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Christian-Muslim Relations in Indonesia: The Challenges of the Twenty-First Century*

Abstraksi: *Indonesia adalah negara-bangsa multi relijius, dengan peng-alaman pluralisme keagamaan yang lama. Hampir semua agama-agama besar dunia (Islam, Kristen, Katholik, Hindu dan Buddhisme) hidup dan berkembang di negeri ini. Meskipun umat Islam merupakan kelompok mayarakat terbesar, dan seringkali mempunyai tempat khusus dalam perjalanan sejarah bangsa, sikap terbuka dan toleran terhadap komuni-tas-komunitas agama lain terasa menonjol. Hal itu bukan saja tercermin dalam harmonisnya hubungan antar- komunitas agama selama ini, teta-pi juga dalam sikap sebagian besar tokoh-tokoh Muslim yang, semenjak merumuskan konstitusi kenegaraan pada 1945, merelakan Republik In-donesia berdiri tanpa secara formal mencantumkan Islam sebagai dasar negara.*

Tulisan ini—diilhami dari "International Conference on Muslim-Christian Relations: Past, Present and Future Dialogue and Cooperation," di Jakarta, Agustus 1997—mendiskusikan tantangan-tantangan bangsa Indonesia dalam kaitannya dengan hubungan Muslim-Kristen memasuki abad 21.

Tinjauan historis tentang akar-akar hubungan Muslim-Kristen di Indonesia, membawa kita kepada wawasan yang mendalam akan dinami-ka hubungan antar-umat beragama yang, meskipun diwarnai rasa saling menghormati dan kerjasama, berjalan dengan berbagai konflik dan kete-gangan. Kenyataan bahwa kedatangan agama Kristen dan Katolik ber-

gandengan erat dengan kolonialisme, dan bahwa agama tersebut memiliki kekuatan dan strategi penyebaran yang relatif efektif, telah menciptakan suatu kondisi di mana masyarakat Indonesia — yang mayoritas Muslim — merasa terancam dalam hal perkembangan komunitas Kristen. Secara historis, masyarakat Muslim di kepulauan Nusantara merasakan kebijakan politik kolonial yang memberi perlindungan terhadap kegiatan penyebaran agama Kristen. Akibatnya, hingga masa-masa awal setelah kemerdekaan, kecurigaan Muslim terhadap Kristen dan Katolik dengan mudah terbentuk.

Namun demikian, keputusan para pendiri Republik Indonesia, yang sebagian besar juga terdiri dari pemuka-pemuka Muslim, untuk menetapkan Pancasila (bukan Islam) sebagai dasar negara dapat ditunjuk sebagai upaya sungguh-sungguh dalam mencari sistem kenegaraan yang menjamin kerukunan dan pluralisme keagamaan. Di dalam kerangka ini adalah suatu jaminan bagi seluruh warga negara, dengan anutan kepercayaan yang berbeda-beda, sssecara bebas untuk menjalan amalan agamanya masing-masing.

Suatu catatan penting adalah, meskipun Islam telah menjadi kekuatan nilai dalam menumbuhkan etos pluralisme keagamaan sejak Indonesia merdeka itu, potensi untuk menjadi gerakan sosial yang mundur kebelakang dengan sentimen anti-Kristennya tetap terbuka lebar. Berbagai kecenderungan dan pola pemikiran keislaman yang muncul akhir-akhir ini menggambarkan posisi Islam yang berbeda-beda, dalam berhadapan dengan komunitas agama lain. Misalnya, modernisme, Neo-modernisme, prodemokrasi Islam, dan internasionalisme-universalisme Islam. Semua model pemikiran itu memang menyuarakan perlunya membanguan suatu Indonesia yang demokratis, adil, sambil tetap menjunjung tinggi pluralisme agama-agama. Tetapi, sebagian di antaranya masih tetap mendambakan terbentuknya suatu sistem kenegaraan yang memberi porsi yang lebih besar bagi Islam, sambil terus waspada terhadap adanya ancaman politik dari komunitas agama lain.

Aspirasi politik-keagamaan yang terakhir inilah yang justru akan membuka jalan bagi tumbuhnya gerakan sosial Islam yang sulit menjunjung tinggi nilai-nilai seperti toleranasi, keterbukaan dan moderasi. Tantangan demikian dirasakan semakin nyata seiring dengan berkembangnya wacana keagamaan paska-moderen dan isu-isu solidaritas keagamaan yang bersifat temporal, seperti perang Bosnia dan perjuangan Palestina. Dan itu pula tantangan keagamaan yang akan dihadapi komunitas agama-agama Indonesia pada abad 21 mendatang.

أبو رابى

العلاقات بين المسلمين والمسيحيين فى اندونيسيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

الخلاصة: إن اندونيسيا دولة الشعب المتعدد الأديان، مع تجربة التعدد الدينى التى تضرب بجذورها فى أعماق التاريخ، حيث تكاد تكون جميع الأديان الكبرى فى العالم (الاسلام والمسيحية والكاثوليك والهندوسية والبوذية) تنتشر وتعيش فيها، ورغم أن المسلمين يمثلون الغالبية العظمى، مع ما قد يتمتعون به من امتيازات، كان التسامح والتعايش السلمي مع الجماعات الدينية الأخرى من المواقف البارزة على مر التاريخ، ولم يظهر ذلك فى حسن العلاقة بين الأديان فحسب، إنما ظهر ايضا فى مواقف معظم زعماء المسلمين الذين رضوا، منذ وضع صورة لدستور الدولة سنة ١٩٤٥م، أن تؤسس الدولة دون الاعلان عن كون الاسلام دينا رسميا للدولة.

