

# Muhammadiyah and Humanitarian Theology

Muhammad Qorib

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

**ABSTRACT:** Muhammadiyah is an Association that plays a role in the fields of community, nationality and universal humanity. Since its inception, Muhammadiyah's identity as an Association concerned with humanitarian movements can be seen through the real work carried out. This was inspired by the spirit of the Qur'an and al-Sunnah which was understood and implemented by its founding figure, Ahmad Dahlan. This research aims to explore information about Muhammadiyah's theology in humanitarian movements. The data in this research is grouped into two types, namely; primary data derived from official Muhammadiyah decisions, and secondary data extracted from the writings of experts on Muhammadiyah. The approach in this research is qualitative with content analysis tools used to explore the data. The data is then presented in a descriptive analytical manner. This research shows that Muhammadiyah's activities are more inclined towards humanitarian actions. These activities are inspired by the spirit of the Quran and al-Sunnah which are institutionalised. The institutionalisation of the spirit of the Quran and al-Sunnah can be proven through the number of charities for humanity manifested in the fields of education, health, and social services

**KEYWORDS** - Muhammadiyah, theology, humanity, ahmad dahlan, tolerant

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has established its identity as a movement of Progressive Islam (Nashir 1, 2015). This identity was not formulated adhoc, temporarily and based on certain circumstances, but was formulated based on the Qur'an and al-Sunnah as the soul and movement of Muhammadiyah (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 1, 2019). In the early days of its formation, Muhammadiyah made society the object of change. Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923), the founder, saw that there was a discrepancy between the supposed Islam (read: normative Islam) and the facts on the ground (read: real Islam) (Hariri, 2018). The teachings of the Quran and al-Sunnah explained that Muslims should be smart and concerned with civilisation, but factually the opposite was true. Muslims are underdeveloped and live in poor conditions.

The establishment of Muhammadiyah was a historical necessity. Indonesia, then called the Dutch East Indies, was a Dutch colony. As a colonised nation, the Indonesian people certainly did not get their rights as children of the nation, such as education, health and social services or others (Riclefs, 2008). In addition, especially for Muslims, the authenticity of Islamic teachings was not well understood. This has consequences for the syncretism of Islamic teachings and local culture that smells mystical-irrational. On the other hand, the power of foreigners who enslaved the natives made it difficult for the community to progress. On this basis and fact, Ahmad Dahlan's movements led to the establishment of Muhammadiyah (Shihab, 2016).

As a *da'wah* movement, Muhammadiyah always feels that conveying Islamic teachings in various contexts and to everyone is an obligatory treatise (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 1, 2009). As a *tajdid* movement, the Islamic teachings brought by Muhammadiyah must always be contextualised and in tune with the times. Muhammadiyah divides religious areas into two categories, namely basic areas such as belief and worship. In this context, *tajdid* means purification and straightening. Basic areas such as faith, which are polluted must be purified and cleaned. Meanwhile, areas of worship that are not in accordance with the teachings of the

Prophet Muhammad must be straightened out (Nashir 2, 2019).

*Tajdid* in the context of mu'amalah means dynamisation, reform or renewal. In this case it can be explained that religion and religion are two different things. Religion comes from God, which is absolute and definitely true. Meanwhile, religious practice comes from the understanding and practice of religious adherents (read: Muslims) in carrying out their religion. So dynamisation, reform or renewal is carried out in this area (Ansori, 2019). The understanding of Islam must be dynamic so that Muslims will always develop and progress. A closed and backward understanding must be updated into an open understanding.

In every phase of history, before independence, during independence and after independence, the identity as a *da'wah* and *tajdid* movement has been attached to Muhammadiyah (Hidayat, 2023). The results of the *da'wah* and *tajdid* movement led Muhammadiyah to become one of the most influential and largest Islamic civil movements in the world with assets of hundreds of trillions of rupiah. Interestingly, Muhammadiyah's contribution is aimed at the benefit of human values. Muhammadiyah does and helps the community by not considering aspects that have often been called barriers, namely; religion. For Muhammadiyah, helping anyone must be based on consideration because the person deserves and has the right to be helped (Baidhaw, 2015).

