

## GUARDING SHARIAH FROM LIBERALISM: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW ON LIBERAL ISLAM NETWORK IN INDONESIA

<sup>i</sup>\*Mualimin Mochammad Sahid, <sup>ii</sup>Malki Ahmad Nasir

<sup>i</sup>Faculty of Syariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)

<sup>ii</sup>Faculty of Dakwah, Universitas Islam Bandung (UNISBA)

\*(Corresponding Author) Email: mualimin.sahid@usim.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

The history has witnessed different efforts from other parties to go against Islam as a religion of peace. Through its teachings and values, Islam appears as a religion that propagates universal message of mercy and peace for all mankind regardless their race, colour and religion. Shariah as a law containing all guidance for Muslims in their daily life must be put above everything. However, challenges faced by Islam in different parts of the world have been occurring until today such secularism, liberalism, and other concepts and thoughts. This paper aims at explaining how Shariah can be guarded from the threat of liberalism which occurred in Indonesia through the movement called *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Liberal Islam Network, abbreviated as JIL). The paper elaborates in details main issues related to the network which include among others: history its emergence, key figures, concepts and activities, as well as its missions and agenda. Based on qualitative method of research using library research referring to primary and secondary resources gathered, the paper analyse the concept and thoughts followed and disseminated by the Liberal Islam Network followers and further study their movement in order to expose the faults and deviations as portrayed by this movement which emerged for the first time in early 2001. Among the results of the research are as follow: The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) was a result of Modernity and its philosophical thought which influenced young Indonesian Muslims. It is funded by Western foundations and disseminates the ideas of Secularization, Westernization, Pluralism, Inclusivism, and Feminism, and Liberalism. Finally, the paper asserts that to guard Shariah from deviated thoughts is to understand Islam from the true interpretation of Islam by reliable Muslim Scholars.

**Keywords:** *Shariah, Liberalism, Liberal Islam Network, JIL, overview*

### Introduction

Islam is a monotheistic religion and teachings of obedience to Allah SWT and His Messenger, who teaches truth and goodness to humanity. Islam specifically means submission to Allah SWT, but also it includes all forms of goodness and perfection. And since Islam has represented all forms of virtue, then it must also have included the value of freedom, namely freedom in a more appropriate and correct meaning according to its size, not freedom in an unlimited sense, because freedom without limits is certainly only worthy of being possessed by the creator which is not burdened with the gift of reason.

Freedom according to Islam is freedom to choose something as long as the choice is still within the scope of the truth, namely the truth desired by Allah SWT as in the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Muslims are free to choose any role or position in their lives, as long as it is not a role or position that is prohibited by Islam itself, because indeed the diversity of roles or positions within the Muslim body will actually make them complement each other and strengthen each other. So, basically, Muslims themselves already have the basic rights in the form of freedom in choosing their own way of life, which is a way of life under the auspices of Islam. They are always free to choose the various roles available within the scope of Islamic truth.

So that, precisely when Islam is imbued with the term liberal, which means 'free', it is precisely at that moment that the meaning of freedom in Islam seems to still have flaws, as if, so far Islam has not been able to free its people from bondage, and as if -the affix is an expression of protest over the imperfection of

Islam, even though Islam itself has been declared its perfection by Allah SWT. Therefore, when Islam is precisely imbued with such liberal terms, then basically it is not Islam in the true and perfect sense.

And in this case, the Liberal Network 'Islam' is a group that imposes that liberal term on Islam. This group consists of people who yearn for 'freedom' within the scope of the Islamic religion. It is a community of freedom lovers who prioritize the use of reason in an effort to interpret the values of Islamic teachings. They believe that any teachings in Islam that are not in accordance with the calculation of human reason will have to be criticized or even have to be replaced with new and different patterns if necessary. It is this group that always prioritizes the rules of reason, even if they have to put aside the basic rules that have been mentioned in the Qur'an and as-Sunnah.

### **The Facts of Liberalism In Indonesia**

Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim communities in the world. (BPS, 2010) Although 88% of its population is Muslim, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Moreover, the Indonesian Muslims are well-known for their moderation and being tolerant regardless the existence of local Islamic groups that are involved in the violent religious conflicts in the recent days. These groups insist on the implementation of Islamic law in the post-authoritarian President Soeharto era. After the emergence of global issue (i.e. Modernity) in the West and its diffusion all over the world, including Indonesia and - like other countries –was affected by this dangerous idea which many Muslims are not aware of the real agenda and goals behind it. (Effendy, 2003)

As a result, the issue of moderation of Islam in Indonesia emerged. This is not merely because of historical factors, but it is also the result of ongoing debates on how to reconcile Islam with modernity, as well as increasing number of young people of Indonesia who are studying in the Western universities, and also who are influenced in which they brought the 'new' ideas when going back to their home land.

This paper deals with the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal –JIL) through discussing the history of its emergence, concepts, deviations propagated by its activists and followers, as well as refutations on these deviations. (Assyaukanie, 2014) The network (JIL) emerged in the middle of 2001 as a forum to disseminate liberal interpretations of Islam. It seems through the name (liberal) and (Islam) that, there is confusion or even wrong understanding when Islam is mixed with liberalism. That is because Islam literally means submission, i.e. the submission to ALLAH's commands; while on the other hand, Liberalism holds the meaning of freedom in everything. It is very unfortunate that The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) has interpreted Islam wrongly due to the limitation of genuine Islamic knowledge of its activists who have been influenced very much by western thoughts and philosophy. In other word, it can simply be said that the followers, participants, and activists of this network do not have enough, good, and proper Islamic knowledge to understand Islam. Or it is due to the influence of western philosophical thought which is usually contradicted to Islam.

