

SECULARIZATION OF ISLAM AS UNIVERSAL ETHICS (An Analysis of Nurkholis Madjid Thoughts)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Nurkholis Madjid's views on Islamic civilization in Indonesia. Cak Nur is a phenomenal yet controversial thinker whose ideas are enlightening and thought-provoking. The objectives of this paper are, *first*, to analyze Cak Nur's intellectual development. *Second*, to analyze Cak Nur's Islamic ideas. *Third*, to understand his ideas in the context of Indonesian Islamic civilization. This research is *library research* using historical, sociological, anthropological, and theological approaches, as well as *content analysis*. The results of this research show that, *first*, Cak Nur's intellectual development cannot be separated from his experiences and education; his family's existence greatly influenced the formation of his thinking. *Second*, in understanding Cak Nur's Islamic ideas, the researcher used several approaches, including the substance approach, postmodern epistemology, and inductive empiricism. *Third*, in reconstructing his ideas, the concept of secularization seeks to free society from the purification or sacralization of things that are not in their proper place (desacralization), so that humans can understand and manage worldly life objectively. Secularization encourages society's progress towards modernization through rationalization, as a tangible manifestation of Islam's command that humans use reason and science to understand the laws of nature. In addition, Cak Nur seeks to reinforce Islamic values as a universal moral foundation that can contribute to national progress. Education is a means of shaping and creating quality human resources. Thus, Paramadina University has become a scientific laboratory that emphasizes rationality, openness, and ethical values that can shape a civilized generation.

Keywords:

Secularization;
universal ethics;
education.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas tentang Pemikiran Nurkholis Madjid Dalam Konteks peradaban Islam di Indonesia. Cak Nur merupakan sosok pemikir yang fenomenal sekaligus kontroversial, gagasan-gagasan yang digulirkannya sangat mencerahkan dan memprovokasi setiap pikiran. Tujuan dari tulisan ini, *pertama* menganalisis perkembangan intelektual Cak Nur. *Kedua* menganalisis gagasan keislaman Cak Nur. *Ketiga* Memahami gagasan dalam konteks peradaban Islam

Indonesia. Jenis penelitian ini adalah *library research* dengan menggunakan pendekatan Historis, sosiologis, antropologis dan teologis, serta menggunakan analisis isi (*content Analisis*). Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan *pertama*, perkembangan intelektual Cak Nur tidak terlepas dari pengalaman dan Pendidikan yang ia tempuh, eksistensi keluarganya sangat berpengaruh dalam membentuk embrio pemikirannya. *Kedua*, dalam memahami gagasan keislaman Cak Nur peneliti menggunakan beberapa pendekatan diantaranya pendekatan substansi, epistemology postmodernisme, dan empiris induktif. *Ketiga*, dalam merekonstruksi gagasannya, konsep sekularisasi merupakan Upaya pembebasan masyarakat dari penyucian atau sakralisasi terhadap sesuatu yang bukan pada tempatnya (desakralisasi) sehingga manusia dapat memahami dan mengelola kehidupan dunia secara objektif, sekularisasi mendorong kemajuan masyarakat menuju modernisasi melalui rasionalisasi sebagai wujud nyata dari perintah Islam agar manusia menggunakan akal dan ilmu pengetahuan dalam memahami hukum-hukum alam. Selain itu Cak Nur berupaya meneguhkan nilai-nilai Islam sebagai dasar moral universal yang dapat berkontribusi bagi kemajuan bangsa. Pendidikan merupakan sarana yang dapat membentuk serta menciptakan SDM yang berkualitas. Sehingga universitas paramadina menjadi laboratorium keilmuan yang menekankan aspek rasionalitas, keterbukaan, dan nilai-nilai etis yang dapat membentuk generasi yang berperadaban.

