



Ahkam

Jurnal Ilmu Syariah

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- ❖ M. IKHSAN TANGGOK
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Implications of Hazairin and Munawir Sjadzali Thoughts in Establishment of Islamic Inheritance in Indonesia

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AHKAM has been accredited based on the determination of Director General of Research Reinforcement and Development, Research, and Technology Ministry of Higher Education of Republic of Indonesia, No. 36/a/E/KPT/2016 (valid until 2021).

AHKAM Jurnal Ilmu Syariah (ISSN: 1412-4734) is a periodical scientific journal published by Faculty of Sharia and Law of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta in collaboration with Indonesian Scientist and Sharia Scholar Association (HISSI). This journal specifically examines the science of sharia and obtains to present various results of current and eminence scientific research. The administrators receive articles as contributions Sharia and Islamic law disciplines from scientists, scholars, professionals, and researchers to be published and disseminated.

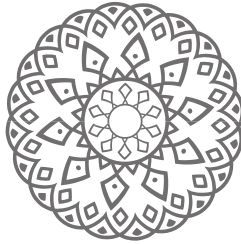
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CIRCUMCISION LAW IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

M. Ikhsan Tanggok

Abstrak: Sunat bagi umat muslim di seluruh dunia merupakan suatu hal yang biasa dan menjadi tradisi yang sudah diwariskan secara turun-temurun. Bahkan jika seorang anak tidak disunat, maka orang tua merasa bersalah karena tidak menjalankan ajaran agama. Sunat yang dilakukan umat Islam adalah mengikuti tradisi nabi Ibrahim dan bukan Nabi Muhammad. Berbeda dengan Kristen, sunat sudah ada perintah dalam Bible, namun ada di antara umat Kristen yang melaksanakannya dan ada juga yang tidak. Umat Kristen berbeda pendapat tentang hukum sunat yang dijelaskan dalam Bible. Di antara para rasul yang disebutkan dalam Bible tentang hukum sunat, mereka juga berbeda pendapat, ada yang mengharuskan dan ada yang tidak. Atas dasar itu ada umat Kristen yang memiliki kesadaran tentang hubungan kesehatan dengan sunat dan ada diantara mereka yang melakukan sunat karena mentaati ajaran Yesus dan ada di antara mereka yang tidak melaksanakan perintah rasul sesuai dengan penafsirannya masing-masing.

Kata kunci: Hukum, sunat, Kristen, Islam, perbandingan

Abstract: For Muslims around the world, circumcision a common tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. If their child is not circumcised, Muslim parents feel guilty for not fulfilling their religious duties. The Muslim practice of circumcision follows the tradition of the Prophet Abraham, not the prophet Muhammad. Unlike the Quran, the performance of circumcision is instructed by the Bible, but there are both some Christians who do it and some who do not. They disagree about the law surrounding circumcision described in the Bible. The messengers mentioned in the Bible also have different views about it, some believing it is mandatory and others not. For this reason, some Christians perform circumcision because of their awareness of its connection to bodily health and others to obey the teachings of Jesus; meanwhile, some do not carry out the messengers' orders because of their different interpretations of them.

Keywords: law, circumcision, Christianity, Islam, comparison

ملخص: يعتبر الختان عند المسلمين في جميع أنحاء العالم من الأمور الشائعة والتقاليد التي تم تمريرها جيلا بعد جيل، حتى أنه إذا لم يختن الطفل، يشعر الآباء بالذنب لعدم تنفيذهم التعاليم الدينية. إن الختان الذي يقوم به المسلمون كان أصله من سنن النبي إبراهيم عليه السلام وليس من النبي محمد عليه الصلاة والسلام. وهذا بخلاف التعاليم المسيحية، بحيث أمر الكتاب المقدس للقيام به رغم أنّ هناك من المسيحيين الذين خضعوا لهذا الأمر ومنهم من رفضوا ذلك. وهذا الاختلاف في هذا الشأن يعود إلى تباين الآراء لدى الرسل المذكورين في الكتاب المقدس عن الختان. فمنهم من أوجبوا ذلك ومنهم غير ذلك. فانطلاقا من هذا الأساس، اعتقد بعض المسيحيين بأن هناك العلاقة بين الصحة الجسمية وبين الختان ففعلوه، ومنهم من يختنون خاضعين لتعاليم يسوع، ومنهم من يرفضون الختان بتاتا محتجين على أن هناك من الرسل في الكتاب المقدس لا يفرضون الختان. وهذا كله يرجع إلى اختلاف تفسيراتهم في الموضوع ذاته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفسير، الختان، المسيحية، الإسلام، المقارنة