There are some learned, scholars and activists who demonstrate their arguments in order to show their understanding wrongly or not enough and proper knowledge on Islam, such as (Saifullah, 2018)

This wrong and deviated understanding can be seen through their slogans when trying to disseminate the concept of Liberal Islam, as follow: (<http://islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>).

*"-The openness of ijtihad's gates in the entire aspects,- emphasize on the ethical- religious spirit, not the literal meaning of the text, the relative, open, and plural truth, stand behind the minorities and the oppressed,- freedom of belief and faith,- the separation of ukhrawi (heavenly) vis-à-vis duniawi (worldly) authority, and the religious vis-à-vis political authority".*

The ideas proposed by JIL activists mostly deal with the compatibility of Islam and democracy, especially on the issues of tolerance, pluralism, secularism, individualism and women's rights. While giving interpretation and explanation to these current issues, they are completely adopting Western understanding or affected by western ideology. (Nasir, 2004) Therefore, it is not strange if they are facing a lot of rejections and refusals from conservative Muslims in Indonesia who want to save Islam from any deviation and to rectify wrong understanding towards the teaching of Islam.

Due to anxiety of many Muslims in Indonesia towards the danger of thoughts brought by The Liberal Islam Network (JIL), it is very important to highlight the issues raised by this network and to explain the right stand how Muslims should know.

There are three main points raised by (JIL) that will be highlighted in this paper in order to come up with the answers and to uncover the agendas behind them. Those points are: (1) the effects of the JIL's idea on demolition of Islamic creed (*Aqidah Islamiyyah*) through developing the concept of secularist and pluralist theology. This concept is nothing but an effort to equalize and distort the religions. (2) JIL brought the idea of refuting the implementation of Islamic Shariah, and (3) JIL's effort to demolish what they call Fundamentalist Islam or Militant Islam. This effort (demolishing the Fundamentalists) was proposed by Israel with full support from America especially after the cold war in the early of 1990's.

## **Liberalism and The Liberal Islam Network in Indonesia**

### **Introduction to Liberal Islam**

"Liberal Islam" is not only the wrong term but it is also conceptually mistaken. The Arabic word "Islam" refers to the meaning of submission to the will of God or peace, while the term "liberal" refers to individual freedom. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism/Rights>) Islam requires its followers to surrender to the will of God and become members of a world-wide community of faith (*ummah*). By contrast, the notion of liberalism requires individuals to master themselves based on the principle that individual liberty is the ultimate value for human beings. Liberal (*liberalist*) means something that is fitted for freedom and makes it for freedom.

The word of liberal Islam is a new interpretation of Islam in the context of modernity. This term is loosely used by many Western and Islamic scholars to label those who reject static, literal views of Islam and propose openness, and contextual interpretations as well. This is seen to be contradicted to the so-called Islamic traditionalists, who see the language of the Qur'an as the basis for absolute knowledge of the world, that revealed in a new form of Arabic as the speech of God concerning Himself, His creation..., (Al-Attas, 1995) meanwhile the proponents of liberal Islam believe that the language of the Qur'an is the a coordinate with the essence of revelation, but the content and meaning of revelation is not essentially verbal. (Zayd, 2004) in other word, the revelation is likewise as said "the sudden visions great poets and artists claim for themselves, or the apostolic inspiration of the writers of sacred scripture, or the illuminative intuition of the sages and people of discernment." (Al-Attas, 1995)

Furthermore, the contemporary Islamic liberals reject a blind adherence to earlier Muslim doctrines and respond to the challenges of modernity with *ijtihad* (creative interpretation) of Islam's main material sources: the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions (*sunnah*). (Kurzman, 1998)

The Muslim Liberalists call for critical reinterpretation and reexamination of *shari'a* (Islamic law) and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) to make them relevant to contemporary modern life. They glorify very much the "Modernity" to the extent that if there is contradiction between Islam and Modern achievements, the only thing to do is to reexamine this Islam and not to reject the things coming with modernity. (Assyaukanie, 2009) This is the essence of JIL's idea which is being popularised by its followers.

### **The Emergence of The Liberal Islam Network (Jil)**

The 1970's era was a time of a new arena of Islamic discourse in Indonesia. In that era, the Islamic thought underwent as a reformation known as "*neo-modernism*". In the process, the figure of Nurcholis Majid (Cak Nur) has been installed as the locomotive for Islamic neo-modernist discourse. It is known as well that Nurcholis was the one who brought the idea of *secularism* and the ideology of *inclusivism-pluralism* in Indonesia. Today, more or less 30 years later, this model of thinking is growing fast and has its position within the Islamic scientific constellation in Indonesia. (Barton, 2010)

The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) is actually bringing the old ideology adopted and popularised by some westernised personalities such as Nurcholis Majid who graduated from Chicago University. It is still remembered by many Muslims in Indonesia that Nurcholis Majid was the one who succeeded in making chaos and confusion as well as anger among Indonesian Muslims when he introduced deviated ideas about

Islam, where he presented his paper entitled: "Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Umat" [A must for modernization of Islamic Thought and the Issue of Ummatic Integration]. (Janah, 2017) He brought the ideas the western approaches to Islam by using secularism as well as liberalism which are considered as products of Modernity as a way of thinking in which he learned and got from his professors in Chicago University and disseminated these ideologies to Muslims in Indonesia. This trend is currently being adopted and popularised by JIL's activists.