Kata Kunci:

Sekularisasi; etika universal; pendidikan

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INTRODUCTION

In this contemporary era, Muslims have come into contact with Western science, which has had an impact and brought new ideas to the Islamic world, such as rationalism, nationalism, and democracy. Muslims continue to face the challenges of progress, prompting many figures to strive to renew Islamic thought, such as Muhammad Ibn Abd Wahab, Al-Tahtawi, Jamaludin Al-Ghani, Muhammad Abduh, Syaid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad Iqba. Over time, Islam has developed rapidly, particularly in Indonesia, which is one of the world's largest Muslim-majority countries and a country rich in diversity, where the role and existence of religion is a relevant and dynamic topic. Historically, religion has played an important role in shaping thinkers and reformers. However, challenges have arisen. Amidst the progress of global civilization, new issues have emerged that highlight the existence and appeal of religion to society. A small portion of society has begun to doubt the role of religion, and some have even chosen not to adhere to any religion at all. This is

influenced by the ideologies of modernism, humanism, and secularism, which have led some educated people to consider religion unimportant (Silaen et al., 2024).

In these circumstances, several reformist figures emerged with ideas that have colored Indonesian politics from time to time, such as Tjokrominoto, who was involved not only in the economic struggle of the Indonesian people but also in matters of principle concerning the political situation of the Indonesian nation. Similarly, Ahmad Dahlan had his own style and characteristics. Muhammadiyah, as a religious social movement, focused on reform by purifying Islamic teachings through education and efforts to eradicate bid'ah, superstition, and khurafat that had taken root in the Indonesian nation. K.H. Hasyim Asy-Ari's focus on renewal was to return religious values to their source: the Qur'an and Hadith, as was that of Harun Nasution and Nurkholis Madjid (Taufiq, 2005). Cak Nur was present and presented his ideas. Nurkhlis Madjid was an Indonesian Muslim intellectual. Cak Nur's presence cannot be separated from the controversy and religious and political actions in the history of Indonesian Islamic turmoil. As a thinker, Nurkholis Madjid did not appear in a vacuum; theologically, his presence was closely related to the emergence of fundamentalism at the time and to the strong influence of exclusivism. In addition, there was the discourse on the formalization of Islamic law in social life. In Nurkholis Madjid's view, when Islam is interpreted formally, especially in the political sphere, it will give rise to sectarian tensions and polarization based on religious sentiment. In other words, the formalization of religion in the national sphere will give rise to identity politics that greatly hinders the pluralism Indonesia needs to address its cultural and religious diversity and build a shared commitment as one nation (Janah, 2017).

Nurkholis Madjid's view of fundamentalism is directed at the stigmatization of some Muslims who encourage the enforcement of Islamic law in the life of the nation and state. In this context, Nurkholis Madjid's liberal and inclusive thinking emerges as a point of balance against a formal and exclusive understanding of religion. His liberal and critical thinking reflects intellectual and spiritual moral awareness of the religious traditions of a society that tends to be formalistic and textual. Cak Nur's presence in Indonesia's intellectual sphere is unquestionable, as he is one of the modern thinkers in the discourse of Islamic thought in Indonesia. On the one hand, his presence broke the new order of Islamic thought by creating a new atmosphere when dealing with Islamic texts. On the other hand, his intellectual brilliance combined ideas from various traditions (Albab, 2023).

Nurkholis Madjid succeeded in developing intellectual discourse among the community. One of his important and influential ideas to this day is about modernization. Amid these conditions, Cak Nur sought to address the challenges of modernization. His conclusion states that modernization is a form of rationalization, in the sense of seeking maximum efficiency in thinking and working (Majid, 2008). However, it is very saddening that today's religious Indonesian society has fallen into a crisis and is backward in various aspects of life. Therefore, there should be efforts to reconstruct and organize life, both in science and technology, because science is an important element in the formation of a civilization and should not be the monopoly of any particular religion.