Introduction

Circumcision in Islam is recommended and not an obligation. However, some scholars consider circumcision to be obligatory for boys and recommended for Muslim women. Although neither the Quran nor Hadith order circumcision to be done, Muslims have held that it is obligatory, regardless of whether the Muslim is poor or rich. If the child has not been circumcised, he is not considered a perfect Muslim and even to resemble an infidel. If Muslim parents are not able to finance the circumcision of their children, they register them with a social foundation to have it performed in a mass circumcision.

In Islam, the practice of circumcision is not based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad but rather on those of the Prophet Abraham. This is because Allah ordered Muhammad and his followers to observe the teachings of the Prophet Abraham, and one of his teachings is that circumcision must be performed. In several Hadiths it is stated that the Prophet Abraham was circumcised at the age of 80. Today, the practice of circumcision has mixed with local culture so that every region in Indonesia presents its own style of child circumcising. There are both Muslim communities that perform child circumcision on a small scale and those who do so on a large scale.

Not only are Muslims circumcised, but also some Christians. Some practice it to fulfill the Bible's commandment and others for health reasons as they realize that the practice helps protect one from venereal diseases. Although circumcision is mentioned in several verses of the Bible, not all Christians carry out the Bible's commandment for their children to be circumcised. While many verses in both the Old Testament and New Testament discuss the matter, it is not an obligation in Christianity. Thus, many Christians (both Catholics and Protestants) are not circumcised.

This paper explores circumcision in Christianity and Islam by looking at the teachings of these two traditions surrounding it. I consider whether Christians and Muslims are commanded by their respective scriptures to perform it and, if so, whether it is mandatory or only recommended.

Theoretical Study of Circumcision

Circumcision has a long history in ancient Middle Eastern societies. It is thought to have emerged as a first step towards ensuring the public's health by preventing the spread of ever-present diseases caused by sand accumulation. Circumcision is a ritual for religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and it is possible that it appeared in the Middle East. Indeed, it does not exist as a ritual practice in religions that arose outside of the Middle East, such as Hinduism, Shintoism, and Buddhism. Circumcision traditions may also be found in aboriginal communities in Australia (Hutson, 2004). In ancient Egypt, boys were generally circumcised between the ages of 6 and 12. For Ethiopians, Jews, Muslims and some others, circumcision is carried out immediately after birth. Among most other people who practice it, it is done at puberty. For Jews, circumcision is the fulfillment of the covenant between God and the Prophet Abraham (Genesis xvii, 10-14), the first divine command of the Pentateuch that every boy must be circumcised. Christians, however, are not required to be circumcised (Cockcroft, 1965: 799).

Hutson explains that circumcision offers several benefits for the health of babies, boys, and men, but only for a small percentage of the population in the community. All surgeons are aware of circumcision, which for a male involves cutting a portion of the skin from his penis. Although circumcision is a straightforward medical procedure, it can still be dangerous and is risky for circumcised children (Hutson, 2004).

In human history, circumcision has caused a lot of controversy in the community with respect to surgical methods. Likewise, the debate over whether it is important or not raises both its pros and cons. Its potential health benefits must be considered in the circumcision process so as not to pose risks in circumcision practice. The practice of circumcision or *khitan* of babies is very common and it is possible that it will not benefit the baby. However, every circumcision must be carried out by a qualified doctor with the use of local anesthesia and having obtained parental consent. Prohibitions on the circumcision of children by non-medical parties need to be taken seriously. Community organizations aiming to protect children's rights have an important role in offering protection for children (Hutson, 2004).

Circumcision is also a part of initiation ceremonies in communities around the world. Male circumcision is a common practice and occurs

in modern industrial societies, especially among Jewish communities and others. Psychoanalytic theories have been advanced to explain the importance of male initiation ceremonies involving circumcision (Smith, 1990: 37). Smith notes that the practice of circumcision may be found in communities almost throughout the entire world and is accompanied by ceremonies, as well as that it has become a part of the culture of societies in which it has been passed down from generation to generation.

