Sophist who held the principle that "man is the measure of all things".[47] In the Western postmodern era,[48] this doctrine was advanced by Friedrich Nietzsche through what is known as the doctrine of nihilism, which in essence is the same—relativism. With this powerful doctrine that aimed to dismantle metaphysics and religious truth, Nietzsche boldly declared the slogan, "God is Dead".[49]

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[44] Husaini, *Liberalisasi Islam di Indonesia: Fakta, Gagasan, Kritik, dan Solusinya*, 5.

[45] Adian Husaini dan Nuim Hidayat, *Islam Liberal; Sejarah Konsepsi, Penyimpangan, dan Jawabannya* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2002), 4.

[46] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 91.

[47] Zarkasyi, 92.

[48] Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi dkk., "Impact of Postmodernism on the Thought of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (IMIs)," *JITC: Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (2023): 30, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.03.

[49] See, Friedrich Nietzshe, *The Gay Science, Trans: Thomas Common* (New York: Dover Publications, 2006).

This doctrine of relativism is often championed by liberals, who believe that no value holds superiority over others. As a result, religion is no longer entitled to claim absolute truth; instead, it is understood to be no different from human perception itself, which is relative.[50] Khairul Muqtafa, in a book published by Fatayan NU and the Ford Foundation, wrote: *"In this realm, what should be our guiding principle is that we cannot know absolute truth. We can only know the truth to the extent that it is valid for us. In other words, the truth we have understood all this time is nothing more than a one-sided truth."*[51]

In fact, the statement that there is no absolute truth, often accompanied by the phrase that only God knows absolute truth, contains several fallacies. First, if it is said that humans cannot know absolute truth, this is clearly untrue, because mathematical equations such as $1 + 1 = 2$ are absolute. Second, if what is meant is that a person cannot know absolute truth as intended by God, this implies disbelief in the prophethood of Muhammad, the man whom God entrusted to deliver His message. It would be impossible for God to reveal a message that could not be understood by His own Messenger. Third, when someone claims that only God knows what is true, then that person must already know what God knows. If they do not, then it is impossible for them to claim that only God holds absolute truth. Fourth, the statement that "truth is relative" is itself self-contradictory, because if all truths are relative, then the statement itself is also relative; meaning it is not necessarily true.[52]

Second: The Dissemination of Religious Pluralism

After embracing the doctrine of relativism, liberal groups automatically accept the concept that arises from it which is religious pluralism. Pluralism itself is essentially in harmony with relativism. It is often understood as a doctrine that holds the view that no opinion is absolutely true, or that all opinions are equally true.[53]

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[50] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 92.

[51] Khairul Muqtafa, *Sururin (ed), Nilai-nilai Pluralisme dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Fatayan NU & Ford Foundation, 2005), 58.

[52] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 94–95.

[53] See, Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*.

The dissemination of religious pluralism is one of the key agendas of the liberalization of thought. Religious pluralism is a theological innovation and the final form of thought promoted by liberal religious thinkers. In its application, this view holds that all religions are equally true and equally valid.[54] Ulil Abshar Abdalla asserts, *"All religions are the same. All lead to the path of truth. So, Islam is not the most correct."*[55] He also stated, *"Without hesitation or discomfort, I say that all religions are indeed on that path—the long journey toward the Ultimate Truth. All religions, therefore, are true, each with its own variation, level, and depth in experiencing the religious path."*[56]

Therefore, the core doctrine of this view is to eliminate the exclusivist attitude among religious adherents, particularly within Islam. In other words, this perspective encourages Muslims to abandon religious fanaticism, refrain from claiming sole possession of the truth, and avoid considering other religions as inherently false.[57] According to John Hick, a prominent proponent of religious pluralism, one of the fundamental principles of religious pluralism is the assertion that other religions are equally valid paths to the same ultimate truth (*Other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth*).[58]

Third: **The Dissemination of Feminism and Gender Ideology**

Liberalism extends not only to matters of truth and religion, but also promotes the spread of feminism and gender ideologies. The feminist and gender movements originally stemmed from Western worldviews or emerged from the socio-cultural conditions of Western societies. The core aim of these movements is to alter the prevailing beliefs in both Eastern and Western societies that behavioral differences between men and women are shaped by social and cultural conditions. Therefore, such gender constructs can be changed through shifts in societal concepts. In this context, Wilson defines gender as *"a basis for*

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[54] Harda Armayanto, "Problem Pluralisme Agama," *Tsaqafah: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 10, no. 2 (2014): 325, https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i2.191.

[55] See, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "dalam Majalah GARTA," 12 Desember 2002.

[56] See, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "Menyegarkan Kembali Pamahaman Islam," *Kompas*, 2002, 18-11–2002 edisi.