يتعرض هذا البحث، انطلاقا من نتائج "المؤتمر العالمي عن العلاقات بين المسلمين والمسيحيين: التعاون والحوار فى الماضى والحاضر والمستقبل" المنعقد بجاكرتا فى شهر اغسطس ١٩٩٧م،

لمناقشة التحديات التى يواجهها الشعب الاندونيسي فيما يتعلق بالعلاقة
بين المسلمين والمسيحيين فى القرن الواحد والعشرين الميلادي.

كانت النظرة التاريخية إلى اصول العلاقة بين المسلمين
والمسيحيين باندونيسيا، تفضى بنا إلى آفاق واسعة من فاعلية العلاقة بين
الأديان، التى هي وإن كانت قائمة على الاحترام المتبادل والتعاون، فإنها
لا تخلو من عوامل الخلاف والصراع، إذ لا يمكن التغاضى عن تلك
الحقيقة وهي أن وصول المسيحية إلى اندونيسيا كان متزامنا مع قدوم
الاستعمار، وأن لهذه الديانة خطة تبشيرية أقوى أثرا، الأمر الذى أفسح
المجال للمجتمع الاندونيسي –وغالبيتهم مسلمون– أن يحسوا بالخطر
الذي يتهددهم من تطور المجتمع المسيحي، ثم انه من الناحية التاريخية،
يسود المسلمين نسبيا اعتقاد بأن السياسة الاستعمارية كانت تحمى
الانشطة التبشيرية، فكانت النتيجة أن نشأ بسهولة الموقف المتشكك
وعدم الثقة لدى المسلمين ازاء المسيحيين.

ومع ذلك، فاستقرار الرأي لدى مؤسسى الدولة الاندونيسية،
ومعظمهم زعماء المسلمين، أن تقوم الدولة على أساس البانجاسيلا
(المبادئ الخمسة) وليست على الاسلام، كان دليلا على المحاولة الجادة
التى بذلت للحصول على نظام السلطة الذى يضمن التعايش السلمي
والاعتراف بتعدد الأديان، وفى هذا الاطار ضمان لكل مواطن يلتزم بما
يعتنقه من الأديان أن يتمتع بحرية ممارسة عقيدته ودينه.

وهناك ملاحظة هامة، وهي أنه وإن كانت القيم الاسلامية هي
التى أرست موقف الانفتاح لتعدد الاديان منذ الاستقلال، إلا ان الأبواب

لاحتمال نشوء حركة اجتماعية رجعية ضد المسيحية ما زالت قائمة، إذ ظهرت نزعات مختلفة واتجاهات فكرية فى الآونة الأخيرة تنبئ عــن رؤى اسلامية مختلفة فيما يتعلق بالعلاقة بيـن الاسلام والأديــان الأخـرى، فالاتجاهات التجديدية، وحركة التحديث الجديدة، وحركـة الديموقراطيـة الاسلامية، وكذلك العالمية والشمولية، كلها مذاهب فكرية، وإن دعـت إلى قيام الدولة الاندونيسية على أسس الديموقراطية والعدالة واحترام تعـدد الاديان، إلا ان البعض منها ظلت تضع الآمال فى قيام نظام للسلطة يتمتـع فيه المسلمون بمكانة أكبر، مع التنبه الواعي للخطـر السياسي مـن جـانب الجماعات الدينية الأخرى.

إن مثل هذه الآمال السياسية الدينية هي التى سوف تمهـد الطريـق لنشوء حركة اجتماعية يصعب عليها احترام قيم التعايش السلمي والانفتـاح والوسطية، وهي تزداد بروزا مع الاتجاه العلمى الرامى إلى إحياء القيـم الدينية بدل المادية الالحادية، متزامنا مع الاتجاه إلـى التضامن القوي فى مواجهة القضايا الراهنة مثل الحرب البوسـنية والقضيـة الفلسطينية، وتلـك هي التحديات الدينية التى تواجهها الجماعات الدينية باندونيسيا فى القـرن الواحد والعشرين المقبل.

lthough Indonesia should not be an Islamic state, it should not be a
secular one either. Rather, Indonesia should have a religious state phi-
losophy based on belief in God through which the ideals of every reli-
gious denomination could be realized.[1]

In August 1997, a major conference on Christian-Muslim relations
and the challenges of religious pluralism in contemporary Indonesia
was convened at the Horison Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia. The driv-
ing force behind the conference was the Ministry of Religious Af-
fairs, which cosponsored this major event with two important insti-
tutions of higher learning in North America: the Duncan Black
Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Re-
lations at Hartford Seminary, and the Department of Religion at
Temple University.[2] Both of these institutions have played a leading
role in Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue.

The conference featured a wide array of topics: the theology of
dialogue, history of Christian-Muslim relations, the religious situa-
tion in post-Independence Indonesia, and the role of religion in the
contemporary cultural and political landscape of the Indonesian na-
tion. The majority of the speakers trained in the fields of Islamic
Studies and Christian-Muslim relations came from Western universi-
ties. They were not necessarily experts in Indonesian affairs but had
much to offer their audience about the methods and history of dia-
logue. The audience, however, was mainly Indonesian composed of
religious leaders, university professors, students (especially from the
IAIN universities across Indonesia) and lay people.

The topics discussed and the conclusions drawn describe a com-
plex religious situation in a country that experiences major transi-
tions in its industrial, urban, cultural, intellectual, political, and reli-
gious landscape and life. One gets the feeling that the country is strug-
gling with its religious identity as never before. As the official state
ideology, Pancasila guarantees the freedom of five state recognized
religions, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and
Buddhism. Although Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in
the world, it has stressed the necessity of separating religion from
politics while respecting, if not encouraging the religious wishes of
all groups in society. Although it is not the official policy of the state
or the Ministry of Religious Affairs, some people believe that Indo-
nesia has remained a secular country since the proclamation of its
independence from the Dutch in 1945.[3] However, it is not an Islam-

ist state in the sense that Iran and Sudan are. In the words of president Soeharto, Pancasila is based on the rejection of poverty, backwardness, conflicts, exploitation, capitalism, feudalism, dictatorship, colonialism, and imperialism. In other words, Pancasila is based on the conviction that Indonesia must follow an independent foreign policy and a cohesive nationalist policy that preserve the religious, ethnic, and linguistic balance and integrity of the country.