The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) emerged for the first time in early 2001. It started from several meetings and discussions among young Muslim intellectuals in ISAI (*Institut Studi Arus Informasi*/Institute for the Study of the Flow of Information), Jakarta, and then extended through discussion using a mailing list, [islamlib@yahoo.com](mailto:islamlib@yahoo.com) in early 2001. The founders held the first discussion on February 21, 2001, in Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta, on *Akar-Akar Liberalisme Islam: Pengalaman Timur Tengah* [The Roots of Islamic Liberalism: The Middle East Experience], presented by Luthfie Assyaukanie. That meeting was followed by other discussions, either in the form of face-to-face meetings or through the mailing list. Since mid 2001, the "official" name of *Jaringan Islam Liberal* has been used on their website, <http://www.islamlib.com/page.php>, which displays their activities, articles, discussions, and relevant sources for the dissemination of liberal Islam.

Their place of meeting and secretariat is in Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta, a complex owned by Goenawan Mohamad (a journalist and author), and used for arts performances and by non-governmental organizations.

It can be said that the term "Liberal Islam" firstly appeared when an Indonesianist Greg Barton mentioned it in his book, *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia* (Paramadina: 1999). Since then, this term has become well-known among Indonesians, especially since Charles Kurzman launched his book entitled: "*Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*", which is considered as the main reference for the ideology of Liberal Islam (Kurzman, 1998), and the establishment of the Liberal Islam Network by Ulil Abshar Abdalla who is currently the leader and coordinator of the network and he is also the head of NU's human resources think-tank, Lakpesdam-NU and his friends. The Liberal Islam discourse has evolved in many directions and become both popular and controversial as well as threatening the true Islamic Ideology among Muslims in Indonesia.

### **The Liberal Islam Network (Jil)'S Key Figures**

They are several key figures of JIL in the early phase included Ahmad Sahal, Budhy Munawar-Rachman, Goenawan Mohamad, Taufiq Adnan Amal, Hamid Basyaib, Luthfie Assyaukanie, Rizal Mallarangeng, Denny J. A., Ihsan Ali-Fauzi, A.E. Priyono, Samsurizal Panggabean, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Saiful Mujani and Hadimulyo. Other important figures who became source persons in the establishment of JIL included more senior Islamic scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid, Azyumardi Azra and Komaruddin Hidayat.

Lutfi Assyaukanie is the first coordinator of JIL who arranged discussions and maintained offline and online discussions through a mailing list. He claimed that since its first meeting, the participants and those who are interested in joining JIL are increasing. The JIL's activists further said: as an open forum without strict organization, JIL does not have a membership system. Therefore, there is no data on the number of members. The current coordinator of JIL is Ulil Abshar Abdalla. These two personalities are both very daring and careless in talking about Islam and its ideology. They show no respect in many discussions and forum when dealing with the Syariah as if it has no sanctity or limitations. (Saifullah, 2018)

We can see that clearly when reading their articles or listening to their talks. What they want is something new in religion in a way that they showed boredom when understanding Islam based on prominent Muslim scholars. Instead, they stick to the ideology of western scholars who definitely wish to be able to destroy Islam by any mean and tool they can. Allah said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"They (the disbelievers, the Jews and the Christians) want to extinguish Allah's Light (with which Muhammad PBUH has been sent – Islamic Monotheism) with their mouths, but Allah will not allow except that His Light should be perfected even though the Kafirun (disbelievers) hate it" (Surah at-Tawbah, verse: 32)*

JIL's activists are cooperating with intellectuals, writers and academicians both local and international to be their contributors and in the same time their references. Among them are:

1. Nurcholis Majid (Paramadina Mulya, University, Jakarta)
2. Charles Kurzman (University of North Carolina)
3. Azyumardi Azra, (IAIN, Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta)
4. Abdallah Laroui (Muhammad V University, Morocco)
5. Djohan Effendi (Deakin University, Australia)
6. Abdullahi Ahmad an-Naim (University of Khartoum, Sudan)
7. Muhammad Arkoun (University of Sorbonne, France)
8. Sadeq Jalal Azam (Damascus University, Syria)
9. Ihsan Ali Fauzi (Ohio University, USA)
10. Komaruddin Hidayat (Paramadina Institute, Jakarta)

As for international figures that are considered as important references in the idea of Liberal Islam, among them are: (<http://islamlib.com/en/figures.php>)

1. Hassan Hanafi
2. Qasim Amin
3. Mohammed Arkoun
4. Fazlur Rahman
5. Shahrur
6. Farid Esack
7. Nashr Hamid Abu Zaid
8. Rifat Tahtawi
9. Ali Abd al-Raziq
10. Fatima Mernissi
11. Muhammad Khalafallah
12. Mahmud Taleqani
13. Mehdi Bazargan
14. Rachid Ghannouchi
15. Amina Wadud Muhsin
16. Chandra Muzaffar
17. Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im
18. Abdul Karim Soroush
19. Mahmoud Mohammed Taha
20. Mohammed Abid Jabiri

Each of these personalities has several articles published in the official website of JIL and the articles or books become main topics to discuss among JIL activists in their forums and seminars.