Muhammadiyah also joins hands with every element of the nation to solve various problems of the people (Qorib, 2022). Muhammadiyah also participates in various international meetings to contribute to humanitarian issues (Temarwut, 2023). For Muhammadiyah, there are still many challenges faced by the Indonesian nation, such as corruption, drugs, and the rule of law (Humas BNN, 2020). Muhammadiyah views that the forces of civil society must be present as well as provide solutions to these various irregularities. Meanwhile, at the international level, the supremacy of superpowers always intervenes in the internal problems of other countries (Anwar, 2016). That is why wars, radical intolerant movements triggered by injustice occur in many countries (Rahardanto, 2012). These movements affect other countries, including Indonesia.

Muhammadiyah in this context is present and provides solutions in accordance with its identity and capabilities. The fate and future of humanity must be saved. For Muhammadiyah, humanitarian issues are religious issues. Because one aspect of religion with another cannot be separated, for example; aspects of creed, moral aspects, aspects of worship, and aspects of *mu'amalah*. These four aspects are an integral unity in Islam. But interestingly, all of these aspects boil down to human values. Therefore, this research theologically reveals how Muhammadiyah has a strong commitment to solving these humanitarian problems.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach in this research is qualitative. The qualitative approach emphasises the quality of analysis to reveal individual or group phenomena, social dynamics and even reveal beliefs. This research uses content analysis which is useful for extracting data from various documents, such as; books, journals, official letters, social media. The data in this study are grouped into two types, namely; *primary data*, in the form of various official decisions in Muhammadiyah in the form of books, journals, magazines, websites, and organisational provisions; *secondary data* in the form of books, journals, magazines, websites written by individual or group experts. The data was then analysed and taken in accordance with the topic of discussion in this research. The data is then presented in a descriptive analysis.

## III. DISCUSSION

### The Spirit of Ahmad Dahlan

Studying Muhammadiyah cannot be separated from the study of Ahmad Dahlan. He can be categorised as a reformer. Ahmad Dahlan was a man of ideas and a man of charity. His ideas to advance the *ummah* led to the establishment of various institutions, such as; educational institutions, health institutions and social service institutions (Anshoriy Ch., 2010). Ahmad Dahlan's construct of Islamic reform did not occur in a vacuum. He became a reformer with intelligent thoughts and movements because he had come into contact with great ideas before, especially when he studied in Saudi Arabia. He absorbed the reform thinking that developed in the Middle East and contextualised it (Wasno et al., 2022).

Ahmad Dahlan's lineage, if drawn upwards, reaches Sunan Giri, one of the Wali Songo. If drawn upwards again it turns out to be up to the Prophet Muhammad. Thus Ahmad Dahlan is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Ahmad Dahlan's family came from among the ulama. In this case, during the formative years, Ahmad Dahlan was very familiar with the teachings of Islam given by his parents. The family environment contributed to the formation of Ahmad Dahlan's thought structure. In addition to being shaped by his family, Ahmad Dahlan was an intelligent child. This shows that seeds and weights were strongly integrated in him (Mulkhan, 2010).

Ahmad Dahlan's life principles were very solid. For example, he received a strong challenge from the traditional anti-change people for his Islamic reform. The reactive attitude of the traditionalists did not make Ahmad Dahlan's stance recede. On the other hand, Ahmad Dahlan was very open and tolerant. He was willing to learn and did not feel prestigious to get information from movement figures in Budi Utomo (Pulungan, 2019: 290) and learnt to advance the humanitarian movement from non-Muslim figures such as Pastor Sneevlit (LKL, 2022). The fruit of his open attitude became his own spirit of progress in mobilising Muhammadiyah.

Ahmad Dahlan was known as a forward-thinking figure. This can be traced from the activities he did. Likewise, the information provided by his students. Indeed, Ahmad Dahlan did not leave scientific works such as books. The reason is predictable, because at that time the people were still in dire need of real action rather than a scientifically studied academic work. However, if traced, Ahmad Dahlan's philosophy of life contains the spirit of far-reaching change. At least Ahmad Dahlan's philosophy of life revolves around the issue of *tawhid*, which then leads to social problems.

