

FROM PROPHETIC THEOLOGY TO PROPHETIC SOCIAL SCIENCE: The Study of Kuntowijoyo's Thought

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Abstract

This article attempts to explore contemporary readings of theology. In classical and medieval times, Islamic theology is regarded as a scientific discourse that discusses such metaphysical issues as God, the status of the Quran, eschatology, and other things that include beliefs or principles of faith in Islam with rational arguments. This article as library research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach by exploring primary and secondary sources in the form of textual sources. Employing content analysis approach, this article found that there has been a shift in views on theology in contemporary times. In addition, this article concludes that prophetic social science can become an epistemological and methodological foundation in building transformative and contextual social science. The novelty of this article lies in the fact that prophetic social science is not a normative discourse, but as an integrative epistemological model that eliminates the dichotomy between revelation and reason, between values and facts, and between science and social practice.

Keywords: *contemporary theology; prophetic social science; prophetic sociology; social theology.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mencoba menggali pembacaan kontemporer terhadap teologi. Pada masa klasik dan abad pertengahan, teologi Islam dipahami sebagai diskursus keilmuan yang membahas masalah-masalah metafisika di antaranya mengenai Tuhan, status Al-Qur'an, eskatologi, dan hal-hal lain yang mencakup kepercayaan atau prinsip-prinsip iman dalam agama dengan argumentasi rasional. Riset kepustakaan ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggali sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder berupa sumber-sumber tekstual. Menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi, artikel ini menemukan bahwa terdapat pergeseran pandangan terhadap teologi pada masa kontemporer. Selain itu, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa ilmu sosial profetik menawarkan sketsa



metodologis dan epistemologis untuk ilmu sosial transformatif dan kontekstual. Kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada kenyataan bahwa ilmu sosial profetik bukanlah suatu wacana normatif, melainkan sebagai suatu model epistemologi integratif yang menghilangkan dikotomi antara wahyu dan akal, antara nilai dan fakta, serta antara ilmu pengetahuan dan praktik sosial.

Kata kunci: *ilmu sosial profetik; teologi kontemporer; teologi profetik; teologi sosial; sosiologi profetik.*

A. Introduction

Islam laden with morally universal values contains many instructions and rules relevant to the development of the times, since it comprises global teachings and therefore requires scholars and scientists to interpret and articulate them contextually, indicating that such values can interact with social changes that occur in contemporary society.¹ Classical texts should not be fixed knowledge that must be applied rigidly, because those are products of their time, so that they need to be recontextualized in the present.

Islam and its theological views become strong pillars to strengthen the reality that occurs in each time. Theology is understood classically as a science that discusses matters related to God, encompassing beliefs or principles of faith in religion with rational arguments. As far as the urgency of theology is only as a basis for faith in individual and personal religious ceremonies, it refers to classical theology which is paradigmatically theocentric and inadequate to take revolutionary steps for humanity in social domain.²

The shortcoming of classical theological thought is that it is not responsive to current social reality, which is constantly developing and changing.³ Hence, theology is never fixed and complete in that it can indeed be elaborated and interpreted continuously. The romanticism of Muslims towards their past is one that shows the stagnation of the dynamics of Islamic interpretation. Theology as the basis for the beliefs of Muslims—in its classical discourse, namely in its formative era—was merely vertical and abstract in nature, so that it did not touch the grassroots of social reality. In other words, the type of classical theology cannot fully meet its social context today.

¹ Abdurraman Kasdi, “Agama dan Transformasi Sosial: Eksistensi Islam dan Peran Ulama dalam Perubahan Sosial,” *Al-Tabrir* 9, no. 2 (2009): 1–2.

² Musa Asy’arie, *Dialektika Agama untuk Pembebasan Spiritual* (Yogyakarta: Lesfi, 2002), 13–14; Fawaizul Umam, “Membela Manusia, Bukan Tuhan: Ikhtiar Transformasi Sosial melalui Pintu Teologi,” *Jurnal Al-Afkar* 9 (2004): 49.

³ Amin Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam di Era Posmodernisme* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 47.

Therefore, a new reading is needed so that a sociological revolution can occur through the door of theology as a prophetic movement.

