

# **SOME NOTES on EUROPEAN HISTORY**

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*Ringkasan:* sebagai kaji awal tulisan ini mencoba mengungkap pengaruh peradaban dan kebudayaan Eropa di dunia saat ini, sekalipun pengaruh tersebut demikian bervariasi. Pengaruh Eropa yang cenderung menegaskan agama, nampak berakar pada masa Abad Tengah. Masa tersebut dikenal pula sebagai Abad Iman, *The Age of Relief* yang berlaku hampir di seluruh Eropa, kecuali di Spanyol atau Andalusia yang berada dalam kekuasaan Islam. Saat tersebut justru Spanyol tampil sebagai *siglo de oro* atau abad emas. Keadaan ini menjadi salah satu sebab mengapa di negara-negara yang mayoritas penduduknya Muslim, agama Islam masih mempunyai peran yang penting.

## **A. INTRODUCTION:**

At present, there is almost not a single country in the world which is not influenced or penetrated by European Civilization. European's influence varies on one country to another. Some countries are influenced in a very deep sense, while others are just on the surfaces. This is one of the many reasons why students of the history department are required to take courses on European history.

One of the courses is known as "Sejarah Eropa Abad Tengah", or History of Europe during the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages cover a period of almost ten centuries, approximately between 500 up to 1500 A.D. The Middle Ages are full of interesting things which are worth presenting. However, some of these are contradictory one to another. These may confuse any body who is unfamiliar with this topic.

This period, i.e. the Middle Ages, is known also as the ages of belief. See for example Anne Fremantle, *The Age of Belief*. As a whole, ways of life of the European people were under the domination of the Church. The Church decided every thing concerning human's every day life. It intervened not only the religious domains, but also the secular domains. Furthermore, the Church did not only choose its own religious officials, but also indirectly chose the government's officials as well. Even the king ruled his people under the name of the Church. In short, the Church had become more concerned with maintaining papal grandeur instead of furthering spiritual religion.

Moreover, this period was full of stagnation. As there was almost no development dealing with knowledges or sciences. The religious spheres which intervened any part of life did not stimulate development in learning, except in the matter of religion.



Inventions stopped, unless they were advantageous for the Church. Any invention, though it was right in relation to the sciences and even benefited human life, if it was considered against the Church was extremely "dangerous". It had to be suppressed and the Church did its best to exterminate it at all. One who dared enough to present his invention which was not parallel to the belief of the Church, was going to risk his life, even his families as well. Thus, the Middle Ages are also known as the dark ages.

This unfavorable situation was growing from bad to worse as it led to what was known as the Babylonian captivity. At the worst there were two popes at once. This schism had to be terminated soon. Many councils had tried to solve this problem but always in vain. In 1409 one of them, which was known as the Council at Pisa, declared the resignation of the two popes and elected the new one. However, instead of uniting the Church there were three popes because the other two popes refused to resign. This condition lasted for nearly forty years<sup>1</sup>, then the council met at Constance to reform the Church, end the schism, and suppress the heretics. Finally, it did end the schism. Nevertheless, some of the members of the Council also tried to raise the status of the Council above the pope and not the opposite, as they realized all popes were but men, who were liable to error and sin<sup>2</sup>.

Despite these corrections, however, the abuses in the Church were going on. There were monks who loved hunting and kept many horses in their stables while caring little for the old monastic rule. At the worst, some of them even kept concubines. Moreover, some friars knew the taverns very well in every town as they sang and played the fiddle. Finally, it is worth mentioning an Italian proverb which spread overseas, i.e.: "The nearer Rome the worst the Christians."<sup>3</sup>

These misdeeds directed some clergy to become reformers, such as St. Benedict who established the Benedictine abbeys. Its members tried to live according to the Christian principles. However, after years Benedictine abbeys grew rich. Unfortunately, this situations led most Benedictine monks either to become idle or extravagant. This condition turned to the foundations of the new orders and the enactment of more stringent rules. But after becoming famous, the new orders became rich and they misbehaved as their predecessors.

At the end, the emerging of what is also known as the greatest reformer, i.e.: Martin Luther, to some extent did not find a complete way out from this diabolic circle. At the first stage, Luther tried to purify the Christian religion by introducing reforms at the head and the member of the Church. Later, he recognized the Bible as the sole authority in religious matters. On one hand he did fragment the Catholic church;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, however, he also did stimulate what is called the Contra Reformation. However, the birth of these divisions of Christians has created either a tremendous problem or a great obstacle to the spread of the Gospel, as it has expressed by Joseph Lortz:

1. Rev. Hugh P. Smyth, *The Reformation*, Chicago: Extension Press, 1919, pp. 12-3.
2. Denys Hay, "The Background of the Reformation", Joel Hurstfield (Ed.), *The Reformation Crisis*, New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p.13.
3. T.M. Lindsay, "Luther", *The Cambridge Modern History*, London: The Cambridge Un. Press, 1934, Vol. II, p. 118.
4. P. Hughes, *A Popular History of the Reformation*, London: Hollis and Carter, 1957, p. 12.