Ahmad Dahlan's philosophy of life is known as the seven philosophies of Kiyai Dahlan (Mustofa, 2018). The seven philosophies of life are as follows: *Firstly*, man lives only once and after that dies, will man get happiness or misery? *Secondly*, most people are haughty and arrogant, and they make their own decisions. *Thirdly*, when people do anything, once, twice, or repeatedly, it becomes a habit. Once it becomes a beloved pleasure, it is very difficult to change. It is the nature of human beings to always maintain accepted habits, whether in terms of belief or determination, will or action.

*Fourth*, people can be classified as one in the truth, and should use their minds together to think about what the nature and purpose of life in the world really is, and what people should do, what they should seek, and what they should aim for. Man must use his mind to correct his resolve and beliefs, his life purpose and behaviour, and seek the true truth. If this one-time life in the world is not used well, then man will feel miserable.

*Fifthly*, man learns a lot and reads various books. There comes a time when man has to speak the truth as he has learnt it, but then man feels very scared to speak the truth. So in such a situation, man is like a creature without reason. *Sixthly*, many leaders are not willing to sacrifice for the people they lead, and cannot be good role models. Sometimes they even use the common people for their own personal and group interests.

*Seventh*, lessons are categorised into two categories; theoretical lessons and practical lessons. If a lesson has been learnt, the next step is to put the lesson into practice through various concrete works. Delivering lessons to the community must be done step by step and adjusted to the community's ability to absorb it well. If a lesson has not been learnt in the area of practice, then do not move on to the next lesson.

Ahmad Dahlan's seven philosophies contain modern thinking. This can be seen from the design that must be done by everyone to determine their future. This is very interesting, because if traced, the design of the future is firmly rooted in the Qur'an (Q.S. Al-Hasyr/ 59: 18). Ahmad Dahlan realised that the future is determined by the earnestness of every Muslim to prepare his life in the present. It is the present that will shape the future. If the present is weak, the future will also be weak.

Ahmad Dahlan also explained that Islam is not just a belief that lies beautifully in the heart and for personal satisfaction. For Ahmad Dahlan, Islam must lead to a practical level and a religion that is solutive for life. In this context, Ahmad Dahlan wanted to create the fire of Islam in the form of the spirit contained in the Quran and al-Sunnah. The fire of religion in Ahmad Dahlan's view is a religion that not only contains a series of rituals but also a religion of civilisation that is useful to be a solution in life. He saw that Islam did come from God, but it was always useful for humanity.

Among the fundamental things that Ahmad Dahlan did was to place Muhammadiyah as a *da'wah* and

*tajdid* movement, not as a political party. Here it can be understood that Ahmad Dahlan shared his role with political parties. Muhammadiyah remains on the cultural path, cultural da'wah in a broad sense that aims to enlighten the people. The cultural movement is permanent and for many people. This is proven by the age of Muhammadiyah as a cultural movement which is more than one hundred years old. If it becomes a political party, Muhammadiyah may not be that old.

### Theological Roots

As a *Da'wah* and *Tajdid* Movement, Muhammadiyah always takes the Qur'an and al-Sunnah as a source of great inspiration (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 1, 2019: 6). There are three important points contained in Muhammadiyah before implementing its movement. *First*, how the Quran and al-Sunnah command. *Second*, understanding the Quran and al-Sunnah to further capture its spirit. *Third*, implementing the spirit in business, which is manifested in business charities, programmes and activities. Charity work is institutionalised effort. Programmes are planned efforts. Activities are efforts that are carried out in the community.

The spirit of *Al-'Ashr* is a very important theological foundation in Muhammadiyah. This does not mean that other verses do not receive attention. For Muhammadiyah, the short *surah* contains the elements of a modern civilisation. Islam as *din al-hadharah* has its roots in this. All nations reach the peak of their progress when discipline becomes a culture and is done automatically. The verse also emphasises that humans are always in the trap of regression, both in mindset and activities if the culture of discipline does not become an important part of life.