In the new theological reading, sociological aspects are involved to build alternative social theories based on Islamic *weltanschauung*. Contemporary Muslim scholars engaged in this effort seek to formulate alternatives to the strong positivistic tendencies and dominance among scientists and social thinkers. Muslim scholars strive for what is called “prophetic social science,” “transformative social science,” “alternative paradigm,” and the like which not only elucidate, but also strive for changing social phenomena and directing them to achieve communal ideal values as proposed by Kuntowijoyo, that is, prophetic sociology or that which is known as “prophetic social science” which is transformative in nature with primary attention to the need for social theory that can bridge Islamic ideals with social reality.⁴

Ideas such as transformative theology, social theology, prophetic theology, and Kuntowijoyo’s prophetic social science have great significance in building a scientific framework that is not only reflective, but also transformative in answering social, political, and cultural issues. Transformative and social theology highlight the importance of down-to-earth religious experience, while prophetic theology brings a prophetic dimension as a driving force for social change. In this context, Kuntowijoyo’s notion of prophetic social science is worth noting as an effort to build social science based on prophetic missions, which include humanization (human empowerment), liberation (liberation from oppression), and transcendence (strengthening the spiritual dimension).

Previous pieces of research on transformative theology, social theology, and prophetic theology carried out by Suhermanto Ja’far entitled “Teologi Profetik dan Ideologi Revolusioner”⁵ and Alwi Bani Rakhman entitled “Teologi Sosial: Keniscayaan Keberagamaan yang Islami Berbasis Kemanusiaan,”⁶ have extensively discussed the philosophical and normative dimensions of these concepts, especially in relation to the role of religion as a driver of social change. Nevertheless, such pieces of research do not touch on the principles of contemporary theology.

In addition, several studies on Kuntowijoyo’s prophetic social science, inter alia by Husnul Muttaqin entitled “Menuju Sosiologi Profetik”⁷ and Syamsul Arifin entitled “Dimensi Profetisme Pengembangan Ilmu Sosial dalam

⁴ M. Syafi’i Anwar, *Pemikiran dan Aksi Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), 163; Moh. Shofan, *Jalan Ketiga Pemikiran Islam: Mencari Solusi Perdebatan Tradisionalisme dan Liberalisme* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2006), 321–22.

⁵ Suhermanto Ja’far, “Teologi Profetik dan Ideologi Revolusioner,” *Paramedia: Journal of Islamic Thought and Bibliography* 8, no. 2 (2007).

⁶ Alwi Bani Rakhman, “Teologi Sosial: Keniscayaan Keberagamaan yang Islami Berbasis Kemanusiaan,” *Esensia* 14, no. 2 (2013).

⁷ Husnul Muttaqin, “Menuju Sosiologi Profetik,” *Sosiologi Reflektif* 10, no. 1 (2015).

Islam Perspektif Kuntowijoyo,”⁸ have focused more on the analysis of the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence within an ethical framework. Nonetheless, all of these studies tend to pay less attention to the integration of prophetic values with the development of a social science paradigm that is applicable and relevant to the challenges of contemporary society. This article fills such a research gap by offering an in-depth analysis of how Kuntowijoyo’s notion of prophetic social science can become an epistemological and methodological foundation in building transformative and contextual social science, while also providing practical solutions to various social problems.

With such an approach, Kuntowijoyo offers a new paradigm capable of synergizing religious values and social science rationality to realize more just and meaningful social change. This article, which examines Kuntowijoyo’s prophetic social science, has significance as a scientific effort to bridge the study of religion and social science within a transformative and applicable framework. The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to reread prophetic social science not merely as a normative discourse, but as an integrative epistemological model that eliminates the dichotomy between revelation and reason, between values and facts, and between science and social practice.

Thus, the model offered is non-dichotomous and practical, namely making prophetic values (humanization, liberation, and transcendence) not only as an ethical foundation but also as an operational framework for social analysis and transformation.⁹ Furthermore, this article makes an important contribution to strengthening academic discourse on a social science paradigm based on prophetic values relevant to contemporary challenges and opens up opportunities for the development of prophetic social science as a practical science directed at structural change and social justice.

B. Research Method

The research method used in this article is a qualitative method with a library research approach, which is based on the analysis of primary texts, i.e. two Kuntowijoyo’s books entitled *Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, Etika* and *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi* which discuss prophetic social science. Besides, this research collected data from relevant secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, and other academic writings so as to identify, understand, and interpret key concepts related to transformative theology,

⁸ Syamsul Arifin, “Dimensi Profetisme Pengembangan Ilmu Sosial dalam Islam Perspektif Kuntowijoyo,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 4, no. 2 (September 17, 2015): 477, doi:10.15642/teosofi.2014.4.2.477-507.