### **The Concept And Activities Of The Liberal Islam Network (Jil) In Indonesia**

The concepts that JIL holds up and bring to Muslims in Indonesia can be summarised in the following paragraphs, that the liberal Islam represents an Islam that emphasizes individual freedom in accordance with the *Muta'zilah* (or Mu'tazilite) doctrine of human freedom and liberation of socio-political structure from oppressive and undemocratic domination. The adjective "liberal" for the activists in JIL has two meanings that are "being liberal" and "liberating." They use this adjective because they do not believe in Islam as such, Islam without an adjective, since in reality Islam has many different interpretations. Therefore, liberal Islam is another variant of Islam and an alternative to literal Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, radical Islam, and many others. (<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Indonesian/Islam/JIL-background.htm>), (Kurzman, 1998)

Since its beginning, JIL has conducted many regular activities concerning public education which caused a lot of confusions among Muslims. With the assistance from funding agencies such as The Asia Foundation, JIL is able to voice to be liberal, tolerant aspirations and interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. This idea as it mentioned above was wrongly understood by JIL activists and they did nothing but making Muslims confused and upset due to their deviations and wrong interpretations on Islam.

In terms of activities and programs, JIL has done a lot of things in order to disseminate the idea of liberal Islam, they are as follow (as mentioned in their official website):

*First:* Syndication of liberal Islam writers. This program is intended to collect writings from authors who defend *pluralism* and *inclusivism* and disseminate them to local mass media

*Second:* Talk-shows in the news office of Radio 68H, Jakarta. The talk-show, which interviews those who promote pluralism and an inclusive understanding of religion, is broadcast through 40 radio stations in the *Namlapanha* radio network across Indonesia.

*Third:* publication of books on liberal Islam, pluralism, and inclusivism in religion.

*Fourth:* publication of booklets or leaflets which contain a short article, interview, or abstract from books on controversial issues in religion.

*Fifth:* Public service advertisements on television which contain messages for religious toleration and peaceful co-existence among different religious followers and pluralism in Islam.

*Sixth:* Discussion of Islam, with cooperation from other institutions, JIL arranges discussions on Islam with distinguished speakers from all over the world.

*Eighth:* road-show discussions to disseminate the idea of liberal Islam which are held on campuses in Indonesia with the cooperation of student organizations.

(<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Indonesian/Islam/JIL-background.htm>)

### **Missions And Deviations Of The Liberal Islam Network (Jil) In Indonesia**

Islam and Liberal are two different terms, one is opposite to another and it is impossible to be combined. Liberal as meant by the followers of JIL is contrary to Islam as revealed and thought to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). What they are calling is merely deviation and wrong understanding of Islam. Among the missions brought by the Liberal Islam Network's (JIL) are:

**First:** To develop the liberal Islamic interpretations according to their understanding and based on their knowledge. And it is obvious that they have no concern with ideas of earlier Moslem scholars as they do not show any respect to those scholars and labeled those who follow them as traditionalists.

**Second:** To create dialogue rooms that are open and free from any pressures of conservatism. However, the dialogues set by them are mostly done in the certain campuses or places where the participants are those who have in their minds deviated concept of Islam, or those who do not have enough Islamic knowledge. JIL claimed that only by the availability of open rooms for dialogues, the thought and Islamic action improvement could be well preserved. How will they preserve Islamic Legacy (*turath*) if they just blindly follow and adopt western ideas and concepts in understanding of Islam? They will simply destroy the religion instead of improving or preserving it.

**Third:** To set formation of a fair and humanely social and political structure. JIL claim that the democratic system is a system that "in the very now" can accomplish those needs.

It can be summarised the main mission of JIL is to encounter (in other word to destroy) fundamentalist movements. JIL activists used to say: "It is sure that if there is no effort to prevent the domination of Islamic militant movements, it could be in the near future a threat and become dominant over the religion for a long time. If this happened, it could bring negative effects on efforts to establish and maintain the democratic system in Indonesia". They went on to say: "Type of such militant understanding of religion usually can create a gap or tension among religious groups, say for example: Islam and Christian. As such, only the concept of inclusivism and pluralism can accommodate and bring the democratic system in our life". (<http://islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>)

It is worth to mention that, Islamic Fundamentalist meant by JIL followers is the rival or enemy to this network and those who have the following characteristics will be described as fundamentalist:

- 1- Those who hate the concept of Western people in their life,
- 2- Those who wish to regain the lost Islamic Legacy by benefiting the history of Islam,
- 3- Those who intend to implement Islamic law (*Syari'ah Islam*),
- 4- Those who propagate and believe that Islam is a religion and a state, and
- 5- Those who keep the past (Islamic Legacy) and make it as a guidance for the future. (As Sunnah 04/VI/1423/2002)

Among the agendas brought by JIL – as elaborated by the first leader of JIL, Lutfi Assyauknie and Adopted from an article written by Luthfi AsySyaukani entitled: "Empat Agenda islam Yang Membebaskan" [Four agendas of Liberating Islam]. The writer is an activist of JIL and a lecturer in Paramadina Mulya University, as well as first coordinator of JIL. They are as follow:

**First:** Political agenda which means the state matter is merely worldly issue and no connection with the religion. As such the system of monarchi and democracy are same.