When viewed from an anthropological point of view, circumcision may be classified as a rite of passage whereby it is interpreted as a ceremony dramatizing one's transition from one social status to another (e.g. marriage and circumcision) (Keesing, 1981: 292). In society, people who have been circumcised are already considered adults. Therefore, circumcision and ceremonies for circumcision are interrelated.

Circumcision in Christianity

There are Christians who perform circumcision and others who do not. Jesus was circumcised when he was born. If his followers thus want to observe his traditions, they should also be circumcised. Yet, in Christianity circumcision was not made an obligation and eventually many did not perform it. Circumcision involves cutting the skin of the lower part of the penis of a man or boy. People often perform it together with various ceremonies, determined by their culture. By definition, circumcision refers to “cutting”, specifically the front part of the skin of the penis by surgery or some other means. If we study the writings of the historian Herodotus, we know that not only Jews had the tradition of circumcision, but also Egyptians, Kolkians and Ethiopians; we then know that it is a part of the Muslim tradition.

History of Circumcision in Christianity

For Christian teachings on circumcision we may first turn to the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the former is found the “*Brit Millab*”, or the circumcision agreement between the Prophet Abraham and God. It may also be considered an agreement between God and His people (Wismoyoadi, 1978: 18). Prophet Abraham is known as the “father of the believers” and to be at the root of three religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When the command to circumcise became a symbol of the agreement between

God and His people, the Prophet Abraham was 99 years old. Some sources say that he was 80 years old at that time and that he had a child named Ismail with his servant Hagar (better known, especially among Muslims, as Siti Hajar). Furthermore, circumcision is required for every baby boy of Israel eight days after his birth (Wismoyoadi, 1978: 18). This command was honored by the Prophet Abraham in performing it on his son Isaac. Isaac in this case is a symbol of the people chosen by God to carry out circumcision. Circumcision can also be interpreted as a sign of God's love for His people, and because of the Prophet Abraham (Wismoyoadi, 1978: 19-20) it is practiced throughout the world by many ethnic groups of different religious backgrounds.

Circumcision in the Old Testament

The discourse surrounding circumcision in Christianity is quite interesting because although in both the Old and New Testament God explicitly orders people to perform circumcision, in reality not all Christians do so. Some think that Bible's order for circumcision must be followed while others do not see it as obligatory. The Bible's reference to circumcision is quite explicit and frequent and God orders His messengers to do it. In Christianity, circumcision was first ordered by God to the Prophet Abraham and stood as a symbol of the agreement between God and Abraham and his descendants. Under the agreement, circumcision is to be performed on all boys eight days after their birth. The verses about circumcision in Genesis include: Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come" (Genesis 17:9). In other verses the God said to Abraham: "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised" (Genesis 17:10). The next verses Allah also said: "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you" (Genesis 17: 11). The next verses God back confirmed on circumcision: "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring" (Genesis 17: 12). Other verses God said: "Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in

your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17: 13). In Genesis God also mention sanctions for people do not the circumcision: “Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant”(Genesis 17: 14). If we consider Genesis 17: 9-14, there is no reason for the followers of Jesus in this world to go uncircumcised. Even in Genesis 17:13 God firmly states that all Christ’s people must be circumcised without exception. Furthermore, God also makes clear in this verse that circumcision does not just involve cutting the skin at the head of the penis, but more importantly it represents an agreement made between God and humans wherein circumcision is only the symbol of that agreement. This agreement with God must be honored because it constitutes obedience to God’s rules as stated in the Old Testament. In Genesis 17:14, God threatens to cut off anybody who fails it to honor it from his community. He thus emphasizes that it is an obligatory practice or that it must be for Jews and Jesus’ followers and that there will be consequences for someone who does not practice it.

As indicated in both the Old and New Testament, circumcision not only existed in the time of the Prophet Abraham, but also in that of Moses. In Leviticus 12 the Lord said to Moses to convey the following rules to the people of Israel, as follows: “The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: A women who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period.” (Leviticus12:2). Other verses God said: “On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised” (Leviticus12:3). If we look at the contents of the word of God written in Leviticus 12: 2-3, circumcision is also commanded to the people of Israel. The word of God written in Leviticus 12: 2-3 explains the process of a woman giving birth to a son and arriving at the command to circumcise the child on the eighth day. These verses thus reiterate what God said in Genesis 17:12. Therefore, the Biblical order for circumcision is very clear and must be fulfilled.