The requirements for civilisation in the verse are also shown in solid faith. Faith for Muhammadiyah must be proven in various innovations and creations of advanced civilisation, such as mastering *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) and mastery of the *Internet of Things* (IoT). Good deeds become the mouth of true and authentic faith. For Muhammadiyah, good deeds are efforts, programmes and activities manifested in the fields of education, health and social services (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 1, 2019: 26-27). These fields are designed inclusively and are intended for anyone regardless of ethnic, cultural, national or religious backgrounds (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2022).

For Muhammadiyah, the theology of *al-'Ashr* provides inspiration for the building of an open civilisation. History records that Ahmad Dahlan instilled an understanding of the spirit of *al-'Ashr* to his students for seven months without stopping. The theology of *al-'Ashr* also contains the principles of truth (*al-haq*) and patience (*al-sabr*). *Al-haq* is defined as the truth and fighting for the truth. While *al-sabr* can be understood as an intelligent and continuous effort to convey the truth.

In many literatures that discuss Muhammadiyah, besides being known as *al-'Ashr* theology, *al-Ma'un* theology is also often the basis (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2, 2022). Even in this theology, there is a criticism of the religious understanding that many Muslims practice, namely obeying rituals but forgetting the essence of the ritualism. Allah even calls this person a liar of religion. The liars of religion are those who ignore the importance of honouring and glorifying human values. It is understandable that the Quran is from Allah, al-Sunnah is from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with the spirit of the Quran. The two most authoritative sources are about human life and for the benefit of human beings.

The two short *surahs* as theological foundations lead Muhammadiyah as a *caring* Association, which means doing and helping the weak and weakened; *purifying*, which is to clean the faith from the influence of *superstition*, *bid'ah* and worship from activities that are not exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, *churafat* or things that can pollute the faith; and *curing*, which means helping the community in the health sector. What Muhammadiyah does can be accounted for theologically, because the activities carried out by Muhammadiyah are believed to be Islamic teachings (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2, 2022). Muhammadiyah also believes that Islam comes from God but was revealed for the benefit of humans (*ilahiyyah al-mashdar insaniyyah al-maudhu'*).

Muhammadiyah is a cultural movement, in other words Muhammadiyah is a *da'wah* and *tajdid* movement. It can be observed, for example, one verse of the Koran that is usually used as a reference by Muhammadiyah, namely; *surah Al- Imran* (3) verse 104. The verse explains that the people who win are those

who have fulfilled several criteria, namely; congregation, which is indicated by the word *ummah*. That is why Muhammadiyah is called the Association. The message to be achieved is that the goals set can be realised well if done together with professional management, not done individually in an unprofessional manner.

The foundation of Muhammadiyah is the Quran and al-Sunnah. In the context of this verse there is the phrase *al-Khair*, which some *mufasirs* interpret as the Koran. After that Muhammadiyah carried out a cultural movement indicated by the word *amar ma'ruf*. This cultural movement has a broad meaning. It can be understood that the cultural movement is realised through various social activities in the fields of education, health and social services. That is why Muhammadiyah is very concerned and places itself as a cultural movement. Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has carried out these movements as a way out of the problems experienced by the people. These fields of movement became the main driving force behind the establishment of Muhammadiyah.

The liberation mission carried out by Muhammadiyah also gets its theological foundation in *surah* Al-Imran (3) verse 110. The verse explains that the best *ummah* (*khairu ummah*) if in its movement contains several elements, namely; the existence of cultural movements, such as in the fields of education, social, culture, economy; the existence of structural movements, mastery in the political field; and the most important thing is that cultural movements and structural movements are framed by strong religious ethics (*tu'minuna billah*). However, it must be understood that the political movement carried out by Muhammadiyah is not practical in nature as carried out by political parties, but rather the allocation of civilisational values, such as; fair, honest, inclusive, disciplined, humanist and so on.