**Second:** To hold up the harmony among religions. For this purpose, the theology of pluralism is completely needed and necessary, due to the diversity of social life among people.

**Third:** Emansipation of women, and

**Fourth:** The freedom of thinking

In a nutshell, Their agendas can be summarized in the following points:

- (1) The importance of utilizing *Ijtihad* in any way.
- (2) The commitment to rationalist and modernization.
- (3) The acceptance of the ideology of pluralism among religions.
- (4) The separation between religion and Political party. (Barton, 2010)

### **Refutations On The Liberal Islam Network (Jil)'S Concepts And Deviations**

If we browse and look at the articles published in JIL official website, we will find so many articles in so many fields, such as: theology, Syari'ah, social, cultural, political and international relations. As for the field of theology (creed/*Aqidah*), JIL focused on promoting and propagating the concept of inclusivism and pluralism in which the activists of JIL are calling for liberalism in Islamic thought and equality and unity among religions (Religion of Ibrahimiyah and *Wihdat al-Adyan*). While doing so, they are actually making falsifications on the religion and distorting its essence. In this chapter we will highlight the deviations on the concepts and ideas found in The Liberal Islam Network (JIL).

#### **A. The Dangerous Idea of Pluralism And Inclusivism**

The idea of Pluralism meant by JIL and its followers is to make religions same, they call it "*al-deen al-jama'i*" (Collective Religion) and universal religion, while Inclusivism means that other religions are implicit form of our religion. (Budi Munawwar, 2000) To ensure the claimed idea and prove it to be correct, they interpret blindly Surah Ali Imran, verse: 19 and 85: "*Truly the religion with Allah is Islam*" and "*And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him*". For them, the word *Islam* in these verses should be defined as only: "a total submission to God" and does not mean Religion of Islam. If the meaning is so – as they claimed – the interpretation of these verses is that Allah will accept the religion which brings total submission to God, and whoever seeks the religion other than submission to God will not be accepted...". It is clear from this deviated interpretation of the mentioned verses that they are trying to unify among religions and try to disseminate the slogans: " Other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth", and "other religions speak of different but equally valid truth", or "Each religion expresses an important part of the truth", or " Each religion is actually expressing the meaning of "The one in the many".

From the statement and idea mentioned above, it is important to say that the JIL's followers and activists are trying to disseminate a very dangerous idea that is calling to "The truth and salvation are not only in Islam", and "all religions are one", Muslims, Jews and Christians are identical in terms of their beliefs.

There are several explanations to refute the ideology of *Pluralism* and equalizing all religions. The ideology has been rejected by many Muslim scholars, one of them is the Committee of Fatwa and Scientific Research, headed by *Syaikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz* on 25 Muharram 1418 H by releasing a Fatwa explaining that: "The propaganda of unified religions" is a deviated campaign. If it is coming from a Muslim it would lead to apostasy for it is clear that such idea is completely contradicted to Islamic principles and Islamic creed (*Aqidah Islamiyah*). This propaganda is calling for infidelity and unbelief in Allah as well as abolishing the truth of Al-Qur'an" (Zaid, 2001)

#### **B. The Distortion of Islamic Creed (Aqidah Islamiyah)**

It is clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an that all infidels (both the owner of the books and polytheist) will be going to hellfire, as mentioned in Surah Al-Bayyinah, Verse: 6 "*Verily, those who disbelieve (in the religion*

*of Islam, the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad) from among people of the scripture (Jews and Christians) and al-Mushrikun (polytheists) will abide in the Fire of Hell. They are the worst of creatures".*

The infidelity of Jews and Christians is very clear; however it is sad to see and hear from JIL's activists who propagate and disseminate the idea of "*The essence of religion is one*" and "*all religions are equal one to another*". The only proof they have and always be mentioned is the verse that mentions: "Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians (*Shabi'ah*) whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Al-Baqarah: 62), and "Surely, those who believe in (the oneness of Allah in is messenger Muhammad and all that was revealed to him from Allah) and those who are Jews and the Sabians (*Shabi'ah*) and the Christians, whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (Al-Ma'idah: 69). The JIL's followers interpret these two verses blindly and wrongly and say that: "All religions are true and can lead to the way of salvation".

To clarify the true understanding of the verses mentioned above, and to refute JIL's idea, it is important to know the fact that Prophet Muhammad PBUH was sent to correct the deviations of the religion thought by Prophet Isa PBUH. It is known by every Muslim that the Christians people have modified and changed the teaching of Isa and the Bible, as it was agreed upon among pastors in Nicea Conciliation. Therefore, Al-Qur'an stated that:

*"Say (O Muhammad) He is Allah, the one, Allah is the self sufficient Master, whom all creatures see, He neither eats nor drinks, He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none co-equal or comparable unto HIM. (Surah al-Ikhlash, verse: 1-4)*

And it is clear as well that Christians and Jews are infidels, Al-Qur'an condemning them in Surah al-Ma'idah, verse: 72 and 73: " Surely, they have disbelieved who say: Allah is the Messiah (Isa/Jesus), son of Maryam. But the Messiah said: "O children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Verily...", "...Surely, disbelievers are those who said: "Allah is the third of the three. But there is no God none who has the right to be worshipped but One ALLAH..."