METODOLOGY

This research is *library research* using historical, sociological, anthropological, and theological approaches, as well as *content analysis*. The data collection methods used in this research include heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Intellectual Development of Nurkholis Madjid

If we are looking for a figure of Islamic renewal in Indonesia who is articulate, demonstrative, impressive, and even inspiring to many people, “yes,” we may find all of that in Nurkholis Madjid, or Cak Nur as he is commonly known. He was born on March 17, 1937, coinciding with the date 26 Muharram 1358 H, in a small village in Mojoarnya, Jombang, one of the cities in East Java. He passed away at the age of 66 on August 29, 2005. Cak Nur was fortunate to be born into a simple, modest family with strong religious values (Amir & Rahman, 2025). His father, Haji Abdul Madjid, was a pious cleric who studied at the Tebu Ireng Islamic boarding school. Abdul Madjid had a good relationship with K.H. Hasyim Asy’ari, one of the founders of NU, which is the most prominent Islamic organization from the past to the present. His mother was named Hj Fathonah, the daughter of Kiyai Abdullah Sadjan, a charismatic scholar from Kediri. Nurkholis Madjid has two sisters and two brothers. His sisters are named Mukhlisah and Qoni’ah, and his brothers are named Saifullah Madjid and Muhammad Adnan. Like Nurkholis Madjid, his two younger brothers also studied at the Gontor Islamic Boarding School (Fakhrurrazi, 2022).

The experience that significantly influenced and shaped Cak Nur’s intellectual development was his study at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java, from 1955 to 1960. It was here that Cak Nur was trained, drilled, and equipped with various basic skills in Islam, including Arabic and English (Rachman, 2011). Previously, Cak Nur completed his primary education at two schools: Madrasah Al-Wathaniyah and the public school (SR) in Mojoar. As a place for its students to gain knowledge, the Gontor Islamic boarding school has the motto “*think freely after being virtuous, healthy, and knowledgeable*.” This motto inspires the students, so it is not surprising that the Gontor Islamic boarding school has been able to foster a critical educational climate and remains non-fanatically affiliated with any particular school of thought. It also teaches a relatively advanced and modern social life (Baiquni, 2018).

In 1961, Cak Nur traveled to Jakarta and continued his education at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, majoring in Arabic Language and Literature and Islamic Cultural History in the Faculty of Adab. This campus has now become the Jakarta State Islamic University. His intellectual career as a Muslim thinker was further advanced when he became chairman of PB HMI for two terms (1966-1969) and (1969-1971). During that time, he also served as the first president of PEMIAT (Southeast Asian Islamic Student Association) and, from 1969 to 1971, as the deputy secretary general of IIFSO (*International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations*). In 1968, Nurkholis Madjid finally completed his studies at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah and was the best graduate, earning a bachelor’s degree. His thesis, written as one of the requirements for graduation, was titled “*Al-Qur’an ‘Arabiyyun Lughatan Wa’Alamiyyun Ma’na*” (The Qur’an is Arabic in language and universal in meaning). From 1978 to 1984, Cak Nur completed his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago and graduated with honors with a dissertation titled “*Ibn Taymiyyah on Kalam and Philosophy: a problem of reason and revelation in Islam*” (Arianto, 2024).

Not only through his formal education, but also, it turns out, the factor that significantly influenced Cak Nur’s intellectual development was inseparable from the intellectual journey he undertook in Islamic countries (the Middle East). With pocket money from his visit to the United States, Cak Nur finally realized his dream of visiting the Middle East, marking the beginning of a journey that significantly changed his perspective. To borrow Thomas Kuhn’s term, he experienced a paradigm *shift* towards a *new paradigm*. The journey began in Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, formerly known as Constantinople. In Turkey, Cak Nur met Dr. Jawad. Despite being a doctor, Jawad had a wide

circle of friends among Islamic activists. He took Cak Nur to meet a revivalist group that claimed to be an association with a mission to revive Islam through a Sufi movement. The meeting was reported in the local newspaper, with photos of Cak Nur and many of his quotes. Not only that, but Cak Nur also met with students in Istanbul and held discussions, during which he conveyed the dynamics of the Islamic student movement in Indonesia (Af, 2010).