⁹ Kuntowijoyo, “Menuju Ilmu Sosial Profetik (1),” *Republika*, February 6, 2023, <https://republika.id/posts/37188/menuju-ilmu-sosial-profetik-1>.

social theology, and prophetic theology. The analytical approach used is content analysis, with a focus on exploring the main ideas and their practical relevance in the socio-cultural context. In addition, this study also emphasizes a hermeneutic approach to exploring the deep meaning of prophetic concepts in relation to the development of a transformative social science paradigm.

C. Discussion

Theology as the Basis of Social Revolution

The problems discussed in classical Islamic theology only revolve around transcendental matters such as God's essence (*dhāt*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*), the status of the Quran, and eschatological issues. Contemporary theological thinkers have expanded such discussions to touch on aspects of humanity and real problems of life in general.¹⁰ This kind of theology is generally called prophetic theology, illustrating that the emergence of the term is inspired by the reading of prophetic movements that were always present in the midst of the people since prophets were revolutionary reformers. Put differently, the use of the term "theology" is based on the revolutionary efforts of the prophets on the call of faith in God to invite society to be moral and enlightened. So, the term "theology" becomes an ontological, epistemological, and axiological emphasis on prophetic movements carried out by the prophets or their successors.¹¹

The ontological basis is intended that the prophetic movement based on faith is the essence of the struggle of the prophets. While the epistemological basis is that the prophetic movement is a call of faith that is sourced from the command of God which is not limited to the prophets alone, but must also be continued until now, the axiological emphasis is based on the mission of the prophetic movement, namely to raise the dignity of humanity as the prophets did.¹² According to the Quran, there were many revolutionary prophets who fought for different societies throughout the ages. The common and main characteristic of these revolutionary prophets was that they revolutionized and fought against oppressive people, and they guided and mobilized to establish a just and egalitarian social order by replacing the corrupt and discriminatory social order.¹³

Contemporary theological terminology such as prophetic theology is in line with various other terms, such as "Islamic left" by Hassan Hanafi. For

¹⁰ M. Afrizal, "Pemahaman Keesaan Allah dalam Teologi Islam," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 20, no. 2 (2013): 114–27; Rakhman, "Teologi Sosial: Keniscayaan Keberagaman yang Islami Berbasis Kemanusiaan," 162–63.

¹¹ Ja'far, "Teologi Profetik dan Ideologi Revolusioner," 161–62.

¹² *Ibid.*, 162.

¹³ Ziaul Haque, *Wahyu dan Revolusi*, trans. E. Setiyawati Al-Khattab (Yogyakarta, 2000), 3–4.

Hassan Hanafi, the task of the Islamic left is to uncover the revolutionary elements in religion and explain the main points of the link between religion and revolution, or in other words, interpreting religion as revolution. In this respect, religion becomes the foundation, and revolution is the demand of the times. The Islamic left relies on three foundations for the Islamic revival. *First*, revitalizing the classical Islamic intellectual treasury by emphasizing the need for rationalism as a necessity, so that Muslims can solve contemporary problems. *Second*, the need to challenge the West. He warns of the dangers of Western cultural imperialism that hegemonizes the cultural consciousness of individual Muslims. He proposes Occidentalism as an answer to Orientalism in order to end the myth of Western superiority. *Third*, analysis of the reality of the Islamic world. In this regard, Hassan Hanafi criticizes the traditional method of reading reality through texts.¹⁴

The concept and mission of the Islamic left itself are also in line with the “liberation theology” by Asghar Ali Engineer. For Asghar Ali, liberation theology begins by looking at life in the world and in the afterlife—not just in the afterlife.¹⁵ Then, this theological model does not side with the status quo that protects the rich and is indifferent to the poor. Therefore, liberation theology has a crucial role in defending and fighting for oppressed groups by providing them with vigorous ideological weapons to fight against the individuals that oppress them.¹⁶

Moeslim Abdurrahman terms such struggles with “transformative theology.” For Moeslim Abdurrahman, transformative theology is a contextual one that is understood as an effort to have a dialectical dialogue with social, economic, cultural, and political problems and dynamics.¹⁷ This is also a theological discourse that leads to praxis, that is, believers carry out actions that are not merely afterlife and personal, but also with collective faith change the unequal life in the world into a just, peaceful, and egalitarian order. All of the terms mentioned actually show a paradigm shift from classical theology that discusses the metaphysics of divinity to revolutionary theology in order to liberate people by means of dialogue on social, economic, political, and cultural orders. The elan vital of classical theology is taken over and also adapted to the spirit of left-wing ideologies.¹⁸