For Muhammadiyah, religion is a set of teachings to produce happiness. This can be traced for example in *surah* al-Baqarah (2) verse 201. Happiness for Muhammadiyah is not individual and egoistic, but widespread and collective happiness. Religion must give birth to collective happiness. Religion is together in happiness. Happiness in the verse can be interpreted as physical happiness and spiritual happiness. In the context of modern management, happiness can be realised through the sufficiency of clothing, food and shelter ([muhammadiyah.or.id](http://muhammadiyah.or.id)). Furthermore, the realisation of living in pious friends, obtaining *halal* sustenance, and maintaining good health.

The nature of Muhammadiyah is open to anyone and in the context of *mu'amalah* Muhammadiyah can collaborate. Muhammadiyah carries the spirit of Islam Berkemajuan with the principle of *wasathiyah* (middle). This principle places Muhammadiyah as a principled, flexible, and humanist Association. If traced, the *wasathiyah* principle is found in *Surah* al-Baqarah (2) verse 143. *Wasathiyah* in the verse contains several meanings, namely; fair, tolerant, balanced, deliberation, giving a good example, and love for the country. These basic characteristics lead to activities that honour human values (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 2, 2022).

In this case, Muhammadiyah realises that Islam as a religion that is fought for, although it comes from God, but its missions are for the benefit of humanity. Interestingly, Muhammadiyah acts not for a particular *ummah*, but for humanity without considering the cultural or religious background that is adhered to. Because Muhammadiyah realises that Islam is *rahmatan li al-alamin*. This religion is a source of life and gives anyone without exception. This middle ground leads Muhammadiyah as an Association that is in accordance with the identity of the pluralistic Indonesian nation. Indonesia has a variety of ethnic, tribal, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Muhammadiyah's personality is in line with this diversity (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 3, 2023: 462-464).

It can be seen for example the choice of the sun as the symbol of Muhammadiyah. The choice was not a coincidence, but was chosen based on careful consideration. The sun is the source of life. Without the sun, life would not be possible. Muhammadiyah is also expected to function like that, giving light and warming life. The emblem is even green in colour. This hints at prosperity. Muhammadiyah is one of the pillars to realise that welfare (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah 1, 2019: 25). Welfare is realised through the fulfilment of basic needs such as clothing, food and shelter. This means that what Muhammadiyah does is the command of Allah and His Messenger, and not merely a matter of humanity. There is a divine responsibility in the symbol.

Muhammadiyah and humanitarian theology can mean that the Muhammadiyah Association moves from the commands of Allah and His Messenger in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah to build civilisation for life together. As

the purpose of the revelation of Islamic law, Muhammadiyah's goal is to maintain religion so that it is functional, to maintain reason so that it is used for benefit, to maintain offspring so that the family tree is clear, to maintain property so that it can be distinguished between what is legal and what is illegal (Fachruddin, 2006). In this context, it becomes clear that the theology of humanity built by Muhammadiyah moves from God to humanity. Because the main characteristic of obedience to God is shown by activities that glorify humanity.

### Humanitarian Actions

Refer back to what Ahmad Dahlan has done. He did an intelligent reading of the Quran and al-Sunnah to be translated institutionally. The command to read as found in *Surah al-'Alaq* verses 1-5 was translated into the establishment of educational institutions. These institutions then developed and advanced in very large numbers, ranging from kindergartens to universities, not only locally but internationally. The rise and development of a civilisation is largely determined by its human resources as evidenced by the quality of its education.

Similarly, Ahmad Dahlan's intelligent reading of *surah al-Ma'un* gave birth to various health institutions, such as hospitals, clinics. Furthermore, orphanages for social services were also born. This institution accommodates thousands of orphans who are unable and have lost both parents. This spirit continues to be maintained as a flagship programme in Muhammadiyah. Therefore, it is appropriate for Muhammadiyah to be credited as a *purifying, caring, curing, and schooling* organisation.