The topics covered directly by the conference are of extreme importance to an astute observer. One of these is the role religion plays in post-Independence Indonesia and the role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in maintaining dialogue and harmony amongst the believers of the different faiths.[4] Another is the creation of a common religious and cultural consensus within the Indonesian nation that permits all classes and segments of society to participate meaningfully and fruitfully in the modernization process launched by the state since the commencement of the New Order in 1966. A third topic covered regards creating a culture of modernism in Indonesian society that is not totally Westernized and is in tune with the basic religious values of the Indonesian nation. These themes reflect in a theoretical way some of the major preoccupations of Indonesia as it faces the challenges and hopes of the twenty-first century.

As any Third World country after independence, Indonesia has faced the 'question of religion' (that is, are religion and politics one?) with an open eye on the long legacy of Dutch colonialism and a new creative way to imagine the future of the nascent Indonesian nation. Taking into account the different religious, social, economic, and intellectual forces at play after Independence, Indonesia opted to create a secular, although theistic, state system while maintaining a clear separation between religion and state. Within this system is a guarantee that all people have the freedom to practice their religion.

Although Islam has been a potent political and social force in Indonesian society since 1945, various Islamic voices and trends of thought have arisen to express different religious positions. Indeed, one may distinguish four currents of Muslim thought in contemporary Indonesia: Modernism, neo-modernism, Islamic social democracy, and internationalism-universalism or Islamic revivalism.[5] Such 'neo-modernist' Muslim thinkers as Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholish Madjid,[6] Ahmad Wahib, Djohan Effendi,[7] and, to a limited extent, Amien Rais, stress the democratization of Indonesian society and reject placing religion at the service of politics, since both deal with differ-

ent arenas of life. Other 'internationalist' Islamic voices, although paying lip service to Pancasila, would prefer to establish an Islamic state, and warn of the threat of Christian missionaries to the Islamic foundations of Indonesian society.

The imagining of the contemporary Indonesian state is somewhat different from that of Muslim revivalists within and outside of Indonesia. The nationalist imagining is based on instilling pride in all Indonesians of their common historical and cultural experience and values, the nationalist fight against Dutch colonialism in the first half of the twentieth Century, creating an atmosphere of religious harmony and tolerance within the country, supporting the modernization process, and abhorring all external intervention that is threatening to the political and social fabric of society.[8]

In spite of the focus of the political elite on maintaining the pluralistic and multi-faith nature of society, it is clear that Islam occupies a unique place in the imagining of the contemporary state in Indonesia. The Pancasila philosophy, while not admitting that Islam is the state religion, is highly supportive of the main tenets of Islam: the belief in one God, giving alms, fasting, prayer, and fulfilling pilgrimage. A new stress is placed on Islamic ethical and spiritual values especially in a society that has been in the throes of modernization and secularization for several decades. New Qur'an study groups have emerged in Indonesia, lately, and many a young person is engaged in the spiritual quest that Islam provides. In the past two decades, Indonesia has witnessed a popular and institutional Muslim revival that is reflected in the high number of mosques built in the country. Amongst the Muslim states, Indonesia boasts the largest number of pilgrims going to the Holy Places in Saudi Arabia every year. All these social and religious phenomena have led an American observer of Indonesian affairs to state that, "Today, Indonesia's public culture is far more Islamic than it was in the 1950s and public piety much greater."[9]

Despite a greater presence of Islamic values and symbols in the contemporary Indonesian public and social space, the Indonesian elite is far more conservative in its Islamic pronouncements than its neighbor, the Malaysian elite. The nationalist imagining of Indonesia stresses the importance of cultural and social integration while shying away from religious tension and disintegration. The message of Pancasila as conceived by the writers of the Indonesian constitution is clear: let us keep the multi-faith and multi-cultural composition of society, since pluralism, with its flexible and creative interaction with soci-

ety, is an important element of the progress and modernization of society.[10] In other words, the vision of those who believe in the nation-state differs substantially from that of the Muslim revivalists. In normative terms, revivalists would like to see the Muslim world linked together by the power of Muslim doctrine, whereas the nation is linked together by language, common heritage, and past experience. Since this type of nationalist imagining is more suitable to the religious minorities than the revivalist one, religious minorities fear the possibility of the revivalists' ascendancy to power in a future Indonesia.

If Pancasila philosophy prefers to draw a distinction between politics and religion, religion has proven to be at the heart of social and cultural change in many contemporary Muslim countries, not excluding Indonesia. In the words of Nurcholish Madjid, "The development of Islamic culture in Indonesia is...very much the result of a dialogue between universal Islam and the cultural characteristics of the archipelago."[11] How much dialogue there is between universal Islam and contemporary Indonesian culture depends on the pace of social change in the country. For example, the changing urban landscape of Indonesia reflects the social movement of society and its attempt to build new religious, cultural, and economic foundations for a society in transition. Such major cities as Jakarta and Yogyakarta, although experiencing a complex process of urbanization since Independence, have also experienced an interesting process of ruralization wherein the people of the countryside with their rural (religious and other) values, fears, and hopes, have invaded the big city. This situation has naturally led to the rise of social protests movements that utilize religious symbols and ideas in order to gain legitimacy in the larger society. In addition to interfaith work as an immediate challenge facing the nation-state in Indonesia, it is important to address this new socio-religious situation intellectually and religiously while maintaining a distance from ideological cliches and empty rhetoric.