After Turkey, Cak Nur continued his journey to Lebanon, where he met with an old friend from Gontor who had become a local staff member at the Indonesian embassy in Beirut. Together with his friend, Cak Nur met with Islamic students and held discussions. Cak Nur considered Lebanon a beautiful city on par with Paris. He even said that Lebanon was the Paris of the Middle East. After three days in Lebanon, Cak Nur continued his journey to Syria, where he visited a village called Ma'lulah, inhabited by native Syrians who were all Christians. From this trip, Cak Nur concluded that Islam strongly emphasizes political tolerance, as the caliphs of the past did not force them to convert to Islam and allowed them to continue practicing their own beliefs. The next destination was Baghdad, where Abdurahman Wahid welcomed him. This was his first meeting with Gus Dur. Here, Gus Dur gave Cak Nur space to deliver lectures and arrange meetings with students for discussion. He then traveled to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia (Riyadh), Medina, Mecca, Sudan, Cairo, and finally Pakistan. After such a long journey, he finally returned to Indonesia. He formulated his version of Islamic ideology, which is now known as the Basic Values of Struggle (NDP). This guidebook serves as the official manual for training HMI cadres throughout Indonesia.

B. Cak Nur's Thoughts on Islam

Islam means complete surrender to God, and this is the core attitude of actual teachings in the eyes of Allah. In a substantive approach, Islam must be understood as teachings and ideals as well as an attitude of life that surrenders to God. Therefore, our understanding of Islam must be open, inclusive, and a blessing for the entire universe (Sopandi & Taofan, 2019). Cak Nur's straightforward interpretation of Islamic terminology is divided into two parts: textual and substantive. In everyday life, many thinkers interpret Islam literally, as it is written in the Qur'an. Thus, the understanding of Islam that is built is historical-sociological: a historical Islam, initially formed in the Arabian Peninsula in the classical century, with the presence of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This understanding places Islam as something communal, local, and particular, confined in space and time.

Substantively, the terminology of Islam in the Qur'an, as stated in Surah Ali Imran (3): 19 and 85, is, according to Cak Nur, understood as having a generic meaning rather than a textual one. Islam in this verse is interpreted not as a religion, but as a state of submission to Allah SWT (Madjid, 1995). Therefore, through the perspective of this verse, Surah Ali. Imran 85, people who claim to be Muslim, labeled as Muslim but do not surrender to Allah SWT, will not be accepted, because Islam in the form of a label is a historical-sociological identification that is the result of interactions between other religions, such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism. In contrast, faithful Islam is intrinsically transcendent and ahistorical.

Meanwhile, in the epistemological and postmodernist approach (relativism and deconstructionism), Cak Nur emphasizes that every understanding or interpretation by any human being (even if they are a renowned scientist) of various issues, even religious issues that are textual in nature, whether from the Quran or the Hadith, must be placed within the framework of relativism. Cak Nur's Reading departs from an assumption about "criticism of truth," a truth related to everything that is claimed to be true by religious communities, especially Muslims. Cak Nur's Reading is synonymous with the term "inclusive reasoning," a method of thinking that acknowledges that there is only one truth, but many paths and methods can be used to arrive at it. Absolute truth (*al-haqq*) is indeed one, but truths (*al-haqaiq*) have many faces. Thus, Nasr Hamid

Abu Zaid once said that truth is relative in the sense of cultural relativity, not in the sense of substantive relativity. Therefore, truth must be pursued continuously as an ideal image that has no endpoint.

With this framework, Cak Nur dynamically and constructively rethinks and reevaluates every *ijtihad* thought from the works of classical and modern scholars. His critical reasoning continues to highlight the concepts of conservatism and modernism, as these are historical products whose validity must be reexamined. This is because, as far as the interpretation of science is concerned, no text is sacred. After all, science grows and develops by criticizing the old and giving birth to the new. In his Empirical-Inductive Approach (social-historical analysis), Cak Nur seeks to review Islam in a substantive, ahistorical constellation, without denying objective-empirical reality. Cak Nur uses the interpretive tools of scientists to objectively contextualize his responses to current issues.