¹⁴ Hassan Hanafi, “Apa Arti Kiri Islam,” in *Kiri Islam antara Modernisme dan Posmodernisme: Telaah Kritis Pemikiran Hassan Hanafi*, ed. Kazuo Shimogaki, trans. Aziz. M. Imam and M. Jadul Maula (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), 118; cf. Suhermanto Ja’far, “Kiri Islam dan Ideologi Kaum Tertindas: Pembebasan Keterasingan Teologi menurut Hassan Hanafi,” *Jurnal Al-Afkar* 5 (2002): 180–81.

¹⁵ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam dan Teologi Pembebasan*, trans. Agung Prihantoro (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1999), 1–2.

¹⁶ Iqra Anugrah, “Islam dan Pembebasan menurut Asghar Ali Engineer,” *Harian IndoPROGRESS* (<https://indoprogress.com/2013/07/islam-dan-pembebasan-menurut-asghar-ali-engineer/>, July 24, 2013).

¹⁷ Moeslim Abdurrahman, *Islam yang Memihak* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005), 57–68.

¹⁸ Ja’far, “Teologi Profetik dan Ideologi Revolusioner,” 153.

Historically, the distinction between the left and the right in politics began with the heated debate between the Montagnard and Jacobin radicals who supported the Republic and the supporters of the Monarchy. In the debate that took place in the National Assembly in 1789-1794, the radicals sat on the left side of the president's chair, while the supporters of the monarchy sat on the right side. There are five differences between the two. *First*, the left ideology takes a progressive path, while the right ideology takes a conservative one. *Second*, the left ideology proposes an egalitarian path, while the right ideology takes a non-egalitarian one. *Third*, the left ideology emphasizes the importance of autonomy, while the right ideology emphasizes heteronomy. *Fourth*, in relation to class interests, the left ideology is laden with the interests of the lower class, while the right ideology is laden with the interests of the upper class. *Fifth*, in relation to epistemology, the left ideology carries rationality, while the right ideology still adheres to old, irrational teachings.¹⁹

In fact, the revolutionary movement that is entrenched in the body of religion (theology) annuls Marx's thesis that considers religion to be a secondary factor that alienates humans.²⁰ In Marx's analysis, there is base and superstructure. Religion is included in the latter, because religion becomes a servant maid of the economy (base), so that religion—at least the time Marx lived when the church authorities colluded with politicians and bourgeois—helped maintain the exploitative system. Religion is not only an economic expression, but also typically provides moral support for social inequality.

There are two functions that religion has in this context. *First*, for the religious elite, it becomes a transcendental justification tool for the continuation of the status quo. As a result, the exploitative capitalist economic system at that time, for Marx, did not receive any protest. *Second*, the eschatological vision of religion which says that from the difficulties and suffering—faced by the proletariat at that time—contains positive spiritual values if borne with patience, surrender, and gratefulness, so that they can be rewarded in the afterlife.²¹ At that time, Marx saw religion as being reactionary and defending the status quo, thus establishing the exploitation of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat (*al-mustad'afin*).

It is the “liberation theology” that emerged in Latin America around the 1960s to have been the antithesis of Marx's view. In fact, religion can also be a driving force for people to take a revolutionary stance against all oppression.

¹⁹ Azhar Irfansyah and Nella A. Puspitasari, “Tentang Pasang Surutnya Badai Itu: Riwayat Pers Kiri di Indonesia (Bagian I),” *Harian IndoPROGRESS* (<https://indoprogress.com/2014/05/tentang-pasang-surutnya-badai-itu-riwayat-pers-kiri-di-indonesia-bagian-i/>), May 16, 2014).

²⁰ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Pemikiran Karl Marx: Dari Sosialisme Utopis ke Perselisihan Revisionisme* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1999), 66–74.

²¹ Sukron Kamil, “Pemikiran Karl Marx Agama sebagai Alienasi Masyarakat Industri: Suatu Apresiasi dan Kritik,” *Jurnal Universitas Paramadina* 1, no. 2 (2002): 123–24.