In addition to its religious dimension, the process just described, reflects a desire of the rural people to compete in the urban economy, and, above all, leave a cultural imprint on the city and its people. Against this background of social and cultural change in contemporary Indonesia, the Pancasila version of 'religion' must play a great role in creating a new nationalist culture amongst the urban-rural poor. In conditions of extreme economic poverty and social backwardness, religion can be easily used to fire up the frustration of the

poor against the status quo.

This brings us to the issue of cultural synthesis in a multi-faith society, such as Indonesia. Of the many crucial challenges that face Indonesia, as a Third World country, one is the New World Order, inaugurated by two significant events in the early 1990s: 1) the military defeat of Iraq in the second Gulf war and 2) the collapse of the Soviet system. In addition to signaling major shifts in world alliances and the rise of the United States as the major superpower in the world today, these two events have raised once again, and perhaps more acutely than before, the issue of Western, especially American, cultural hegemony and its impact on Third World cultures, including the Muslim world. One must note that even some European, and most specifically French intellectuals, are discussing ways to respond to what they see as the American cultural menace on Europe and are seeking ways to protect cultural diversity and revive their cultural independence *vis-a-vis* the United States of America. In the opinion of a large number of Indonesian intellectuals, a superpower does not necessarily act as a moral power although it tends to impose its cultural characteristics on other nations and cultures.

During the colonialist era and especially since the nineteenth century, Indonesian intellectuals have always posed the question: 'What is the West?'[13] Some have called for the total Westernization of Indonesian society: "The time has come for us to direct our eyes toward the West."[14] The West has posed a major challenge to the modern 'Indonesian mind', a type of challenge that forced modern Indonesian thought to critique the past and attempt to appropriate the scientific spirit of the modern West. In spite of the fact that the 'West' has remained an undefined term in modern Indonesian and Muslim thought (is the West liberalism, Christianity, Capitalism or Socialism?), the West, as a scientific and socio-cultural entity, has always been on the offensive. Some Indonesian thinkers have been intrigued by the different possibilities the 'Western mind' and Western science would give them. They argue that the stagnation of modern Muslim and third World societies is due to the lack of science as practiced in the West.

If the United States is a great superpower but less so in moral terms, how can contemporary Indonesia, which boasts of major economic and political contacts with it, remain culturally creative and independent of the control of the United States? Cultural independence from the West is the question! What is cultural independence?

While it is possible to measure and quantify economic factors, it is difficult to measure culture in the same way. The departure of official colonialism left behind a complex cultural package that cannot be overcome overnight. The intellectual elite of the ancient regime, some of whom fought political but not cultural colonialism, found themselves in commanding positions, caught between their adopted European culture and the culture of their society. Nationalist thought in contemporary Indonesia, especially as represented by Pancasila, has faced this dilemma since the termination of official colonialism. What are the cultural and intellectual mechanisms that help create and maintain a unique culture for Indonesia in the context of the New World Order?

One of the unfortunate facts in today's world is that no country can rival the economic and intellectual hegemony of the United States. This country has huge economic resources, military prowess, advanced technology, and a will to conquer the whole world intellectually.[15] Indonesia is infiltrated not just by American cultural and social symbols such as the proliferation of Macdonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants and Pizza Huts, but by the fact that more and more of the young intelligentsia prefer to complete their studies in American universities instead of Egyptian or Arab universities as had been the case with a significant number of the old intelligentsia. Therefore, one may pose the following question: How do we achieve an overall rational, cultural, political, and social renaissance in contemporary Indonesian society while being faithful to its nationalist, religious, and historical facts? Instead of rewriting the past, Indonesia must face the contemporary cultural challenges of the West, especially of the United States, in the context of the New World Order.

Being independent of the cultural hegemony of the United States does not necessarily translate as the refusal to learn from or about the West, especially since there is a lot to learn from its recent pluralistic experience. For example, in the complex encounter and interrelationship between the world of Islam and that of the West, the Muslim world must learn a lot about the West. The West must also endeavor to learn a lot about the world of Islam. One example might suffice: To many in the Muslim world, Christianity in the West has been marginalized. This thesis is not sensitive to the strength of Christian religious, educational, business, and media institutions nor to the return of a number of intellectuals and artists to the abode of Christianity. Neither is it sensitive to the fact that the Western elite,

although secular in nature, is, in one sense or another, indebted to the power of religious imagination. It is impossible to conduct meaningful dialogue with the Western world and the world of Christianity without forming an accurate view of the position of Christianity in contemporary European and American societies. While Western societies are secular in terms of religion-state separation, religion is nevertheless an important force in many of these countries.

Further, a large number of Muslims from various countries in the Muslim world have migrated and settled in the west in the last fifty years. There are some Muslims who believe that only in America do Muslims have a real opportunity to form a genuine Islamic identity, consciousness, and world-view. This position is predicated on the following facts:

1. American cultural and religious space, as it has developed over the centuries, tolerates the formation of new cultural and religious identities;
2. Since the cultural makeup of the Muslim community in North America is very diverse, America is one of the few societies in the world that could enable Muslims, coming from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to mingle freely with each other, thus paving the way for the formation of a universal Islamic culture–with unique American characteristics–within the boundaries of secularism.

Internal events in the life of the American Muslim community (both immigrant and indigenous), and external changes in the world order of the past few years, especially the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increasing American entanglement in the economic and political affairs of the Muslim world, have increasingly transformed the Muslim community from an exotic, (and at times, to some Americans, scary) group of people into a conspicuous and expanding community. Muslims cannot afford to remain outside American religious life and the real challenges secularism has posed to the theistic mind.