For example, in discussing the issue of belief in the existence of the spiritual realm, which science does not appreciate, Cak Nur not only draws on normative theological postulates (Q. s. Al. Isra: 44) but also views historical-sociological reality objectively while accommodating classical and modern insights in an interactive dialectical manner. Quoting Ibn Taymiyyah's comment, "the absence of knowledge does not mean that knowledge about something does not exist." In this case, Cak Nur also enriches his argument with the views of a contemporary philosopher, Haston Smith. Smith reveals that the human senses as tools of observation are not capable of capturing reality in its essence. Everything that is seen by the naked eye is actually mostly space, because in essence, objects are a condensed force, more like pure energy than solid objects that are dead as captured by the five senses. Through this inductive empirical analysis, Cak Nur seeks to present a more rational and objective understanding, rather than merely a transcendental-normative one, of how the practice of science can greatly enhance human awareness of the essence and existence of the universe. Cak Nur seeks to present a more rational and objective understanding, not merely a transcendent-normative one, that the practice of science can greatly enhance human awareness of the essence and existence of the world around them.

C. Reconstruction of Ideas

1. Secularization is not secularism

Secularization comes from the Latin word *saeculum*, which means "the present age." *Saeculum* is one of two Latin words that mean "world." The other word is *mundus*. If *saeculum* refers to time, then *mundus* refers to "space." *Saeculum* is the antonym of *eternum*, which means eternal, used to refer to the eternal realm, that is, the realm after this world. According to Cak Nur, the word secular does not contain Western elements, because humans are worldly beings who live in the present world and have not yet died or moved on to the afterlife. The word "world" is replaced with the word "secular," so it is said that humans are secular beings. This shows that this meaning is not only true in terms of terminology but also in reality (Majid, 2008).

- a. **Secularization in sociological terms.** This is the recognition of the authority of science and its application in shaping worldly life. This is because worldly life requires an objective attitude toward understanding and examining the laws that govern it, so that knowledge is essential for achieving the highest possible certainty in solving existing problems. Therefore, Cak Nur emphasizes that secularization is a dynamic process. In contrast, secularism is a worldly ideology that forms its own philosophy and has a worldview that is different from and often contradictory to almost all religions in the world. Therefore, even though we require secularization, we firmly reject secularism (Majid, 2008). To strengthen his argument, Cak Nur quotes the renowned American theologian Harvey Cox, who states that the term "secularization" has a broad descriptive meaning. It appears in different guises depending on the religious and political history of a particular region. However, wherever it arises, it must be distinguished from secularism. Secularization indicates a historical process in which society and culture are freed from the constraints or supervision of religion and closed metaphysical views, and this shows that secularization is a development of liberation. Meanwhile,

secularism is the name for an ideology, a new closed worldview that functions very similarly to a new religion. Cak Nur also sharpens the sociological understanding of secularization by quoting two views of famous American sociologists, Talcott Parsons and Robert N. Bellah. From Talcott Parsons, Cak Nur shows that, as a sociological process, secularization more often refers to the liberation of society from the shackles of superstition across several aspects of life, and this does not mean the elimination of religious orientation in social norms and values. Meanwhile, drawing on Robert N. Bellah, Cak Nur shows that the process of liberation from superstition can occur solely through encouragement or as a logical continuation of a religious orientation, particularly monotheism. Thus, sociologically, secularization means liberation from inappropriate attitudes of purification. Therefore, it implies desacralization, the removal of taboos and sacredness from objects that should not be taboo or sacred.