If we compare between the ideologies (Islam and Christian), we would find out very clear difference. Islam calls for the Oneness of GOD (ALLAH), while Christian says that Allah is the third of the three (Ideology of trinity). As such, it is clearly wrong to simply say that there is no significant difference between two religions as propagate by JIL's followers. In fact, there so many contrasts and differences between Islam and other religions. Say for example the Christian creed of Crucifixion. Islam is totally against this ideology and belief, and whoever believes that Prophet Isa PBUH was crucified, will be considered as *kafir* (unbeliever). Al-Qur'an has clearly stated that: " And because of their saying (in boast), we killed Messiah, son of Maryam, the messenger of Allah, but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Isa was put over another man (and they killed that man).. " (Surah Al-Nisa, Verse: 157)

Besides, there are significant differences between Qur'an and Bible, as the latter has been modified and changed by Christians. Al-Qur'an and Hadith told us that clearly, and the only religion accepted by Allah is Islam, Prophet Muhammad was sent to mankind to bring the ultimate and final truth and the book of al-Qur'an is the final book that rectifies all books revealed to previous Prophets. Whoever lives and knows about Islam and Qur'an but does not want to believe in Prophet Muhammad and his teaching (Al-Qur'an) will definitely be categorized as a infidel and going to Hell fire. So, it is no room or space to reconcile or accept the idea of *pluralism* or *inclusivism* which call for "unified religion" and other slogans as hold up by JIL's activists which will only be distorting and camouflaging the Islamic Creed (*Al-Aqidah Al-Islamiyah*).

### **C. Blind Interpretation Of Al-Qur'an.**

Allah has mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse: 63 ["Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians (*Shabi'ah*) whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.] and in Surah Al-Maidah, verse: 69 [Surely, those who believe in (the oneness of Allah in is messenger Muhammad and all that was revealed to him from Allah) and those who are Jews and the Sabians (*Shabi'ah*) and the

Christians, whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve].

These two Surahs are the only proof the followers of the *Pluralism* and *Inclusivism* ideology [i.e. JIL's activists] are holding on to. They conclude from the mentioned Surahs that the truth and salvation in religions are found only in three points, i.e. the only things can salvage any religion from Hellfire and secure happy life in the hereafter are three: (1) Believing in Allah, (2) Believing in Day of Judgment, i.e. reward for good deeds and punishment for bad deeds, and (3) preserving righteousness towards mankind. Only this three – as claimed by JIL's activists – can define and bring the truth and salvation for religions not the religion itself. What they want to explain is that the truth and salvation do not belong only to Islam, but other religions as well have the same position.

To refute the idea propagated by JIL's activists, it is important to refer to the explanation of the above-mentioned surahs by Rashid Ridha who interprets the meaning of the verses as follow:

"These three are the principles of the religions (Belief in Allah, belief in the day of judgment, and good deeds). The Qur'an in this verse only explaining that the principles brought by al-Qur'an are better and more complete than the previous religions. The teachings of Qur'an rectify the deviations occurred in the previous religions, such as omitting and changing teachings of the books, innovations, and other rituals which are contradicted to ALLAH's teachings as mentioned in the Qur'an." (Ridha, 1984)

As for the first principle (i.e. believe in God), Rashid Ridha further explained that it refers to concept of Iman (belief) within Islamic framework, it means: to believe in Allah, and not only to believe in any god as other religions have. And for the second principle (i.e. believe in the Day of Judgment) he stated that even though other religions believe in this principle, their belief is distorted and deviated, see for example what Christians believe in Messiah (Isa) who is believed to be responsible for the sins done by mankind, about his birth, his death, and his return, just like what is found in Hinduism, and Buddhism. (Ridha, 1984)

Ibnu Katsir, the prominent scholar in Qur'anic interpretation (*mufasssir*) stated while explaining Surah al-Baqarah, verse: 62, that: "after having explained in the previous verses about the condition of the infidels (*kafir*), hypocrites (*munafiq*), Jews and those people who did not obey Allah's commands and committed sins that prohibited by Allah, and about the punishments they got. In this verse Allah reminds us that though the condition is so, there are previous people who were good and obeyed all of Allah's commands. Because of these good deeds, they will get the rewards till the Day of Judgment. Based on this, whoever follows Prophet Muhammad PBUH he will be given eternal happiness in the here-after, and they shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve". (Muhammad, 2008)

#### **D. The Rejection of Implementation Of Shari'ah And Full Acceptance Of Sucularism**

Among the main agendas brought by JIL's activists is rejection of Islamic Syari'ah, especially in the context of society and state. They completely reject the implementation of Syari'ah. Instead, they support and work hard to carry out and realize the idea of "Secularization" i.e. to separate life (and state) from the religious matters and issues. As such, they believe and claim that the implementation of Syari'ah will only bring suffers for people. One article by Dr. Muslim Abdurrahman (in an interview with Ulil Abshar) entitled: "Korban Pertama dari Penerapan Syariat adalah Wanita" [The first victim of the implementation of Syari'ah is woman]. He said: "That there will be so many negative effects on the implementation of Syari'ah in Indonesia. That is due to the problems of poverty, injustice, and human rights are spreading very widely. And the first victim will be a woman whose rights are usually violated and whose activities are mostly limited.