The Muslim community in America is still going through the process of laying its intellectual (that is, religious) and institutional foundations by appealing to both the central Islamic tradition developing in the Islamic core (the Middle East) over many centuries, and by negotiating, although feebly and perhaps with an unclear vision, with American modernity for a place for Islam within this culture. Muslims know that to both survive in this country and preserve their Islamic identity, a new group of Muslim intelligentsia needs to come

forth and be ready to face the two-fold task of interpreting the vast Islamic tradition in a new situation while keeping an open eye on the coexistence of other religious communities within the present social and political order.

Muslims recognize that they live in a multi-cultural, pluralistic and religiously-diverse society and that some of their classical legal formulations (that is, *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam*) might not suit their new position in American society. This could be the same case in Indonesia. Eventually, Muslims, in the West as well as in the Muslim world, would have to formulate new legal and theological concepts in order to express the unique nature of the Muslim community, its interaction with other religious communities, and its tolerance of many diverse views and philosophies. In other words, Muslims should answer the following criticism shared by some observers of Islam in the American scene: "Muslims who take their religion seriously cannot believe in separation of religion and state, and religious pluralism is a concept alien to the ideal of a Muslim society. Consequently, Muslims in the united States should be allowed to practice their religion but not to the point where it inhibits or threatens the religious freedom of others, and certainly not to the point of practicing *jihad* (holy war) against non Muslims."[16] I think that the Indonesian example of practicing religious tolerance and maintaining a pluralistic religious society contradicts the above claim.

Meanwhile, in America, immigrant as well as overseas Muslims have a lot to learn from indigenous Muslims about coexistence and participation in American society, and indigenous Muslims have a lot to learn from immigrant Muslims about the central tenets of Islam. However, both groups face a common challenge: how to articulate an Islamic consciousness that is not shy of the central premises of modernism. In other words, American Muslims have been given a unique historical opportunity to advance arguments and values that are not at odds with the central tenets of the modern nation-state and its secular ethic. It is possible to achieve this type of consciousness without sacrificing the basic values of Islamic identity.

Both Judaism and Christianity, each of which has had a unique approach to modernity, have a lot to offer Islam in its meaningful encounter with modernity. It is important to learn from both how to preserve and strengthen religious identity within the context of modernity and to discover the vital springs of spirituality within this formulation.

In their pluralistic approach to the central issues and problems besetting this society, Muslims, just like other people of faith, should highlight the common features that distinguish the universal religious traditions of the world such as egalitarianism, social and economic justice, and human emancipation from slavery. By highlighting these characteristics, Muslims resurrect some of the central values of their faith and impress on others to do the same.

Forming a pluralistic Muslim consciousness in addition to enabling Muslims to participate fully in the religious and cultural life of this society, would ultimately help Americans of other faith traditions to appreciate Muslim doctrine, Muslim civilization, and the Muslim way of life in a new light. Further, it would sensitize Americans to modern Muslim history and problems, and the need for a more enlightened and humane American policy toward the world of Islam. It is my conviction that Indonesian Muslims can learn a lot from the current experience of American Muslims, both indigenous and immigrant.

There are some like Huston Smith who speak of the crisis of Christianity and spirituality in the West, whereas there are others who follow the theses of Max Weber and who believe that Christianity has become an integral part of Western societies. There is a need for a Muslim critique and appreciation of the world of Christianity, its contemporary theological expressions, its encounter with the industrial mind, and its deep reflection on the state of humanity in the 20th century. Muslim thought must delve into the problematic of Christianity just like it has delved into the problematic of Islam.

Likewise, the Western world must rid itself of the past colonialist and missionary mentality and treat the Muslim world not like an enemy but as a world that is full of potentials. Orientalism must be substituted by the spirit of dialogue and compassion toward the problems of the Muslim world.

A fascinating phenomenon that characterizes the modern civilization is the profound mutation taking place in the passage of this civilization from a 'culture of production' to a 'culture of information and scientific knowledge'. This is possible because of the radical breakthroughs in science and technology. Because of the scientific superiority of the West, the information gap between North and South has become insurmountable and it is increasing day by day. For example, in 1990, the United States possessed 56 percent of the total world data banks–especially research and science data banks, the

European community twenty eight percent, Japan twelve percent and the Third World one percent. This important fact results in a superior Western position in economic and political affairs; the spread of Western ideas by acquiring Western technology; the brain-drain from the Third World to the advanced Center, and the gradual process of Western cultural and intellectual values. This leads to an absence of a genuine cultural dialogue between South and North, "En revanche, c'est l'absence de communication et de tolerance culturelles, qui risque de mettre la paix en peril dans les annees a venir."   Indonesia has begun to face some of these problems, least of which is that of the brain-drain.

The Third World suffers from a continuous 'intellectual hemorrhage', identified as the 'brain drain', which is the exodus of competent people: professionals and intellectuals from South to North. Many emigrate, not just in search of better economic and social standards, but because the development process in their native countries lacks the appropriate vision to incorporate them productively. Very often, this lack of vision is substituted by a blind imitation of the modernized North, which leads to the transfer of technology– a process that lacks creative behavior. In other words, the South can purchase technology but it must create its own forms of modernity and modernization. However, these forms cannot be created in the context of the continuous exodus of the skilled professionals. Therefore, the Muslim world suffers from three major problems: 1) illiteracy; 2) lack of scientific research, and 3) lack of democratic values. Indonesia, fortunately, does not face the problem of the brain-drain to the same extent as do Arab Muslim countries. In launching its modernization process, there has been an emphasis on high-tech competitive industry that is home grown, so to speak.