God discusses circumcision not only in Genesis and Leviticus, but also in Exodus, especially in the regulations concerning the Easter ceremony. God’s comments about circumcision in Exodus are as follows: “And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof” (Exodus 12:43). Other verses God also said: “But every man’s servant that is bought for money,

when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof” (Exodus 12:44). “A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof” (Exodus 12:45). “In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Exodus 12:46). “All the congregation of Israel shall keep it (Exodus 12:47), “And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof “(Exodus 12:48), and “One law shall be to him that is home born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Exodus 12:49). This is all the teachings of circumcision described by God in Exodus 12: 43-49.

In Exodus 12: 43-49, then, once again God emphasizes the importance of circumcising boys. Their circumcision is required for them to participate in Easter celebrations. If they have not been circumcised, they are strictly forbidden to do so. Moreover, uncircumcised people are also not allowed to join in eating the lamb offered during the Passover celebration. This also means that circumcision is for Christians, wherever they may be, closely tied to Easter rituals. Easter is a Christian holiday that celebrates Jesus’ resurrection. It is also said to be a celebration for the Jews in commemorating the time when God released the Israelites from slavery in Egypt in 1513 B.C. God commanded the Israelites to commemorate this important event every year. As written in the Bible, the celebration should occur for eight days during the first month of the Hebrew calendar. It ends on the 21st day of Nisan in Israel and the 22nd day of Nisan outside Israel and is celebrated to commemorate the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. For one week, people are only allowed to eat unleavened bread. Thus the day is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread (id.m.wikipedia.org accessed 30 September 2018). This tradition continues to be carried out by Christians today.

In the Biblical chapter Joshua, God commands Joshua to circumcise everyone. As explained there: “At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time” (Joshua 5:2). “And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins” (Joshua 5:3).

“And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the

wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt“ (Joshua 5:4). “Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised” (Joshua 5:5). “For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord sware that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey” (Joshua 5:6). “And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way (Joshua 5:7). “And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole” (Joshua 5:8). “And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day” (Joshua 5:9). “And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho” (Joshua 5:10). “And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day (Joshua 5:11). “And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Joshua 5:12). In Joshua 5:2-12 God again emphasized the importance of circumcision, especially for children of Israel.

The second circumcision ceremony was held because the men of Israel were mature enough to become soldiers and were circumcised when the people left Egypt, but they all died while wandering in the desert. In Joshua 5: 2-12, God seems to repeat what he said in previous verses about the importance of circumcision for boys, especially for the Israelites. In this context, God commands Joshua to circumcise all the sons of Israel to show how important circumcision is for boys and reaffirm that it is obligatory.

The tradition of circumcision thus continued from one generation to another, finally reaching the time of Jesus. From the context of this verse: “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the

angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21). This verse explains Jesus is circumcised eight days after his birth and given the name Jesus. While the many verses of the Bible discussed above indicate that circumcision is an obligation for Christians, Father Robini, a Catholic priest in the city of Pontianak in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, explained to me that circumcision is not mandatory for Catholics and that many Catholics are thus not circumcised (Interview, 30 September 2018). Many of Jesus’ followers believe that the most important thing is not bodily circumcision, but rather spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart, i.e. purifying one’s heart. Some Christians interpret Deuteronomy 30: 6 as suggesting a definition of circumcision that pertains to the sanctity of one’s heart and not the cutting of the skin at the head of the penis. For this reason, many Christians believe that circumcision is not mandatory for Christianity followers.

There are several other reasons why Christians do not believe that circumcision is obligatory. First, they regard the command to circumcise as a teaching of the Old Testament, not the New Testament. Yet the origin of God’s command to circumcise is in the Old Testament (Genesis 17: 9-14) is to be passed down from generation to generation (Genesis 17:12), without exception and for eternity, clearly the validity of the command must continue until the present generation. Furthermore, it is stated in the New Testament that Jesus himself was circumcised, in accordance with the command of his Lord, on the eighth day following his birth (Luke 2:21). Circumcision is thus in fact not only mentioned in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. So it is inappropriate that circumcision is stated only in the Old Testament, even though in the New Testament it is also very clearly stated.

Second, it is said that circumcision only applies to Jews and not to any other peoples. But this is incorrect, for Christian teachings have not only spread to the Jews but also to other peoples. Indeed, the teachings of Jesus have spread throughout the world and are embraced by various ethnic groups. As such, Christ’s mission is not only directed at the Jews. Non-Jewish peoples are also obliged to follow the laws of Prophet Abraham.