- b. **Monotheism.** The concept of monotheism, which can be understood as a process of liberation from all forms of false beliefs, is illustrated at the beginning of Islamic history, where society adhered to animism and dynamism, beliefs that viewed objects as having powers and spirits that required worship. Islam came with its concept of monotheism without compromise and invited animists to see objects considered to have power for what they really are. We can approach them objectively; we can understand them; we can master them, so that our approach and understanding of these objects depend entirely on our intelligence, rather than on rituals of worship towards them. It is at this point that secularization occurs on a massive scale within an animist society.
- c. **The concept of the world and the afterlife.** In this concept, Cak Nur sees a difference in the laws that apply on both days. Regarding the laws of the afterlife, *do you know what the Day of Reckoning is? Then, do you know what the Day of Reckoning is (it is the day when) no one can help anyone else in the slightest. All matters on that day belong to Allah.* (QS. Al-Infithaar (82): 17-19). This verse explains that at that time, secular or worldly laws no longer apply, and what applies are the laws of the hereafter, the direct relationship between individuals and God. However, in the worldly life we live, the laws of human society apply. With their intelligence, humans must understand the laws of worldly life and use that knowledge to build a more advanced society through thought. Cak Nur says that we know the forms of human relationships, face problems as they are, and that there are no ritualistic problems. A person's success in facing and solving worldly problems does not depend on their ability to perform religious ceremonies or worship, but on their intelligence, breadth of knowledge, and objectivity.
- d. **The Concept of Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim.** Cak Nur's interpretation of the meanings of Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim has its own consequences, depending on each person's response. The nature of *Ar-Rahman* is that God will always reward those who live their worldly lives properly with goodness in this world. God's love does not depend on a person's faith but on their knowledge of secular matters. Meanwhile, the nature of *Ar-Rahim* is that God will always reward those who prepare for the afterlife correctly, namely by following God's religious teachings, with goodness in the hereafter. So, the love of *Ar-Rahim* depends on a person's faith, not on their knowledge. So we can see that *Ar-Rahman* is given to humans as social beings in their relationships with other humans in the surrounding world. In contrast, the attribute of Ar-Rahim is given to humans as individuals in their relationship with Allah SWT. Based on the meanings of *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Rahim*, Cak Nur concludes by urging us to seek happiness in this world and the hereafter through the approach of knowledge and faith. Because both will shape our lives, our daily activities must be motivated by the right intentions,

in accordance with the voice of conscience, sharpened and enlivened by faith and worship, or spiritual activities, and illuminated by accurate scientific or rational calculations.

With the concept of secularization, Cak Nur wants to lead Indonesian society towards modernization. Therefore, modernization is nothing less than an imperative and fundamental command from God; as a consequence, it is a necessity and an obligation for a Muslim. Rationalization based on the use of reason, especially in understanding the laws of nature that apply, without being accompanied by a process of secularization, will never be realized. This is because if humans are unable to distinguish between the sacred and the profane, the transcendent and the immanent, the otherworldly and the worldly, it is difficult for the human mind to work actively and freely. If everything is considered transcendent, otherworldly, immanent, and sacred, then reason cannot touch it. Therefore, a separation must be made between them so that reason can function actively and maximally, and this is what is called the essence of secularization or desacralization (Sopandi & Taofan, 2019).

2. Islam as universal ethics

Islam is a set of rules that encompasses moral values and ethical principles in Islamic teachings and applies universally, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or religious background. Therefore, to directly experience the application of Islam as a universal ethic and as an effort to build an Islamic civilization in Indonesia, four things must be considered in the life of the nation and state.

- a. **Justice** The term “fair” in Arabic has the basic meaning of “middle” or “balanced,” so the basic attitude of justice is balance, which is acting without excess. In addition, justice is always associated with the term *wisdom* or prudence, which in Arabic is called hikmah, a personal quality of humans obtained through comprehensive and balanced knowledge about a matter. Therefore, from this explanation, justice can be interpreted as putting something in its proper place, while an act of putting something in the wrong place is called injustice (Muhyidin, 2019). In life, justice must be applied to everyone, both positively and negatively, regardless of social status, race, ethnicity, class, ideology, beliefs, and even religion. When we apply justice across the dimensions of life, whether individually or socially, we help create peace and prosperity in the public sphere. Conversely, when we are unable to create justice in the dimensions of life, either as individuals or as a society, we have failed to create peace in the public sphere, and chaos and anarchy may arise in social life.
- b. **Humanity.** Cak Nur reveals a postulate from the holy book when discussing humanity, which is very interesting for us to reflect on. *Indeed, we have honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea. We have also bestowed upon them sustenance from the good things, and we have preferred them above many of the creatures we have created with perfect excellence.* (QS.17:70). This verse explains that honor is not reserved for a particular race or generation, nor is it based on religion or lineage, but is bestowed upon all the children of Adam so that each individual can attain it. Thus, the nobility of a human being, whomever they may be, is not based on their social and economic status, race, language, or religion, but rather on something transparent within the human being themselves.
- c. **Freedom.** Freedom is the most basic right that humans must have, because with freedom, humans become moral beings, that is, beings who can take full responsibility for all the actions they choose with full awareness. To achieve a complete and integral life as caliphs on this earth, everything must be based on freedom of conscience, which is freedom from all forms of coercion, even coercion carried out in the name of established truth, because the freedom to choose and determine the direction and purpose of life is the most fundamental thing in human beings. Therefore, faith and piety to God Almighty are attitudes that can protect oneself from tyrannical tendencies towards oneself. Faith and piety will also give rise to a humane attitude, namely, mutual respect and honor for fellow human beings. *There is no compulsion in religion (Islam). Indeed, the right path has been made clear from the wrong path. Whoever rejects the tyrant (thaghut) and believes in Allah has grasped a strong rope that will never*