The above questions, such as the role and meaning of Islam in contemporary Indonesian society, the relationship between religion and politics, cultural and religious pluralism, American intellectual, educational, and scientific influence, the deep transformation of Indonesian society in the past several decades, and the preservation of the main cultural characteristics of the Indonesian nation are at the heart of the theoretical and religious quest of the current Minister of Religious Affairs in Indonesia, Dr. Tarmizi Taher.[18] To an objective scholar, the Ministry of Religious Affairs under the leadership of Tarmizi Taher has experienced an extension in its work over the years, especially in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. There-

fore, it is important to spend some time examining Taher's religious and intellectual career, especially in light of the social and economic transformation of Indonesia in recent decades.

In his most recent book, *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia*, Taher deals candidly with a number of issues that have beset Indonesia since independence, namely, poverty, religious tension (especially between Muslims and Christians),[19] national integration, Islam and the West, and the role of state and the intelligentsia in the formation of more viable and just social and religious order in the country.

Taher strongly believes that the present state of Christian-Muslim relations, and interfaith relations in particular, in his country are in need of the type of academic and religious expertise that American institutions of higher learning such as the Hartford Seminary and the Temple and Georgetown Universities provide. In spite of his military background and medical training, he grapples with the major theoretical and intellectual problems surrounding dialogue and understanding in a multi-faith and pluralistic society. He often stresses the necessity of grasping the theoretical and historical foundations of the religious questions in his society as means of understanding the current state of religion in Indonesia. Further, he is cognizant of the fact that besides teaching 'dialogue' as an academic discipline, the practice of interreligious dialogue is an art that Indonesians must excel in.[20] In this he follows in the footsteps of the most well-renowned Indonesian authority on comparative religion and interreligious dialogue, professor Mukti Ali.[21] Further, Taher finds the combination of both theory and practice highly intriguing. Supporting the national philosophy of Pancasila and its negation of proselytization, Taher encourages both Muslims and Christians to go beyond the mission/*da'wah* paradigms. In other words, he disagrees with the Muslim position on conversion and the Christian position on mission.[22] Proselytization was a matter of the colonialist past. He applauded the courage of a contemporary Christian theologian, Dr. Barbara Brown Zikmund, President of the Hartford Seminary–home to the Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslims relations (one of the most important of such centers in the West) who said in a Jakarta conference in 1996 that:

> As we do this [religious dialogue] we are challenged with a new intellectual agenda. In earlier eras, when many Christians lived in homogeneous enclaves of

like-minded believers, there were two approaches taken by Christians toward people who were not Christian—we sought to convert all people to Christianity, or we conspired to get rid of all people who refused to convert by killing or marginalizing them. The history of Christian tolerance towards non-Christians is not something that I am proud of as a Christian. I regret that many violent and reprehensible acts have been done in the name of Christianity. I deplore the lack of knowledge about Islam and other religious traditions that continues to characterize the contemporary Christian community.[23]

A major challenge facing the Ministry of Religious Affairs is to move the adherents of different faiths in the country from a position of strife and tension to that of harmony and understanding. This task becomes the more daunting when society is in the grip of a major industrialization and modernization process where the basic traditional values of any religion are challenged to the core. Taher is aware of the great burdens Indonesians must shoulder because of modernization. Indonesian society is undergoing rapid social changes brought about by national development. The pace of social change is coupled with the globalization process which has invaded Indonesia [since] the last decade. Consequently, certain segments of society are experiencing disorientation, dislocation, and alienation, all of which [are] conducive to social unrest.[24]

In other words, there is an urgent task to interpret the core ideas of religion, that is Islam and other faiths in Indonesia, in the context of modernity. Instead of reacting to modernity in the form of 'religious fundamentalism', there is an urgent need to absorb the major lessons of modernity in the context of religious and social pluralism. It is almost a cliche to state that if religious faith lags behind the process of modernization it is because the intellectual leaders of that faith are unable to come to grips with the main problematic of modernity.

Taher does not perhaps agree with all the ideas expressed by the neo-modernist school in Indonesian Islam represented by Madjid and others. However, he goes a step further than most of them in seeking inspiration for his intellectual and religious work from Western, especially American sources. Here he does not see the United States as a superpower in the traditional military sense only, but as a leading intellectual and moral power as well. His stress on learning from the American religious models (that is, religion and state in a pluralistic American society) must not be translated as the Westernization or Americanization of Indonesian thought. This would be akin to mental colonization that he, and the majority of Indonesian intellectuals,

fiercely reject. However, he thinks that contemporary Indonesia can learn a great deal from the process of a rapprochement between religion and society in North America as it has unfolded in this century, and believes that a selective borrowing of ideas from American society, as a highly advanced nation, is necessary in order to rethink some of the problematics facing Indonesian intellectuals and society today.

It is clear that Taher's main concern, in addition to renewing contemporary Islamic thought in Indonesia through opening widely the door of *ijtihâd*, is to lay down foundations for solid interfaith activities in contemporary Indonesian society. This is not to claim that Taher is not preoccupied with the central questions of Islamic belief and dogma. I think that he stands at the heart of the interfaith movement in Indonesia from his position both as a Muslim leader, and as the Minister of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Indonesia.

Interfaith work is a pioneering kind of work done in a Third World context and it is courageous in the sense that all religious segments of society are asked to participate in this post-mission/*da'wah* process without hesitation or fear. It is clear that few countries in the Third World are interested in the theories behind interfaith work, or are eager that all adherents of religious faiths participate fully in the cultural and religious formation of their societies.