Third, and as just explained, some say that the most important kind of circumcision is that of the heart, not that of the penis. This statement is based on the verses in the New Testament as follows: “For

he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh” (Romans 2:28). “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Romans 2:29). Romans 2:28 suggests just this idea. Specifically, it proposes that if the heart and mind are reinvigorated or renewed, circumcision is no longer compulsory. Citing this verse, many pastors and followers of Jesus assert that male bodily circumcision is no longer valid because it was replaced by Jesus with the “circumcision of the heart”. Likewise, some Catholic priests found on this verse their view that circumcision is not mandatory, but rather only a tradition (interview with Father Wahyu, 09-10-2018). However, if we consider the verses in the Bible about circumcision, circumcision of the flesh and circumcision of the heart are two different commands that are found in the same book, namely the Torah of Moses. Neither of them, however, cancels out the obligatory nature of the other. But a certain interpretation of the Old and New Testament allows Jesus’ followers not to consider circumcision mandatory. The latter view is also based on the words of the apostle Paul: “Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised” (1 Corinthians 7:18). from the above verse clearly Paul forbids his followers to be circumcised. In another verse Paul also says: “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” (Galatians 5:2). Paul continued his words: “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” (Galatians 5:3). From this Paul’s explanation, it is very clear that he did not approve of his followers to be circumcised.

These verses in Galatians and Corinthians above provide a legal backing for Christians to assert that circumcision is not obligatory for the people of Jesus.

Circumcision in Islam

Circumcision is a familiar practice in Muslim communities where it has become an obligation for boys. If a boy has not been circumcised, the duties of the parents are not fulfilled. The Arabic term for circumcision, *khitan* (ختان) is the noun (*ism masdar*) deriving from the verb *khatana* (خاتن) which means “to cut” or “to cut an object” (Luis

Ma'luf, 1908: 169). The definition of *khitan* may also be found in al-Munawir's dictionary where it is likewise shown to originate from the verb *khatana*, meaning "to cut an object" (Munawir, 1984: 348). Beyond dictionary definitions, the meaning of circumcision is also expressed by several scholars, such as al-Mawardi. He states that circumcision in males consists of cutting off the foreskin of the penis. Circumcision in women, meanwhile, does not involve cutting but rather the removal of the part that is above the vaginal or clitoral organs (al-Asqolani, 1993; Fathullah, 2006).

An-Nawawi in *Syarah Sabih Muslim* explains that circumcision for men involves cutting the entire foreskin that covers the head of the penis so that the head of the penis is visible or open (Syamsuddin, 1997: 57; Sauki, 2010: 16). Male circumcision involves cutting the skin that closes the *khasyafah* in order to keep it clean by making it easy to clean after urinating as well as to increase sexual pleasure with one's wife. Circumcision for women, meanwhile, is the cutting of the upper part of the vagina (clitoris). Circumcision is an ancient tradition that has been practiced for generations (Sabiq, 1987: 36), both on males and females.

The meanings of circumcision in Islam are thus given in several dictionaries and the comments of scholars. They are similar to and even compliment one another, thus making the meaning of circumcision easy to be understood. In Muslim societies, especially in Indonesia, not only are men are circumcised but also women. However, female circumcision is not followed by a ceremony and is even only known within the family, or is practiced just a few days after the birth of the girl. In Muslim communities, especially in Indonesia, circumcision involves a ceremony. The circumcision of a boy is announced to all people. Relatives and people in the neighborhood are invited to celebrate the ceremony and pray for the child who was circumcised.

Circumcision in the Quran and Hadith

Circumcision is the tradition of the Prophet Abraham, not that of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad and Muslims, however, also follow the teachings of the Prophet Abraham, such as to circumcise and to celebrate the holidays Eid al-Adha. In the 16:123 of the Quran, God states:

ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth; and he was not of those who associate with Allah” (*Sahih International*). God thus commands the Prophet Muhammad and his people to follow the religion of Abraham and explains that Abraham was a *hanif* (a believer). The term *hanif* refers to an Arab who lived in the pre-Islamic era who followed the teachings of monotheism. A *hanif* group did not like to perform polytheistic deeds, such as worshipping statues, which was quite common in pre-Islamic Arabian societies. Following the teachings of the Prophet Abraham, therefore, is tantamount to following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Abraham was and is a model for the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. For this reason, the teachings and traditions of the Prophet Abraham are always followed by Muslims throughout the world.