break. Allah is All-Hearing and All-Knowing. (QS. 2:256). From this verse, we can see that Allah gives humans freedom, even in matters of religion, without coercion to adhere to a particular religion. On the other hand, Allah emphasizes that what is right is clear from what is wrong, so that humans, with their freedom and purity of conscience, can recognize and grasp it. Faith in Allah is linked to the attitude of opposing and rejecting tyranny, and this verse concludes with the affirmation that Allah SWT is All-Hearing and All-Knowing of the heartbeat of a person, whether they accept and act upon something out of their free and sincere choice or because of forced circumstances.

- d. **Democracy.** In Cak Nur's view, democracy is not only a crucial principle commanded in the fundamental doctrines of Islam, but democracy was also practiced directly by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions during his lifetime, in the formation of the Medina Charter as the first constitution that bound the lives of the community at that time, such as the Muslims (Anshar and Muhajirin), the Jews (Bani Qainuqa, Bani Nadhir, and Bani Quraizhan) and polytheists (remnants of the Aus and Khazraj tribes). This reflected democratic values in life, mutual respect, honor, and protection between one another. These are important points in the Medina Charter, rooted in shared interests, regardless of religious background, tribe, or social status. For Cak Nur, democracy, as intended by the principle of deliberation, always guides each of the parties concerned to sincerely meet at a point of common good for all, in a spirit of giving and taking that is imbued with an optimistic view of humanity. Therefore, democracy, with proper deliberation as its foundation, will not be realized without a strong view of human equality and egalitarianism, and will be undermined by rigid, *a priori* social stratification in paternalistic and feudalistic systems.

Based on this sketch, even though Cak Nur departs from the principles of faith and historical prophetic examples, he eloquently voices an inclusive democracy, in which, in a country that embraces a democratic system, everyone has the same rights of freedom to express their aspirations and demands for justice openly and democratically, regardless of their ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. All people are part of a democratic, open, and just society and must participate with full commitment and responsibility for the good of society and for the benefit of all citizens *equally*.

3. Education as a pillar of civilization

In the context of social life, Cak Nur pays close attention to education. He emphasizes the importance of education, especially higher education. Educational institutions should be able to create rational, open, and critical individuals (Syam'un, 2021), as inherited by the classical civilization, which highly values *ijtihad*, science, and freedom of thought. Not only that, education must become an instrument that frees humans from the shackles of poverty, ignorance, and social injustice, to create good education, namely, education that reflects the spirit of renewal and *ijtihad* to face the demands and challenges of the times (Iddian, 2021). Therefore, as a tangible manifestation of his concern for education, Cak Nur established Paramadina as an institution and a symbol of modern, inclusive education that addresses the reality of education, which tends to be rigid and stagnant.