Interfaith work thus gains a new meaning under the Pancasila of the 1990s since it supports the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation. It is not just based on a conviction of debating and being curious about the 'Other', but of elaborating on the 'Self' in the context of fast change and modern challenges. The Muslim world, in his own words, "is a vital civilization searching for its historical identity."[25] And one may add its religious identity in the context of modernity as well. The Muslim Self that Taher would like to promote is the moral and spiritual Self, especially in a world that seems to be distant from the spiritual fountains of the great world religions. But the challenge that faces Taher, as the religious philosopher of the Pancasila, is that as a representative of the state, he must be able to preserve "harmony within each religion, amongst all religions and between the state and religions" in Indonesia.[26] This is a difficult task indeed.

One could argue that Taher's point of departure in his appreciation of the 'Other' is the 'Muslim Self', which he understands as both normative and historical. To retrieve the 'normative Self' from many centuries of socio-economic, political, and religious decline, coloni-

zation, and marginalization, (that is to say, from its stagnant 'histori-cal Self'), he calls for the revitalization of Islam's moral and spiritual dimensions. This revitalization, according to Taher, is best achieved under the auspices of an open nationalist culture and ideology. The greatest achievement of the modern Indonesian state has been the unifying "into one great nation of hundreds of 'national' groups of such diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with hundreds of regional languages."[27] In other words, in Tarmizi's view, the nationalist imagining of the contemporary Indonesian state does not negate the religious givens of Indonesian society. It has paved the way to creating harmony and an atmosphere of tolerance, is anti-thetical to conversion, is open to outside influences, and is the only philosophy that can cement the heterogeneous social and religious segments of Indonesian society.

Following his analysis of the necessity of promoting a multi-faith and pluralistic society in Indonesia, Taher differs in his appreciation of both Christianity and the West from a great number of nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim thinkers and philosophers. For ex-ample, he does not share the position of Muhammad 'Abduh or Rashid Rida or Muhammad al-Bahiy, some of the most important Arab Muslim thinkers of this century, that Christianity and the West rep-resent the antithetical 'Other'.[28] In theological terms, he considers Islam, as a monotheistic phenomenon and a divine religion, to be highly intertwined with Christianity. In other words, he sees the essence of Islam to be similar to that of Christianity. He further im-plores the Indonesian intelligentsia to be open-minded and learn as much as possible about the religious experience of other nations. In other words, Taher would like to nurture the development of a 'col-lective self' in contemporary Indonesian thought that does not just belong to the Third World, or the marginalized Third World—to use a phrase of the late Moroccan philosopher, Muhammad Aziz Lahbabi[29]—but a 'dynamic collective self' that believes in cultural and religious pluralism and is ready to face the challenges of moder-nity and the twenty first century. This approach is open to all seg-ments of society and does not draw any distinction "between 'major-ity' and 'minority' in terms of rights and responsibilities."[30] Taher, as an intellectual spokesman of the new Order, stands forcefully against reviving old fears of national or social disintegration, and, therefore, opposes any attempt, be it from the Muslim or Christian side, to shake off the foundations of national unity.

The main goal, therefore, is to seek intellectual vitality around interfaith issues and relations while discarding the whole issue of mission from a Christian perspective or the issue of *da'wah* from an Islamic perspective. It is the expectation therefore that both mission and *da'wah* positions be transformed and channeled into new energies to help the urban poor and build a common religious consensus in the Indonesia of the twenty first Century. The question is not about preferential treatment of this or that religious group but the building of strong social and religious foundations of an open society. Taher's new perspective is seeking to lay new grounds for dialogue and rapprochement in a society that has a long colonial legacy, and that looks to the twenty-first century with a pluralistic vision. In the words of Taher, "Religious harmony and tolerance are instrumental [in] the maintenance of the unity of [a] pluralistic society."[31]

Indonesia is going through a deep process of modernization. This is especially clear in Jakarta. People often ask the questions; what does modernization mean in a multi-faith country, and 'what approach should we follow in dealing with the increasing relationship between resurgent Islam and society in Indonesia?. These are critical times that need a sort of critical and open philosophy. Perhaps one answer is already provided by a contemporary Indonesian scholar living in the United States, professor Alwi Shihab, who argues that, "From a religious perspective, leaders of both religious groups [that is, Muslims and Christians] should seek valid theological foundations abundant in both religions on which to build religious tolerance."[32] However, for his part, Taher, as the intellectual architect of the contemporary religious philosophy, provides a practical answer that the practice of religious pluralism in society is undergoing a fast process of modernization.

The above questions and many others enable us to delve into a society that is rarely mentioned in the West. Indonesians seem to be unhappy with the fact that when people in the West speak of Islam they only refer to the Arab world, neglecting South East Asia. Hence the government insists that more students and scholars should be sent to Western academic and religious institutions so that the real situation in Indonesia be exposed to the outside world.

On the whole, Muslim–and even Western–scholars devote less time to studying Islam in South East Asia, and Indonesian Islam in particular, than they do to Islam in the Arab world. This has resulted in basic gaps in understanding the history of Indonesia and especially

its post-Independence situation, and understanding the dramatic changes in the standard of living and outlook of its people.

In conclusion, as Indonesia approaches the twenty-first century, and its process of modernization produces concrete results in society, there is an urgent task to interpret anew the main pillars of Pancasila in a way that is faithful to recent social and economic developments and that is acceptable by the main religious groups in the country. It is necessary to maintain religious harmony through the art of persuasion and conviction especially in a society that is more aware, collectively speaking, of its religious, nationalist, and historical mission than before. Post New Order Indonesia is a far more complex country than before. Because of this complexity, it adheres to an open interpretation of Islam, especially in the political arena. It does not share the belief of Islamic revivalists that Indonesia has to follow an Islamist political system.[33] Indonesia is a very unique and interesting country and simple solutions and cliches do not suffice to deal with the interesting problems it has faced over the past four decades.