This movement involved significant sectors of the church (priests, practitioners of religious orders, and bishops), lay religious movements, popular pastoral involvements, and grassroots groups in church society.²² Liberation theology is a theological thought that emerged in Latin America and other Third World countries. The peak of the liberation movement that emerged then spread to Asia and other countries, so that this theology is also known as Third World Theology.²³ It is a radical new approach to the task of theology with the starting point of the experiences of the poor and their struggle for freedom.²⁴

For liberation theologians, the term liberation is a rich and complex one. Almost all liberation theologians, such as Gutierrez, Munos, and Galilea, give it a complete and integral meaning. They argue that freedom is a process towards freedom from all forms of oppressive systems, which is liberation that leads to the realization of the individual to determine himself or herself in his or her political, economic, and cultural life goals. Liberation is an effort to free oneself from the shackles of economic, social, and political oppression or cultural alienation, as well as poverty and injustice. This is the essence of liberation theology.²⁵

As a concept, liberation theology first emerged among Christians by Gustavo Gutierrez. He defines it as “critical reflection on the level of Christian praxis in the light of the Word.” Segundo Galilea maintains that liberation theology is “a reflection on the concrete experience of faith faced by Christians as individuals and as a community.” In essence, both views do not stop at themselves, but rather move to give birth to transformation and liberate humans. In this context, liberation is perceived as a form of worship to God as a whole while also listening to the cries of His people.²⁶

Such a theology, which prioritizes the poor and the oppressed as the *locus theologicus* of Latin American liberation theology, is not only characteristic of the Christian tradition, but can also be found in other religious traditions, including Islam, which cares much about the oppressed (*al-mustad‘afin*). The Quran sura al-Nisā’ [4]: 75 firmly commands Muslims to fight to free their brothers and sisters who are still oppressed and unable to do anything but reach out for help.

And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed—men, women, and children—who cry out, “Our Lord!

²² Michael Lowy, *Teologi Pembebasan* (Yogyakarta: Insist Press & Pustaka Pelajar, 2000), 26–32; Tony Firman, “Antara Iman dan Pembebasan,” *Harian IndoPROGRESS* (<https://indoprogress.com/2014/08/antara-iman-dan-pembebasan/>, August 11, 2014).

²³ M. Husein A. Wahab, “Pemikiran Pembebasan dalam Teologi (Suatu Analisis Historis dan Geografis),” *Jurnal Substantia* 15, no. 2 (2013).

²⁴ Natalia, “Evaluasi Kritis terhadap Doktrin Gereja dari Teologi Pembebasan,” *Veritas* 1, no. 2 (2000): 184–85.

²⁵ Suhermanto Ja’far, “Teologi Pembebasan dan Gerakan Profetik,” *Majalah Forma* (Surabaya, 2016), 4.

²⁶ Fauzan Saleh, “Membangun Kesalahan Individu dan Sosial untuk Kesejahteraan yang Humanis,” in *Agama sebagai Kritik Sosial di tengah Arus Kapitalisme Global* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2006), 54.

Bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a protector, and appoint for us from Thee a helper” (Q.S. al-Nisā’ [4]: 75).²⁷

According to the context, what is meant by “*al-mustadh’afīn*” in this verse are the believers who were under the oppression of the Quraish infidels. They were unable to migrate to Medina, such as al-Walīd bin al-Walīd, Salamah bin Hishām, and Iyyāsh bin Abī Rabī’ah. The general message conveyed by this verse is—as stated above—the command to fight to free those who are oppressed and unable to do anything to free themselves other than hope for help.²⁸ Prophetic theology is very relevant to the sacred mission of social liberation. The idea of prophetic theology is inspired by the sacred mission of prophecy mentioned in the Quran sura al-A‘rāf [7]: 157 as follows:

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them, who enjoins upon them what is right, and forbids them what is wrong, and makes good things lawful for them, and forbids them bad things, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles that were upon them. Thus, those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him; it is they who shall prosper (Q.S. al-A‘rāf [7]: 157).²⁹

Based on the verse above, prophetic theology as a movement of the prophets is a call of faith in liberating society and social problems,³⁰ such as eradicating poverty which is a consequence of social class inequality. As a consequence, the most important prophetic mission is that of liberation, namely freeing humanity from all forms of shackles and oppression. According to Asghar Ali, the Quranic formulations are indeed more theological, not sociological, but it can be seen that its formulations contain very large social implications.³¹

One of the social implications is that the Prophet Muhammad, based on divine revelation, proposed an alternative social order that was just and non-exploitative, opposing the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few people. Just as the Quran condemns those who hoard gold and silver, the solution to this problem is to distribute excess wealth to weak groups in society, which is termed *infāq fī sabīlillāh*. Empowerment of women was also considered at the time. Tribal discrimination was also eliminated by emphasizing that what God takes into account is piety, not skin color. The Prophet also emphasizes the

²⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Harper One, 2017), 432.