Quran 6:161 makes the same claim as 16:123:

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدِيْتُ رَبِّيَ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيمًا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Say, ‘Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path - a correct religion - the way of Abraham, inclining toward truth [*hanif*]. And he was not among those who associated others with Allah” (*Sahih International*).

The Prophet Abraham’s circumcision is verified in the following Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ص قَالَ: اخْتَنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ بَعْدَ ثَمَانِينَ سَنَةً وَاخْتَنَّ بِالْقُدُومِ. البخارى

From Abu Hurairah: “Prophet Abraham was circumcised when he was 80 years old by means of an ax,” (Narrated by Bukhari, Chapter 7:143).

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص: اخْتَنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمُ النَّبِيُّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَهُوَ ابْنُ ثَمَانِينَ سَنَةً بِالْقُدُومِ. مسلم

From Abu Hurairah, he said; Rasulullah SAW said, “Prophet Ibrahim ‘AS circumcised when he was eighty years old using axes (Narrated by Muslim, Chapter 4: 1839).

Circumcision was thus practiced by the Prophet Abraham before the Prophet Muhammad entered the world. While today circumcision is performed with modern tools and procedures, in earlier times when it was introduced by the Prophet Abraham, only a simple ax was used. This Hadith also makes clear that the tradition of circumcision existed since the pre-Islamic period and was further developed by the Prophet Muhammad after the emigration to Medina.

The Prophet Muhammad also discusses circumcision in another Hadith where it figures as one of five natural actions or dispositions (*fitrah*). The Hadith states:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: الْفِطْرَةُ خَمْسٌ، الْخِتَانُ وَالْإِسْتِحْدَادُ
وَالْتَقْلِيمُ وَالشَّرْبُ وَالْأظْفَارُ. البخاري

Abu Hurairah said that the Prophet Muhammad said, “Five *fitrah* (natural characteristics): cutting pubic hair, circumcision, cutting a mustache, pulling out armpit hair and cutting nails” (Narrated by Muslim, Chapter 1: 221).

This Hadith frames circumcision as an act whose purpose is to purify humans. In Muslim society, the uncircumcised are not said to be purified from uncleanness (*najis*). Uncleanness may be caused by urine released through the penis of a man. The skin on the part of the penis is believed to retain urine and therefore must be cut.

Besides this Hadith telling of the circumcision of the Prophet Abraham and the tool he used to do it, there is another one that informs us that the Prophet Muhammad circumcised two of his male grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn, the children of Fatima Az-Zahra and Ali Ibn Abi Talib, on the seventh day of the first week of their births. The Hadith is as follows:

إِنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ حَتَمَ الْحُسَيْنَ وَالْحَسَنَ يَوْمَ السَّابِعِ مِنْ وِلَادَتِهِمَا

Indeed the Prophet of Muhammad circumcised Hasan and Husein on the seventh day of his birth. [Hadith narrated by Aisyah, in Talkhiishul Habiir, Chapter 4: 226, no. 1808]

This is evidence of the continuation of the tradition of circumcision of Prophet Abraham by the Prophet Muhammad and from him until the present generation where today the circumcision of boys on the seventh day following their births is widely practiced within the Muslim

community, not only in Indonesia but in other Muslim countries as well.

Circumcision may not only pertain to the cutting of the foreskin of the penis, but also with eliminating *kekufuran* (rejection). The Hadith speaking of *kekufuran* and circumcision is:

أَلْقِ عَنْكَ شَعْرَ الْكُفْرِ وَاخْتَتِرْ

“Get rid of your *kekufuran* hair and circumcise!” (Hadith narrated by ahaqi Ahmad, Abu Daud).

Kekufuran may refer to a person’s disbelief in Allah and His Messenger. An example is the failure to carry out the commands of Allah and His Messenger. Another Hadith discussing circumcision and the law around it is:

لِلنِّسَاءِ مَكْرُمَةٌ، لِلرِّجَالِ سُنَّةُ الْحِتَانِ

“Circumcision is *sunnah* (recommended) for men and a noble deed for women,” (Hadith from Ahmad and Baihaqi).