The Paramadina Waqf Foundation is a religious educational institution that explicitly provides integration between Islam and Indonesians as a manifestation of universal Islamic values. In its establishment process, Paramadina was designed to be a center for creative, constructive, and positive Islamic religious activities for the community (Sabri et al., 2018). Paramadina University was founded on January 10, 1998, as a combination of Paramadina, led by Cak Nur, and the Pondok Mulya Foundation, led by Soedwikatmono, giving birth to an educational institute named the Paramadina Mulya Foundation. In its first year of operation, UPM had only 70 students. Over

time, it grew to 200 students and, at that time, offered only 4 study programs: Philosophy of Religion, Information Technology, Product Design, and Management (Zuhri, 2020). As a campus of civilization, Paramadina University has a vision to develop ethics- and religion-based higher education to realize a noble civilization. Its mission is to foster knowledge and a sense of noble character for the sake of shared happiness by creating a campus environment as a center of science and culture, upholding a tradition of scientific community, and upholding academic freedom.

The symbol of Paramadina University is a calligraphic letter Kaf and Ha inspired by Qs. An-Nisa verse 133 *"Allah has sent down to you the Book and wisdom and taught you what you did not know,"* so that from the meaning of this symbol, Cak Nur wants to convey the message that we can obtain knowledge in two ways, namely by studying the holy book and learning about the universe. As a campus of civilization, Cak Nur reinforced his argument by quoting Qs. Al Baqara verse 269, *"He bestows wisdom upon whom He wills. Whoever is granted wisdom is granted abundant goodness."* Thus, in his interpretation, Cak Nur says that the source and origin of civilization is the prophetic message, namely the delivery of divine teachings, the development of wisdom and insight, and the study of natural phenomena and history as signs of God's greatness to explore what is not yet known to humans (Siraj et al., 2020). Paramadina University is not only a place for students to prepare for a career that is merely a formality, but more than that, with the establishment of Paramadina University, Cak Nur wants to build an inclusive laboratory of knowledge that can develop the capacity and capabilities of each individual so that they have their own paradigm in understanding and interpreting life. Wherever they work, a mentality of faith, an open mind, *problem-solving* skills, and analytical thinking abilities must be their hallmarks and serve as *role models* for everyone in their social environment.

As an inclusive educational institution that adheres to the principle of offering general, open study programs, Paramadina University does not limit student admissions based on formal educational background or specific disciplines. Instead, it accommodates prospective students from diverse educational backgrounds who demonstrate resilience and are assessed as having sufficient academic readiness and intellectual capacity to participate in the available study programs actively. The academic discipline or field of study of prospective students is viewed as a transferable asset that can be applied to academic tasks within the university environment. Therefore, Paramadina University places greater emphasis on high individual academic potential as the basis for student admission, without prioritizing specialization in a particular field of study. All of Cak Nur's ideas have become the hallmark of Paramadina University, distinguishing it from other higher education institutions (Siraj et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Secularization is not a form of secularism that is hostile to religion, but rather an effort to free social life from the domination of superstition or false sacredness, without eliminating religious orientation. This is a consequence of the principle of monotheism, which frees humans from worshipping anything other than God. Cak Nur clearly distinguishes between secularization (a social and historical process) and secularism (an anti-religious ideology). Secularization is rooted in religious values themselves, especially monotheism. During the classical Islamic period, secularization was practiced by diminishing the value of tribalism, which had previously been considered sacred. In the life of the nation and state, Islam should be understood as a source of ethics and moral values, not as a political ideology. For Cak Nur, Islam is a universal religion (dīn) that guides humanity towards happiness in this world and the hereafter. Islam, in Cak Nur's view, should be a moral force that substantively, not symbolically, animates the life of the state. Thus, the grounding of Islam in the Indonesian context must prioritize moral integrity, equality of rights, and respect for human freedom of conscience. In the context of social life, Nurkholish Madjid (Cak Nur) views education as a fundamental means of creating a rational, open, and critical society. As a concrete manifestation of his ideas, Cak Nur founded Paramadina University, a modern, inclusive

higher education institution that integrates Islamic and Indonesian values. This university is designed to be a center of scholarship that encourages free, reflective, and creative thinking, and instills a spirit of cosmopolitanism, moral responsibility, and a love of knowledge.

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