²⁸ Abad Badruzaman, *Teologi Kaum Tertindas: Kajian Tematik Ayat-Ayat Mustadh’afīn dengan Pendekatan Keindonesiaan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 88–89.

²⁹ Nasr, *The Study Quran: New Translation and Commentary*, 834.

³⁰ Ja’far, “Teologi Profetik Dan Ideologi Revolusioner,” 162–63.

³¹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam Pembebasan* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1993), 8; Masdar Hilmy, *Islam Profetik: Substansiasi Nilai-Nilai Agama dalam Ruang Publik* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2008), 248–50.

obligation to seek knowledge, even though the ignorant society before the Prophet did not know how to read and write, and the majority considered illiteracy a source of pride.³²

According to Ziaul Haque, revelation is a simple pre-scientific knowledge used to represent a practical method to raise the dignity of the oppressed and weak from slavery. This concept is a religious expression of reality. The prophets as recipients of revelation were human beings who lived among ordinary people and the poor. The social mission of the prophets has three goals. First, it is to reveal the truth. Second, it is to fight against falsehood and oppression. Third, it is to build a community or brotherhood based on social equality, goodness, justice, and compassion. In the context of Islam, the Quran as a divine revelation to the Prophet Muhammad becomes a revolutionary social mission. The revolution in question is primarily aimed at fighting the power of class discrimination, oppression, and superstition. The revolutionary prophets were rebels who never compromised with injustice and falsehood. They fought against the ruling groups and classes that rule in a corrupt social order.³³

The most important sacred mission of the prophets is its revolutionary nature to free society from all forms of oppression and discrimination carried out by tyrants. This can be seen from the Prophet Ibrāhīm who carried out a revolutionary struggle in freeing society from the paganism of Namrūd, the Prophet Moses who carried out a revolutionary struggle in freeing the Children of Israel from the hegemony of the dictatorial tyrant Pharaoh, the Prophet 'Isā who carried out a spiritual revolution movement against the hegemony of Roman society, and the Prophet Muhammad who carried out a moral revolution against the ignorance of the Quraish society.³⁴

Prophetic Sociology of Kuntowijoyo as Social Science

Social science has been developed with one assumption that strongly influences the development of social science,³⁵ that is, science and religion are two distinctive purviews. Science is in one area, while religion is in another. This assumption is still fanatically held by social scientists, especially those who are positivists.³⁶ One of the fiercest resistances to the positivist paradigm comes from the thinkers of critical theory. Critical theory is *ideologiekritik* (ideological critique), which is a reflective effort to free human knowledge when such knowledge is trapped and frozen on one side only, either the transcendental

³² Engineer, *Islam dan Teologi Pembebasan*, 49–56.

³³ Haque, *Wahyu Dan Revolusi*, 23–24.

³⁴ Ja'far, "Teologi Profetik dan Ideologi Revolutioner," 163.

³⁵ Sindung Haryanto, *Sosiologi Agama: Dari Klasik hingga Postmodern* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2015),

13.

³⁶ F. Budi Hardiman, *Filsafat Modern: Dari Machiavelli sampai Nietzsche* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2007), 203–13.

side or the empirical side. Critical theory as an ideological critique carries the task of exposing the ideological cover of positivism. At the level of theory of knowledge, critical theory attempts to overcome positivism and scientism, whereas at the level of social theory, the critique is aimed at various forms of ideological oppression that perpetuate the repressive social configuration of society. As a result, critical theory carries an emancipatory mission to direct people towards a more rational society through self-reflection.³⁷

With the same spirit, Kuntowijoyo then launched the idea of “prophetic social science” (*ilmu sosial profetik*). Prophetic social science not only rejects the claim of being value-free as in positivism but goes further to require social science to have foundational values as its goal. It does not solely explain and understand reality as it is, but more than that, namely, transforming it towards the ideals desired by society. That which is very interesting, controversial, and promising about this idea is that prophetic social science seeks to integrate the critical features of social science and Islamic values to become one frame with a complete and integral social science paradigm.³⁸