Against the above background, the relationship between the West (especially the United States) and Indonesia takes on a special dimension. Aside from economic and political ties with America, Indonesia enjoys academic ties as well. In an atmosphere of lack of information and misinformation about Indonesia, there is an urgent need to promote Indonesia internationally by appointing Indonesian scholars and intellectuals in the role of cultural ambassadors to the world. Indonesia can serve as a model to many countries in the world by its interfaith and pluralistic vision and work. These are some of the issues that the August 1997 conference in Jakarta on Christian-Muslim relations tried to address.

Endnotes

*   I would like to thank Professor Alwi Shihab of Hartford Seminary and Usep Fathudin, a visiting scholar at Hartford Seminary, for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. Anthony Johns, "Indonesia: Islam and Cultural Pluralism." In John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 208.

2. Some of the scholars who gave presentations at the conference were: Alwi Shihab, Richard Valantassis, and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' of Hartford Seminary; John Raines, Leonard Swidler, Gerald Sloyan, and Mahmoud Ayoub of Temple University, and John L. Esposito of Georgetown University.

3. The official position of the Indonesian government on this matter runs as follows: 'Indonesia is neither a secular state nor a theistic one'. See H. Tarmizi Taher, *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Center for the Study of Islam and Society, 1997), especially page 55.

4. Minister Tarmizi Taher, current minister of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Indonesia believes that, "The main tasks of the Ministry of Religious Affairs are as follows: to develop the religious life of Indonesian society; to maintain religious harmony; and to participate in the efforts to improve social welfare." H. Tarmizi Taher, *Aspiring for the Middle Path, ibid.*, p. 23. See also, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Ministry of Religious Affairs: Tasks and Functions* (Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1996).

5. Masykuri Abdillah, *Responses of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals to the Concept of Democracy, 1966-1993* (Hamburg: A. V. Meyer, 1997), p. 19.

6. Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* [Islam, Modernity and Indonesianness] (Bandung: Mizan, 1987).

7. Abdurrahman [Wahid] and his followers are social democrats and religious liberals." R. William Liddle, "The Islamic turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55(3), August 1996, p. 617.

8. On the differences between the 'nationalist imagination' and the 'Islamist imagination' in the Muslim world, see Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), especially chapter three.

9. Robert W. Hefner, "Modernity and the Challenges of Pluralism: Some Indonesian Lessons." *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, Vol. 2(4), 1995, p. 37.

10. See Nurcholish Madjid, "Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism: [The] Indonesia Experience." *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 1(1), 1994, pp. 57-77.

11. Nurcholish Madjid, "Islamic Roots." Ibid., p. 60.

12. See Paul-Marie de la Gorce, *Le Dernier Empire* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), and Ignacio Ramonet, "L'empire americain." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 1997, p. 1.

13. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Routledge, 1992).

14. S. Takdir Alisjahbana, "Individualisme en Gemeenschapsbewustzijn in de Moderne Indonesische Letterkunde." Poejangga Baroe, March 1941.

15. Ignacio Ramonet, "L'empire americain." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 515, February 1997, p. 1.

16. Dinesh D'Souza, "Solving America's Multi cultural Dilemma." *The World and I*, January, 1996.

17. Ramonet, *ibid.*, p. 29-30.

18. Minister H. Tarmizi Taher was born in West Sumatra, a province known for its contribution to the modern Islamic ideas of reform in Indonesia. He studied at the faculty of medicine, Airlangga University, Surabaya, where he became the leader of the Muslim Students' Association known as HMI, and the president of the University Students' Association. After graduating from medical school, he took up the career in naval health. He has been minister of Religious Affairs since 1993. (Interview with Dr. Usep Fathudin, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT, September 1997).

19. To get the view of some people in the Christian community on religious tension in contemporary Indonesia, please consult, Indonesia Christian Communication Forum, "The Closing, Damage and Burning of 374 Church Buildings in Indonesia from 1945 to 1997." *ICCF Publications* (Surabaya, 1997).

20. Barbara Brown Zikmund, "New Program on Interfaith Relations within the Republic of Indonesia." *Praxis: News From Hartford Seminary*, Vol. IX, No. 1, July 1997.

21. Ali Munhanif, "Islam and the Struggle for Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: A Political Reading of the Religious Thought of Mukti Ali." *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 3(1), 1996, pp. 79-126.

22. H. Tarmizi Taher, *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Center for the Study of Islam and Society, 1997).

23. Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Rethinking a Christian theology of Mission." *Praxis: News From Hartford Seminary*, Vol. IX, No. 1, July 1997, p. 4.

24. Taher, *ibid.*, p. 44.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

26. "Au nom de la philosophie *Pancasila*, les representants de l-Etat estiment du'ils doivent preserver l'harmonie a l'interieur de chaque religion, entre toutes les religions, et entre les religions et le Governement." F. Raillon, "Chretiens et Musulmans en Indonesie: les voies de la tolerance. *Islamochristiana* (Rome), vol. 15, 1989, pp. 162-3.

27. Taher, p. 9.

28. On the Arab views of the 'Other', see Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "The Concept of the 'Other' in Modern Arab Thought: From Muhammad 'Abduh to Abdallah Laroui." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 8(1) 1997, pp. 85-97.

29. See M. Lahbabi, *Le monde de demain: Le Tiers-Monde accuse* (Casablanca: Dar el-Kitab, 1980).

30. Taher, *ibid.*, p. 5.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

32. Alwi Shihab, "Muslim-Christian Encounters in Indonesia." *News: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions*, vol. 4(2), Spring 1997, p. 11.

33. Taher may agree with the following statement: "The usually unsated accusation is that once Islamic groups attain power they will reveal themselves to be, in the New Order lexicon, anti-Pancasila. This prospect revives old fears of national disintegration, an explosion of Muslim-Christian enmity, and the demise of Indonesia as a secular state." Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 165.

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