It is interesting and unique if Muhammadiyah educational institutions are studied and explained more comprehensively. In certain areas such as East Nusa Tenggara and Papua, Muslims are a minority quantitatively, but Muhammadiyah Universities are developing and advancing rapidly. Muhammadiyah Kupang University can be used as an example, 80 per cent of its students are Protestants and Catholics. They are heavily involved in Muhammadiyah activities and do not even feel uncomfortable because of this (Anton, 2019). This is what Abdul Mu'ti calls Christian of Muhammadiyah (*Krismuha*). The term is not in the theological area, but in the *mu'amalah* area. *Krismuha* also means Christians and Catholics (non-Muslims) who study at Muhammadiyah (Mu'ti dan Riza Ul Haq, 2023).

This is also the case with Muhammadiyah Universities in Papua. Its students and faculty are also dominated by Christians and Catholics. They are even involved in various academic and al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah activities. The College has never forced them to embrace Islam. However, they are asked to get to know Islam more closely. They are also familiar with various activities carried out by Muhammadiyah. Of course, this fact is strong evidence of Muhammadiyah's role for the benefit of humanity.

Data that can be collected from the institutionalisation movement carried out by Muhammadiyah in the fields of education, health, social services as follows: Muhammadiyah Provincial Leaders: 35. Muhammadiyah Regional Leaders: 475. Muhammadiyah branch leaders: 3.947. Muhammadiyah branch leaders: 14.670. Muhammadiyah Special Branches: 30. Helper elements of the leadership: 31. Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah Universities: 172. Muhammadiyah Hospital: 122. Clinic: 231. Schools/Madrassahs: 5.345. Social Charity: 1.012. Muhammadiyah Islamic Boarding School: 440. Humanitarian Missions for Palestine, Rohingya, Philippines, Bangladesh, Morocco, Turkey, Nepal, Sudan, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon ([muhammadiyah.or.id](http://muhammadiyah.or.id)).

As an Association that carries the idea of Progressive Islam, the Muhammadiyah movement crosses geographical, ethnic, tribal, national and religious boundaries. Along with the journey of Muhammadiyah's more than 100 years of age, Muhammadiyah's activities are aimed at raising the dignity of human values. In one of the important decisions of the 48th Muhammadiyah Congress in Surakarta in November 2022, a systematic formulation of the Risalah Islam Berkemajuan was decided. The Risalah Islam Berkemajuan is the main reference and clear evidence of Muhammadiyah's identity as an Association that carries human values as its movement.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah established its identity as a movement that cares about human values. Muhammadiyah's efforts, which are manifested in charities, programmes and activities, are sourced from the

Quran and al-Sunnah. The two main sources of Muhammadiyah are a great inspiration. Muhammadiyah's efforts are inclusive and transcend tribal, ethnic, and religious boundaries. As the bearer of the mission of Islam *rahmatan li al-'alamin*, Muhammadiyah acts for anyone regardless of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. That is why the Muhammadiyah movement flows regionally, nationally, and internationally. The theology of humanity that Muhammadiyah has always promoted can be traced to a group of Quranic verses that Ahmad Dahlan taught to his students and friends. These verses largely contain issues of faith, human values and designs that must be prepared in living life. *Surah al-'Ashr* and *Surah al-Ma'un* were *suras* that Ahmad Dahlan studied repeatedly. These two short suras became among the theological foundations of Muhammadiyah to move in the humanitarian area. Similarly, for example, the idea of *wasathiyah* contained in *Surah Al-Baqarah* (2) verse 143, became a great inspiration for Muhammadiyah to maintain the cyclical balance of various religious and non-religious movements everywhere.

The spirit of change that Ahmad Dahlan had laid down continued to be elaborated and contextualised by later generations. The major theme that became the main concern was human values. For Muhammadiyah, human values are not only the main goal of change, they are the main vision of Islamic teachings that must be implemented. The main message of the Quran and al-Sunnah revolves around humanitarian issues. That is why Muhammadiyah has always been loose and accommodating when it comes to human values. Muhammadiyah views that glorifying humans is the same as glorifying God.

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