According to Kuntowijoyo, the reason for developing the idea of social theory based on the Quran is that it is necessary to understand the Quran as a paradigm. In this sense, the Quran as a paradigm means a construction of knowledge that allows scientists to understand reality as the Quran understands it. The construction of knowledge is built with the Quran with the aim that one has wisdom on the basis of which behavior can be formed in line with the normative values of the Quran both at the moral domain and at the social one. Furthermore, the construction of knowledge also allows a scientist to formulate a grand design regarding the Islamic system, including system of knowledge. Thus, besides providing an axiological description, the Quran can also be operative in providing epistemological insight.³⁹

Kuntowijoyo, the initiator of prophetic social science, seems to avoid or disagree with the term “theology” as used by Moeslim Abdurrahman. He rather proposes to develop a framework of social theory in order to carry out the transformation process with the Islamic paradigm.⁴⁰ According to Kuntowijoyo, Islam must also be viewed as an open paradigm or system. In addition, when he talks about the transformative ideals of Islam, what he means is transforming the normative values of Islam and making them a scientific theory before being actualized into social behavior or action.⁴¹

In Kuntowijoyo’s view, the Quran as the most authoritative source of Islam needs to be positioned as a starting point for developing the lives of

³⁷ F. Budi Hardiman, *Kritik Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2009), 27–35.

³⁸ Muttaqin, “Menuju Sosiologi Profetik,” 221.

³⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, Etika* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2006), 11.

⁴⁰ Shofan, *Jalan Ketiga Pemikiran Islam: Mencari Solusi Perdebatan Tradisionalisme dan Liberalisme*, 316–17.

⁴¹ Anwar, *Pemikiran dan Aksi Islam Indonesia*, 171–72.

Muslims, including in the field of science. The Quran is actually very rich in various concepts and narratives that contain historical value and has implications for creating changes in accord with the vision of the Quran itself. Kuntowijoyo divides the concepts in the Quran into two. *First*, abstract concepts such as God, angels, the afterlife, and the like that are metaphysical in nature. *Second*, concrete concepts such as *fuqarā'* (the poor), *du'afā'* (the weak), *mustad'afūn* (the oppressed class), *zālimūn* (tyrants), *aghniyā'* (the rich), *mustakbirūn* (the rulers), *mufsidūn* (the corruptors of power), and so on.⁴²

Meanwhile, narratives that contain historical value and have implications for social change can be seen through stories that are proverbs in the Quran itself to recognize prototypes of universal social portraits. Examples include the story of the patience of the Prophet Ayyūb, which is the most ancient perfect type of how persistent the patience of believers is in facing trials; the story of the injustice of Pharaoh which describes the prototype of tyrannical evil in the earliest times ever known to humans; and the Thamud people who killed the camel belonging to the Prophet ṣāliḥ which describes the prototype of mass betrayal by infidel conspiracies.⁴³

Prophetic social science has three pillars. These three pillars are a derivation of the ethical and prophetic ideals contained in the Quranic verse, “You are the best community brought forth unto mankind, enjoining right, forbidding wrong, and believing in God” (Q.S. Ali Imran [3]: 110). *Firstly*, humanization. In religious language, the concept of humanization is a creative translation of *al-amar bi al-ma'rūf*, the original meaning of which is to encourage upholding virtue. The humanism proposed by Kuntowijoyo is a theocentric one as a replacement for anthropocentric humanism, which in the West has become dehumanization as a result of desanctification. With the concept of theocentric humanism, humans must focus on God, but the goal is to manifest goodness to humans themselves. This principle of theocentric humanism will then be transformed into a value that is fully lived and implemented in society and culture.⁴⁴

Secondly, liberation, which is to liberate or set free. Liberation in Kuntowijoyo's view is *al-naby 'an al-munkar*. In religious language, *al-naby 'an al-munkar* means preventing all destructive crimes, loan sharks, corruption, and so on. In the parlance of prophetic social science, it means liberation from lack of knowledge, impoverishment, and oppression. These liberative values are understood and placed in the context of social sciences which have prophetic responsibilities. The aim of liberation is in empirical reality and is concrete, not

⁴² Arifin, “Dimensi Profetisme Pengembangan Ilmu Sosial dalam Islam Perspektif Kuntowijoyo,” 488.