Wherever the Christian message is preached today, be it is in our great cities or across the seas, it finds itself almost immediately confronted by these questions: "Which Christianity? Catholic or Evangelical?" And within Evangelical Christianity: "Which church? Which sect?" .... (thus) the rupture of the reformation has produced the Christian message to the state of relativity.<sup>5</sup>

## B. SPANISH MOORS:

The "dynamic" features discussed above are common in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, with one exception: namely Spain. What occurred there were completely different. Furthermore, neither the Christians nor the pagans played the most important roles at these golden ages which lasted for centuries. The new comers who proved their abilities were welcome and preferable in comparison with the old rulers. According to Lewis: "The new regime was liberal and tolerant and even the Spanish chroniclers described it as preferable to the Frankish rule in the north."<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the Spain became a kind of melting pot where people from different cultural backgrounds, ancestors, even beliefs mixed together. To some extent, it is stressed by Arango:

Intermarriage among Christians and Muslims was not uncommon, and it would be difficult to find many Spaniards today (with possible exception of the Galicians and the Basques) who do not have Moorish ancestors.<sup>7</sup>

Instead of backwardness, during the Middle Ages the Spain represented a tremendous development in every features of human life. In his concise sentence, a famous western historian, Stanley-Lane Poole has written: "For nearly eight centuries, under her Mohammedan rulers Spain set to all Europe a shining example of a civilized and enlightened state."<sup>8</sup>

This golden ages or *siglo de oro* was going on though there was no more unity within the Spain. The Spain's disintegration became a reality as continues warfares never ended. However, the development of learnings was not affected and it continued to grow as shown below:

Yet despite political weakness and disunity of the country, the interlude of the "party kings" was a period of great cultural efflorescence. The many petty court were centers of scholarship, philosophy, science, and literature ....<sup>9</sup>

As warfares among Moors never ended, finally they were ousted from the Spain. Unfortunately, the Spain achieved its low tide as shown in this quotation:

This land, deprived of the skillful irrigation of the Moors, grew impoverished and neglected; the richest and the most fertile valleys languished and were deserted; most of the populous cities which had filled every district of Andalus fell into

5. Joseph Lortz, *How the Reformation Came?* New York: Herder and Herder, 1964, p. 19.

6. Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, London: Hutchinson and Co., 1984, p. 121.

7. E. Ramon Arango, *Spain from Repression to Renewal*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985, p. 9.

8. Stanley-Lane Poole, *The Moors in Spain*, Beirut: Khayats, 1967, p vii.

9. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 125.



ruinous decay; and beggars, friars, and bandits took the place of scholars, merchants, knights.<sup>10</sup>

The echo of this unhealthy situation can be seen in many books on European history. Further, it is extremely very difficult if one wants to find proportional information dealing with the history of the Moors in Spain. Until the coming of an excellent orientalist, i.e. R. Dozy, who did his best on his research on Spain during the Middle Ages. By his toil and perseverance, finally Dozy presented his master piece Spanish Islam. His study was done at the end of the last century. It is worth mentioning here, though Spain is a part of Europe one usually finds many difficulties if he wants to read Moors in Spain on European History. He usually finds it in the Middle East or Arab History.

### C. FINAL NOTES:

In short, when the Church played the dominant role in Europe during the Middle Ages, the situation was unfavorable. As a whole, probably with the exception of religious domain, life stagnated especially in sciences. To some extent, every facet of life is full of misdeed or abuses. Well known scholars call this period either as the age of belief, or the dark ages. Consequently, due to these historical experiences, the Westerners tended to disregard religion when they entered the new and modern period.

On the contrary, when Islam played the most and important role in Spain at the same period, this part of Europe had provided the best example of a civilized and enlightened state to the rest of Europe. Every aspect of life in Spain was developing, such as trade, culture, and sciences. Her trades were blooming, even with the overseas<sup>11</sup>. While culture was flourishing, sciences were flowering in amazing speed<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, religious life was full of tolerance. In short, experts call this period as golden ages or *siglo de oro*. However, the constant internal warfares during the period of petty states weaken them, and finally the Muslims were ousted from the Spain.

In present time, as a whole Westerners have got richer, healthier, and freer to enjoy leisure time in addition to many other conveniences such as in transport and communication. However, they have also become more materialistic and put more faith in sciences at the cost of religion. Religion plays in very limited role, usually during their ceremonies to celebrate birth, married, and burying the death. At the worst, they had caused two world wars which claimed many lives, and almost had destroyed civilization at all with their deadly weapons.

At the present time, Muslims are divided into three categories in order to accentuate their roles in human affairs. The first category hold strongly Islamic

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10. People, op. cit., p. ix. C.f. Arango, op. cit., p.45: In 1609, the Spanish expelled all Moors from the national territory, casting out a people who had lived on the peninsula for nearly 900 years. With the Jews gone since 1492 and the Moors banished, Spain had crippled itself. The Moors and the Jews had been among the most creative people in Spain history, and when they were driven out, their genius went unreplaced.

11. Arango, op. cit., p. 37.

12. P.K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, London: Macmillan & Co., 1970, p. 526.



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The second category follows footsteps of Westerners, they disregard Islamic principles as they are considered as out of date. This is done by the late Kemal Pasha who wants to modernize Turkey in accordance to western line.

The last or the third category still believe in Islamic principles though not only in the literal meaning. They see many changes and the lags of time which influence greatly upon the interpretation of Islamic principles. In addition to this, they try to catch up some western values especially dealing with technology and sciences as far as they are not against the Islamic principles. They want to modernize themselves by presenting Islamic values and try their best to minimize, if not to eliminate, many disadvantages of the present life, such as polluted materials, alienation, loneliness, dehumanization and the likes.

This condition can also be seen among the Muslims in Indonesia who become the majority of the population. For more details please read the book written by D. Noer. *The Modernist Muslim Movements in Indonesia 1900-1942*. The author himself has already translated this book into Indonesia and it has published by LP3ES in 1980.