What is worried by those people (JIL's followers) is that: if the syari'ah is implemented, the chance to establish the secularized state will be threatened, and finally will collapse. One of JIL's activists said: "Liberal Islam can accept a secular state which is better than a state as described by fundamentalists. That is because Secular state can accommodate the energy of righteousness as well as the energy of disobediences (*ma'siyat*) in the same time" as quoted by by the coordinator of Liberal Islam Network (JIL), Ulil Abshar Abdallah. (Tempo Magazine, 19-25 November 2001)

It should be understood that there has never been any dispute or debate among Muslim scholars on the issue of implementing the Syari'ah. It is agreed upon by those scholars that to implement Syari'ah is part of our religion and belief. However, one may raise a question; it is difficult to realize the implementation of Syari'ah in the recent days, or there is no possibility of implementing the Syari'ah. To answer such question

is by saying that to believe is one thing and to implement is another thing. Meaning to say: We should have a firm belief in implementation Syari'ah (i.e. Ahkam Syari'ah must be implemented) and that is the only right of a ruling government to implement. But, when the condition is not ready yet and there is no possibility to implement the Syari'ah due to Non Islamic State – for example –, the responsibility is not in our hands, it is rather in the ruler's hands. However, in case of Indonesia which is not an Islamic state despite the majority of its population is Muslim, all what we should do is explaining to people that this is Allah's commands that everybody should believe in, and not by accepting distorting ideas come from the West which eagerly wish to destroy Islam through the deviated and dangerous ideas such as: pluralism, secularism, inclusivism, equality of religion and so on; all are the products of Modernity.

### **E. War Against Fundamentalists**

It has been mentioned earlier that the most wanted enemy of Liberal Islam Network (JIL)'s activists is what they called: Fundamentalist or Militant. To describe any group as a fundamentalist is an old fashion of Islam-Phobia followers. The term "fundamentalist" itself comes from the West who portrays Islam as a threat. They will simply call those Muslims who are very committed to Islam, implementing what they believe as fundamentalists. Thus, it is not only JIL who do such thing, but such an activity has been practiced and propagated by the West and followed blindly by JIL's activists.

It is worth to mention that, Islamic Fundamentalists meant by JIL followers are those who have the following characteristics: (1) Those who hate the concept of Western people in their life, (2) Those who wish to regain the lost Islamic Legacy by benefiting the history of Islam, (3) Those who intend to implement Islamic law (*Syari'ah Islam*), (4) Those who propagate and believe that Islam is a religion and a state, and (5) Those who keep the past (Islamic Legacy) and make it as a guidance for the future. (As Sunnah 04/VI/1423/2002)

### **F. Fiqh Across the Religions (Deviated Ideas of some issues in Islamic Jurisprudence)**

There are various activities conducted by JIL's followers, and there are many fields they involve in, not only ideological and political areas, but also Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) area. Several articles and book have been written to disseminate their dangerous and deviated ideas and thought, among the issues is: "Inter-faith marriage" i.e. the marriage between Muslim man with non-Muslim woman, and the marriage of Muslim woman with non-Muslim man.

In the article written by Drs. Nuryamin Aini, MA, entitled: "The Empirical Facts of Interfaith Marriage" Published on: 22/6/2003 in JIL official website: "www.islib.com" it stated that there is no problem at all to the issue of inter-faith marriage. The writer explained – in an interview with Ulil Abshar Abdallah – that the data gathered in her study on this kind of marriage showed that the statistic and number of inter-faith marriage which occurred without any problem related to ideology (religion) increased, especially for the issue of "marriage of Muslim woman to Non-Muslim man".

This phenomenon is dangerous and will encourage such marriage to many Muslims who do not have enough knowledge pertaining to the verdict of such marriage if Islamic Fiqh and do not have a firm belief in their religion. Those people will go astray and easily accept the idea propagated by JIL which is totally contradicted to Islamic Syari'ah and rejected by Islam.

It is clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an that: "Muslim man is allowed to marry a women of the people of the scriptures (*ahl al-kitab* / Jews and Chirstians) with some rules and conditions, and it is not permissible for muslim women to marry to non-muslim man. Allah *Subhanahu Wata'ala* said:

*"Made lawful to you this day are al-tayyibat (all kinds of halal foods, which Allah has made lawful. The food of the people of the scriptures (Jews and Christians) is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them. (Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given the scripture (Jews and Christians) before your time when you have given their due Mahr...". (Surah al-Maidah, verse: 5)*

It is agreed upon by all Muslim scholars that Islam does not allow Muslim woman to marry non-Muslim man. However, in case of Muslim man's marriage to a woman of the people of the scriptures (*Ahl*

*al-Kitab*) is still disputable. Some scholars viewed that this kind of marriage is unlawful because there are no people of the scriptures anymore, not like the previous time. And some other scholars said that this marriage is permissible and lawful if the Jewish or Christian woman is chaste and not adulteress or prostitute. Thus, to believe in the idea propagated by JIL's activists which is [The Inter-faith Marriage] is unacceptable and completely rejected by Islam.

## Conclusion

In the end of this paper, we would like to summarize and draw the main points of all topics and ideas discussed earlier, as follow:

The Liberal Islam Network, or known as JIL (Jaringan Islam Liberal) in Indonesia emerged in the early 2001 as a result of Modernity and its philosophical thought which influenced young Indonesian Muslims who studied in the Western Higher Learning Institution with no strong background of Islamic knowledge.

Being funded by Non-Islamic (Western) foundations, The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) is able to attract its followers - through seminars and discussions-, and to disseminate its deviated ideas and ideology which are products of Modernity, they are: Secularization, Westernization, Pluralism, Inclusivism, and Feminism, and Liberalism.