In this Hadith, not only are men recommended to circumcise but also women. Circumcision here is not considered obligatory, but is recommended and a noble deed for women. Among Muslims in Indonesia, female circumcision is less popular than male circumcision because it is performed at the time of birth and in secret, not being announced as male circumcision is. Furthermore, male circumcision is also accompanied by a ceremony where family and friends, far and near, are invited, and is carried out on a large scale.

With respect to female circumcision, the Prophet Muhammad stated to female circumcision operators in Medina, who were common at the time, the following:

إِذَا خَفَضْتَ فَأَشْمِي وَلَا تَنْهَكِي فَإِنَّهُ أَسْرَى لِلْوَجْهِ وَأَحْضَى لِلزَّوْجِ

“Shorten it a little and do not overdo it because it is more pleasing to the face and desirable for the husband,” (narrated by Abu Daud and validated by Sheikh Al-Albany, and considered to be authentic by Shaykh Al Albani in *Ash Shahihah*).

According to this Hadith, female circumcision is also recommended by the Prophet Muhammad. The purpose of it is to brighten up a woman’s face and ensure the vagina’s proper functioning so that she is more loved by her husband if she marries.

Law and Circumcision for Muslims

There is much research that discusses circumcision in Islam. First is that conducted by Basid Rustami who explains that there are no verses in the Quran nor the Hadiths of the Prophet which specifically explain about circumcision and how it should be carried out by Muslims (Bustami, 2000). Second is that done by Nawawi who tells that in Islam circumcision is intended as a ritual of servitude (*'ubudiyah*) to God which had been enacted by the Prophet Abraham in pre-Islamic times. He also explains that Muslims have been very consistent in maintaining this ritual from past ages until now. Although scholars note pros and cons about the legal basis for circumcision in Islam, their views do not cause Muslims to abandon circumcision. It is recommended as an act of obedience to God. Neither of these two studies, however, explicitly state whether circumcision is compulsory for Muslims or just recommended (*sunnah*).

As we know, the rules concerning circumcision in Islam are not found in the Quran, but rather in some of the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. This is one reason why scholars hold different opinions about circumcision, especially about whether or not it is obligatory, both with respect to males and females. According to the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali schools of law, it is recommended (*sunnah*) for men and a virtuous act for women (Muhammad Amin ibn 'Umar 'Abidin, 1984). Meanwhile, according to the Shafi'i law school, it is mandatory for both men and women (Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rusyd, 1984: 439). This view is expressed by Imam Shafi'i as well as other scholars. However, the opinions of Imam Shafi'i about circumcision pertains more to males than females (Al-Asqalani, tt. 530). In contrast, Imam Malik and other scholars assert that the circumcision of women is not an obligation but rather only recommended (An-Nawawi, tt: 126). Ibn Qudamah argues that circumcision is mandatory for men and recommended for women (Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi, 1998: 18). Finally, Imam Hanbal contends that circumcision is mandatory for men and discouraged (*makru*) for women (Ibn Qudamah, 1998: 70). Therefore, scholars clearly disagree over the place of circumcision in Islam, some saying it is mandatory and others merely recommended.

As explained earlier, in Islam the laws about circumcision are not found in the Quran. The Quran only instructs Muslims as the

followers of the Prophet Muhammad to follow the teachings or religion of the Prophet Abraham (e.g. Quran 16:123). The explanation about circumcision is only found in some of the Hadiths of the Prophet, which are widely referenced by Muslim scholars to insist on the obligation of circumcision for Muslims. For this reason, the views of scholars of various law schools differ concerning the question of whether circumcision is an obligation for Muslims or not. In addition, scholars have also disagreed over whether it is possible for women to undergo it. Although the law surrounding circumcision in Islam raises the pros and cons of the practice, generally Muslims have inherited it as a part of their religious heritage. As mentioned above, the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali schools argue that circumcision is recommended for men and a virtuous act for women (Rusyid, 1989). It seems that the opinions of these three schools are based on the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. Differences of opinion regarding the legal status of circumcision has added to treasure of Islamic thought.

Similarities and Differences Between Circumcision in Christianity and Islam

Similarities

1. The practice of circumcision in both Christianity and Islam originates from the Prophet Abraham and thus both imitate or continue the Prophet Abraham's tradition. Prophet Abraham is thus in terms of the teaching of circumcision not only a role model for Muslims but also for Christians.
2. Christian teachings about circumcision are related by the Bible, while Islamic ones by Hadiths and not the Quran. As is known, Hadiths are the second main source of Islamic teachings and are one of the sources of Islamic law.
3. In both Christianity and Islam, adherents are encouraged to circumcise every boy born.
4. There exists in both religions debates over whether circumcision is compulsory or recommended. In Christianity, every religious figure has a different view about it. The Old and New Testaments also express different views about whether it is an obligation or not for Christians. Meanwhile, Muslim legal scholars disagree over its legal status.