[57] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 106.

[58] See, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

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distinguishing between men and women within culture and collective life, which as a result, turns them into men and women."[59] The gender movement does not question the differences between male and female identities from biological, psychological, or other non-biological aspects.[60]

Nevertheless, the movement originating from the doctrine of equality in all aspects of society eventually began to reflect more of its Western cultural roots than its humanistic elements. One branch of feminist theory, for example, *Radical Feminism*, demands equal rights for men and women not only in social matters but also in matters of sexuality. This means that sexual satisfaction can also be sought from same-sex relationships, thereby granting legitimacy and the right to exist and flourish to lesbianism and homosexuality. Influenced by such ideas, a Muslim woman from Canada named Irshad Manji was brought to Indonesia to spread this ideology. Likewise, books by figures such as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Bint al-Shati', and others who advocate these views have been widely translated into Indonesian.[61]

Because of this, with liberal thinking combined with the influence of feminist and gender ideologies, new legal *ijtihad* (interpretations) have emerged—ones that do not refer to the opinions of past scholars and were never heard of before. Supporters of this ideology even act as if they understand the intentions of God, going so far as to legalize what God has clearly forbidden. One such expression declares, *"Only primitive people see same-sex marriage as something abnormal and dangerous. For us, there is no strong reason—under any pretext—for anyone to prohibit same-sex marriage. Even God understands; His project of creating human beings has not only succeeded, it has gone overboard."*[62] This kind of statement amounts to speaking on behalf of God. Yet, ironically, when others quote Qur'anic verses, as a basis for argument, such individuals will quickly respond, "Don't *speak in the name of God!"*

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[59] See, H. T. Wilson, *Sex and Gender, Making Cultural Sense of Civilization* (New York: EJ. Brill, 1989).

[60] Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* (New Jersey: Prientice Hall, t.t.), 2.

[61] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 112.

[62] See, Ahmad Khairul et al Umam, *Indahnya Kawin Sesama Jenis: Demokratisasi dan Perlindungan Hak-hak Kaum Homoseksual* (Semarang: Lembaga Studi Sosial dan Agama/eLSA, 2005).

Fourth: **Criticism of the Qur'an**

In addition to promoting the three Western doctrines mentioned earlier, one of the most strategic steps in the liberalization agenda is the criticism of the Qur'an, which is the primary source of guidance and law in Islam. This, too, is part of a broader scenario based on the Christian West's own historical experience—specifically, the methods used by Christian missionaries in studying and critiquing the Bible are now applied to the study and critique of the Qur'an. One of the earliest figures to systematically apply Biblical methodology to Qur'anic studies was Theodore Nöldeke, through his work *Geschichte des Qorans* (The History of the Qur'an).[63] Nöldeke's efforts were later supported and followed by Reverend Edward Sell, a prominent missionary based in Madras, India. He adopted Nöldeke's work as a model for critical studies of the Qur'an and went on to publish his own work titled *Historical Development of the Qur'an* in 1909.[64]

The connection between the criticism of the Qur'an and the Western experience with the Bible can be seen in the statement of Reverend Alphonse Mingana (d. 1937), who said, *"The time has surely come to subject the text of the Qur'an to the same criticism as that to which we subject the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Jewish Bible, and the Greek of the Christian Scripture."* In this statement, Reverend Alphonse emphasized that the time had come to conduct textual criticism of the Qur'an. Following this, Arthur Jeffery proposed that such critical interpretation of the Qur'anic text could be realized through the application of scientific critical methods specifically, biblical criticism.[65] As a result of applying biblical criticism to the study of the Qur'an, Orientalist scholars put forward various controversial views, such as: the Qur'an has undergone multiple distortions; its standardization was the result of political engineering and power manipulation; and that Uthman ibn Affan was mistaken for codifying the Qur'an, among

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[63] Adnin Armas, *Metodologi Bibel dalam Studi Al-Qur'an: Studi Kritis* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2005), 49–57.

[64] Canon Sell, *Studies in Islam* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1985), 253–56.