⁴³ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, Etika*, 13–14.

⁴⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 167–68; Muttaqin, “Menuju Sosiologi Profetik,” 225–26.

in the abstract field of morality, with the result that liberation is very susceptible to the matter of oppression or structural dominance. Kuntowijoyo even maintains that the chief goal of liberation is the knowledge system, economic system, social system, and political system that fetters humans in such a way that they are not able to realize themselves as honourable and free beings.⁴⁵

Thirdly, transcendence, which is the foundation of the other two pillars. Transcendence is a concept derivative of *tu'minūna bi Allāh* (belief in God). Transcendence seeks to render transcendental values crucial in the undertaking of constructing civilization. Transcendence in concert with Islamic values is very pivotal in prophetic social science as a form of human contact with the greatness of God. It is the foundation of liberation and humanization, which provides bearing for the steps and goals of liberation and humanization. Additionally, transcendence in prophetic social science functions as a cornerstone for values for the practice of humanization and liberation and a critique of secular sciences.⁴⁶

The goal of humanization is to view a human as a human.⁴⁷ Now people are entering dehumanization because industrial society makes the people part of an abstract society without human values. The goal of liberation is freedom from the inhumanity of structural impoverishment, technological hubris, and exploitation. Muslims must together free themselves from the shackles they have built themselves. The goal of transcendence is to add a transcendental dimension to culture. Many Muslims have surrendered to the draughts of decadent culture, materialism, and hedonism. Now Muslims should cleanse themselves by reminding themselves of the transcendental dimension that is a pivotal part of human nature.⁴⁸

For Kuntowijoyo, the term social science is more relevant to seeing the reality of stagnant science. In addition, Kuntowijoyo's proposal is indeed no different from the idea of transformative theology by Moeslim Abdurrahman, but Kuntowijoyo does not agree with the term. There are two reasons why Kuntowijoyo does not agree with the term. *First*, Kuntowijoyo believes that changing the term "theology" to "social science" emphasizes the nature and intent of the idea of theological renewal to be interpreted in a new way in order to understand reality, and an effective method for this purpose is to elaborate Islamic teachings into social theory. Hence, its scope is not in the normative aspect which is fixed as in theology, but in the empirical, historical, and temporal aspects.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Muttaqin, "Menuju Sosiologi Profetik," 267–68.

⁴⁶ Arifin, "Dimensi Profetisme Pengembangan Ilmu Sosial dalam Islam Perspektif Kuntowijoyo," 294.

⁴⁷ Kuntowijoyo, "Menuju Ilmu Sosial Profetik (1)."

⁴⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, Etika*, 88.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

Second, the term “transformative theology” implies a precedent in liberation theology in Latin America, which situationally presupposes the structural oppression in it, being not in line with a society in which there is no structural oppression. Therefore, for Kuntowijoyo, it is more effective to call it “social theory” rather than “social theology,” since it is indeed situationally different from Latin America at that time but now faces the need for social reform that is more through objective and scientific approaches rather than normative or theological ones. In addition, with social theory, it seems that the field being elaborated is more empirical, temporal, and historical.⁵⁰

D. Conclusion

The spirit of reformulating theology to focus more on the aspect of humanity is a creative effort of Muslim scholars. Several terms such as social theology, prophetic theology, and transformative theology have emerged to reposition the focus of classical theology into a theology that fights for humanity. This kind of theology means that the revelation carried by the prophets is also a revolutionary mission against the social order of their time that is unequal and corrupt. This prophetic spirit also does not stop at the prophets alone, but is continued by the successors of the prophets, namely Muslim scholars.

Thus, Kuntowijoyo’s idea of the need to formulate social theory within an Islamic paradigm represents a strategic step towards integrating revealed values with scientific rationality. This effort not only dismantles the assumed differentiation between religion and science but also affirms that social knowledge must be oriented towards moral transformation and justice. Prophetic social science, as he has formulated it, is a concrete form of theology in motion, a theology that descends into the realm of social practice and guides change in accordance with the transcendental values of the Quran. Therefore, the primary strength of prophetic social science lies not in its description of reality, but in its ability to intervene and transform reality on the basis of prophetic ethics. As a science, it remains open to reformulation and reconstruction, but this openness actually confirms its vitality, that is, divine values can live and operate within social dynamics without losing their critical power and relevance to contemporary situations.

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 85–86.

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