It is known from the idea of JIL, that the most threatening JIL's enemy is so-called fundamentalist. JIL's activists would simply label Muslims who have the characteristics of: [commitment to Islam, detesting the concept of Western ideology, regaining the lost Islamic Legacy, intending to implement Islamic law propagating and believing that Islam is a religion and a state, as well as preserving the past (Islamic Legacy) for a future guidance] as fundamentalists.

All JIL's concepts and deviations in Islamic understanding have been influenced by Western philosophical thoughts and ideology, and those who follow and support the ideology of Liberal Islam are mostly those who are dazed by western development which is secular-based ideology (i.e. separating religion from life (and state) and believing in supremacy of human reason over revelation (*al-wahyu*).

Finally, the only way to understand Islam (as a final and ultimate religion) is understanding Islam from within the Islamic Legacy and through Muslim Scholars' concept which are accepted by the Majority of Muslim people all over the world. It is important to say and remind that "Modernity" is not understood correctly by many Muslims, or they are being deceived by western concept of modernity. It is a must to know and realize that Modernity is actually: a philosophical concept, believing in supremacy of human reason, getting rid of God's guidance and denial of religion.

Based on these facts, in order to guard the *Shariah* (Islamic Law) from the liberalism concepts and thoughts, there is no other way than going back and referring to the original version of Islamic teachings based on the authentic Islamic sources (*adillah syar'iyah*) and to reliable muslim scholars' interpretation. On top of that, exposing the faults of liberalism as portrayed by Liberal Islam Network (JIL) in Indonesia and explaining the truth on *Shariah* (Islamic Law) to the people is a crucial effort be done. Although, Islam is facing different types of challenges and efforts coming from those who oppose the true image of Islam all over the world – such as many incidents occurred nowadays in several part of countries- the truth will reveal and Islam will appear as the winner, as promised by Allah The Almighty in His Qur'an : “*They (the disbelievers, the Jews and the Christians) want to extinguish Allah's Light (with which Muhammad SAW has been sent – Islamic Monotheism) with their mouths, but Allah will not allow except that His Light should be perfected even though the Kafirun (disbelievers) hate (it)*. (Surah at-Tawbah, verse: 32)

## References

- Adnin Armas. (2003). *Pengaruh kristen orientalis terhadap islam liberal: dialog interaktif dengan aktivis jaringan islam liberal*. Jakarta: GIP
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1995). *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization.
- Assyaukanie, L. (2009). *Islam and the secular state in Indonesia*. *Islam and the Secular State in Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308900>

- Assyaukanie, L. (2014). Recent publications on Indonesian Islam. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003605>
- Barton, G. (2010). Indonesia: legitimacy, Secular democracy, and Islam. *Politics and Policy*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2010.00244.x>
- Budi Munawwar, (2000). *Mengembalikan Kerukunan Umat Beragama* (Towards returning the religious harmony), Republika, 24 June 2000.
- Effendy, B. (2003). *Islam and the state in Indonesia. Islam and the State in Indonesia*.
- Greg Barton, (1999). *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia*, Jakarta: paramadina, page: 53-54.
- Janah, N. (2017). Nurcholish Madjid dan Pemikirannya (Diantara Kontribusi dan Kontroversi). *Cakrawala: Jurnal Studi Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.31603/cakrawala.v12i1.1655>
- Jaiz, Hartono Ahmad. (2005). *Ada Pemurtadan Di Iain Jakarta*. Al-Kautsar.
- Kurzman, C. (1998). *Liberal Islam: A Source Book. Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*.
- Luthfi Assyaukanie, (2002). *Wajah Liberal Islam di Indonesia*, Jakarta:JIL
- Luthfi AsySyaukani entitled: "*Empat Agenda islam Yang Membebaskan*" [Four agendas of Liberating Islam].
- Muhammad, A. bin. (2008). Tafsir Ibnu Katsir. *Pistola Imán Asy-Syafi'i*.
- Nasir, M. A. (2004). *Indonesian Scholars' Reception of Arkoun's Thought: A Case of his Method of interpreting The Quranic Text*. IIUM.
- Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (The Concept of the Text: A Study of the Qur'anic Sciences), Beirut and Cairo 1991, 5th edition 1998
- Nurcholish Madjid, (1999.) *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* [Modernity Islam and Indonesia,
- Ridha, M. R. (1984). *Wahyu Ilahi kepada Muhammad*. Singapura: Pustaka Nasional, Pte.Ltd.
- Saifullah, M. (2018). Menimbang Kritik Adnin Armas atas Hermeneutika Alquran. *SHAHIH: Journal of Islamicate ....*
- Syamsuddin Arif, (2008). *Orientalis & diabolisme pemikiran*, Jakarta: Gema Insani press.
- Zaid, B. bin A. A. (2001). *Propaganda Sesat Penyatuan Agama*. Darul Haq.
- Zayd, N. H. A. (2004). *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*. *Universiteit voor Humanistiek*.

#### **Magazines:**

Tempo Magazine, 19-25 November 2001  
As-Sunnah Magazine (04/VI/1423/2002)

#### **Websites:**

<http://islamlib.com/en/aboutus.php>  
<http://islamlib.com/en/figures.php>  
<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Indonesian/Islam/JIL-background.ht>