Differences

1. Whereas in the Old Testament circumcision is only recommended for boys, in the Hadiths it is recommended for both boys and girls. In the latter, male circumcision is deemed as *sunnah* and female circumcision as a virtuous act. In the Old Testament, circumcision is obligatory for the Israelites and Jesus belongs to the Israelites. Meanwhile, in the New Testament the practice is not mandatory.
2. Traditionally, circumcision in Islam is a large-scale operation, whereas among Christians this manner of circumcision does not exist.
3. The legal basis for circumcision in Christianity is the Bible, while in Islam it is both the Quran and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. Direct treatment of circumcision is not found in the Quran. Rather, God commands Muslims to follow the teachings of the Prophet Abraham (including those on circumcision). Meanwhile, although circumcision is discussed in several Hadiths, not all scholars agree on the validity of such Hadiths.
4. Not all Christians perform circumcision. Some of them interpret Jesus' teachings as asserting that it is not obligatory, even though the messengers mentioned in the Bible practiced it and ordered others to do so. In Islam, in contrast, circumcision is for all Muslims, both men and women, carried out, despite there being no Hadith designating it as mandatory.

Conclusion

Teachings on circumcision in the Old and New Testament differ. In the former, it is described as mandatory for the tribes of Israel and their descendants. On this basis, Christians were obliged to perform it. But in the New Testament, circumcision is not deemed obligatory for Christians because, according to some messengers written about in the New Testament, circumcision has no meaning if someone cannot reinvigorate his soul and fulfill the commandments of the Lord. Circumcision in the Old Testament pertains to cutting the foreskin of the penis and making a covenant with God, while in the New Testament to the renewal of the soul or returning to the path of truth in accordance with God's command. Meanwhile, circumcision in the Hadith means to cut the foreskin of the penis and rid the person of uncleanness.

In Islam, circumcision is not mentioned in the Quran but rather only in the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. Because there is no statement about circumcision in the Quran, it cannot be concluded whether the practice is compulsory for Muslims or not. However, God does make clear in the Quran the obligation of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad to observe the teachings of the Prophet Abraham. These teachings include the performance of the pilgrimage (*hajj*), ritual slaughter during *Eid al-Adha*, and circumcision. The first, the *hajj* pilgrimage, is one of the five obligatory pillars of Islam (for those who are capable of performing it), while the enactment of the latter two is not compulsory for Muslims. However, scholars have disagreed over whether circumcision is mandatory or not. Although it is believed by some scholars not to be mandatory and there is no single Hadith that declares it an obligation, circumcision has, culturally, become one for Muslims. All Muslims carry it out, except those who abstain from it for specific reasons. If considered from the perspective of أصول الفقه (*usul al-fiqh*), circumcision is mandatory in Islam because its purpose is to rid people from genital uncleanness. *Usul al-fiqh* is a legal science in Islam that studies the rules, theories and sources in detail in order to produce Islamic law taken from Quran and Hadith. If a Muslim is not clean while he/she prays, his/her prayer is not accepted. Meanwhile, the practice of circumcision within a community is inseparable from the community's traditions and ceremonies which are performed in accordance with its respective ethnicities and cultures.[]

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AHKAM Jurnal Ilmu Syariah (ISSN: 1412-4734/E-ISSN: 2407-8646) is a periodical scientific journal published by Faculty of Sharia and Law of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta in collaboration with Indonesian Scientist and Sharia Scholar Association (HISSI). This journal specifically examines the science of sharia and obtains to present various results of current and eminence scientific research. The administrators receive articles as contributions Sharia and Islamic law disciplines from scientists, scholars, professionals, and researchers to be published and disseminated. The article will be situated in a selection mechanism, a review of proved reders, and a strict editing process. All articles published in this Journal are based on the views of the authors, but they do not represent the authors' journals or affiliated institutions.

AHKAM has been accredited based on the determination of Director General of Research Reinforcement and Development, Research, and Technology Ministry of Higher Education of Republic of Indonesia, No. 36/a/E/KPT/2016 (valid until 2021).