[65] Arthur Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'an Texs," *The Moslem world* 25, no. 1 (1935): 4, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1935.tb00058.x.

others. Based on these critical studies, it was concluded that there is a need to produce a critical edition of the Qur'an.[66]

In addition, criticism of the Qur'an is also closely linked to the application of hermeneutical methods in understanding the Qur'an. This is because the first step in using hermeneutics is to alter the status of the Qur'anic text—from a divine text to a human (*basyari*) text. Once the status of the text is reduced to something human, bound by time and space, hermeneutics then allows a person to change the text (*nass*) itself as well as reinterpret its original meanings. These are then deconstructed according to the prevailing social context, which is ultimately rooted in humanism.[67]

Fifth: Deconstructing Islamic Shariah

Not only is the Qur'an subject to criticism, but one of the methods used to align Islam with Western thought particularly the doctrine of humanism is by deconstructing *Shariah*. This deconstruction is carried out by altering interpretations of religious texts, emphasizing the contextualization of *ijtihad*, commitment to rationality and reform, and promoting the ideas of social and religious pluralism.[68] One way of stressing the contextualization of *ijtihad* is by positioning the Qur'an as a spontaneous response to the societal conditions of its time, thus making it contextual in nature. The argument is that the Qur'an did not descend in a vacuum, but was influenced by the culture in which it was revealed. At first glance, this may seem valid, but its logical consequence is that the Qur'an would no longer be considered universal. It would then be seen as a product of Arab socio-cultural conditions, and thus, in the modern era, could not be understood in the same way as when it was revealed. However, prohibitions such as those against alcohol, the consumption of pork, gambling, adultery, and

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[66] Armas, *Metodologi Bibel dalam Studi Al-Qur'an: Studi Kritis*, 49–57.

[67] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 103–4.

[68] Greg Barton, *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia: Pemikiran neo-modernisme Nucholis Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib dan Abdurrahman Wahid, 1968-1980* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999), xxi.

the 2:1 inheritance ratio between males and females are not based on cultural context; they are divine commands.[69]

In addition, the deconstruction of *Shariah* is also carried out by questioning the concept of *maslahah* (public interest or benefit). The argument presented is that since the purpose of Islamic law is to bring about *maslahah* for humanity, then *maqasid al-shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law) should be considered more important than the *Shariah* itself. According to liberal groups, any action that contains benefit (*maslahah*) must inherently be part of *Shariah*. However, the correct understanding is that every Islamic legal ruling (*hukm shari'*) inherently contains *maslahah*, and not the other way around.[70] Here, what liberal thinkers target is the definition of *maslahah* itself, because it can be interpreted according to socio-cultural contexts and ultimately aligned with the doctrine of humanism. The end goal is to reshape Islamic law so that it conforms to Western cultural doctrines, which are typically rooted in humanistic principles.[71]

Not only do liberals interpret Islamic teachings contextually and prioritize *maslahah* over *Shariah*, they also associate the *ijtihad* of scholars with the socio-cultural conditions present when those rulings were made. As a result, the thoughts of classical scholars are viewed as relative, bound by time and place.[72] With this way of thinking, the valuable intellectual heritage of past scholars is considered no longer relevant in the modern era. Consequently, the *ijtihad* of scholars who distinguished between *muhkamat* (clear and decisive verses) and *mutashabihat* (ambiguous verses) is also dismissed;[73] clear and definitive meanings in the Qur'an are re-contextualized until they become ambiguous,

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[69] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 108–9.

[70] Amir Sahidin dan Imam Kamaluddin, "An Examination of Maqashid al-Shari'ah between Textual and Contextual Reasoning (Descriptive Analysis Study)," *Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum* 20, no. 2 (2024): 21, https://doi.org/10.32332/istinbath.v20i02.4830.

[71] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 110.

[72] Amir Sahidin, "Telaah Atas Ijtihad Umar Bin Khaṭṭab Perspektif Maqāṣid Al-Syarī'ah," *Jurnal Penelitian Medan Agama* 14, no. 1 (2023): 25, http://dx.doi.org/10.58836/jpma.v14i1.16553.

[73] Harda Armayanto dan Maria Ulfa, "Dekonstruksi Syari'ah Dalam Pernikahan Muslimah Dengan Non-Muslim," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Hukum dan Ekonomi Islam* 7, no. 2 (2013): 169, https://doi.org/10.21111/ijtihad.v7i2.82.

while verses that are inherently ambiguous but align with liberal views are treated as if they are *muhkamat*.[74]

Conclusion

From the entire discussion above, it can be concluded that liberalism is a Western worldview that presupposes absolute freedom in political, social, economic, intellectual, and religious matters. This form of liberalism has been disseminated through the movements of missionary activity, Orientalism, and colonialism. When it entered Indonesia, liberal thought was perceived by some scholars as an idea for Islamic reform, which in turn created confusion (*shubhat*) among the Muslim community. Amid such developments, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi emerged as a scholar who rationally and argumentatively refuted this way of thinking. He not only clarified the teachings of liberalism but also exposed the movements behind the liberalization agenda and provided rebuttals against such ideological practices. The key manifestations and challenges of liberal thought include the dissemination of the doctrines of relativism, religious pluralism, feminism and gender ideology, criticism of the Qur'an, and the deconstruction of Islamic *Shariah*.

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[74] Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam (Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis)*, 110.

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