

Chapter 4 The Future of Religion

It would be a catastrophe if a person claimed to have faith but was dishonest in his or her actions. Such a person might appear observant symbolically and ritually, but symbols and rituals are not the same as the substance of a steadfast belief. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, religion confronted complex problems, not only due to external factors, but also to the internal conditions of its adherents, which are far from resolved. At the same time, much of the world is unfriendly to spiritual values. Need the *umat* surrender? Surrendering would be the same as digging one's own grave.

Islam: An Open Religion

What if the Quran were asked, does Islam have the courage to confront the challenges of science, theology, ideology, Sufism, and philosophy, challenges that arise almost anywhere? If the *umat*, which claims to believe that the Quran is the final message from Heaven, is now powerless to prove the truth of this message in the real world, will God be silent and waive His responsibility to preserve the Quran as the source of wisdom for humanity? We cannot surrender our search for the answers to such questions merely to human reason, whoever possesses it, whether *ulama*, theologians, philosophers, or famous Sufis. We must be prepared to negotiate with the Quran about these formidable problems.

With all its awesome capabilities, mankind is still limited. Mankind is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. If the questions we address are in the realm of the limitless, then we must call on faith to discuss them. Reason and intuition at this stage only function as faith's ancillaries. This postulate is sure to be rejected by atheist philosophers, because a theist in their eyes "is someone who lacks the nerve to be an atheist," to borrow the expression of the French Catholic writer de Bonald.¹ The Quran, as I understand it, gives the freedom of choice to each person to be a theist or an atheist, with all the risks of each of these. The reason for this is that without free choice it would be difficult for us to locate the proper place of human responsibility. For responsibility can only be asked of a morally free humanity. It would be virtually impossible to ask a slave or someone with a slave's mentality to take responsibility for his

or her behavior. Slaves generally act at the command of their masters and do not have the freedom to choose.

If mankind is neither omnipotent nor omniscient, the energy stored in its Ego, according to Muhammad Iqbal, is extraordinary, on the condition the work of *ijtihad* is bravely performed. In the context of this stream of thought, Iqbal's concept that *ijtihad* needs to be given an adequate portion continues to be relevant to the condition of the Islamic world, which is still gasping to overcome endless internal problems. It would seem extremely difficult to make the Muslim *umat* in general understand absolute freedom of thought as a condition for a sincere *ijtihad*. In fact, the success of prophetic values regarding social change and the advance of civilization will very much depend on the quality of *ijtihad* performed by the Muslim thinker bravely and with a complete sense of responsibility.

For Iqbal, *ijtihad* is the "principle of movement" within the Islamic structure.² Because of that, the cessation of *ijtihad* for centuries now has brought the world of Islam to a situation of rigidity and gloom. According to Iqbal, for some this is the result of lazy thinking in confronting big problems. In an era of spiritual decay in the world of ideas, the great Muslim thinkers have been idolized.³ Their pronouncements are placed above the Quran and the Sunnah, whether consciously or not. As Iqbal sees it, the idea that the formulations of Muslim thinkers of the past, no matter how breathtaking, are final, goes against the entire spirit of the Quran. There is not a single authentic guideline found in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet that would have us stop thinking, that would have us blandly accept everything that has been laid out by the classic thinkers. This does not mean that their work is unimportant; on the contrary, it is very important to study them. Did not the companions of the Prophet themselves quarrel and argue? They even fought against each other – which we, however, should not imitate.

If that is the case, what is demanded of those who come later? Nothing less than a critical attitude in evaluating their thinking, because the result of *ijtihad* is definitely bound up with the spirit and energy of the time and the place. Thus, the *ijtihad* of our predecessors was born out of their interaction with the times they lived in. How can we be certain that even their contemporaries thought the same way as they did, let alone us moderns, who live in such a different era? Iqbal argues, "The only road open to us is to conduct an approach to modern knowledge with the greatest respect, but with an independent attitude when evaluating the teachings of Islam in the light of this knowledge, even if it may happen that we will be guided to differ from those who preceded us."⁴ Of course, Iqbal's statement here must be treated with care to avoid our being fettered by modernism, because that is not our direction either.

Here is another question. Why do we fear to be different? Does *ijtihad* not straighten out the road to agree or differ with mature and rational arguments? We have to ensure that Islamic teaching can function with stability and has the power to resolve problems that arise endlessly in social life. At the highest intellectual level, it is revelation that has to show the way for humanity whenever science and philosophy have thrown up their hands in surrender. Science and philosophy, for example, will not be able to answer the question of the meaning of life and death, for such things are in the realm that transcends history.

It is not possible to make Islamic teaching something that lives and gives life in our times if we are not brave enough to critically assess all the unquestionably rich Islamic thinking of the past eras. And we courageously take what is relevant to our own era and to our benefit after we have tested this against the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, and based on our *ijtihad* by referring to these two main sources. For example, in political thought, with all our respect for Al-Mawardi (d. 1050), a jurist and diplomat of the Al-Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, with his famous work *The Ordinances of the Government*,⁵ is this work not really only a justification and defense of the rule by the Abbasid dynasty that was crumbling from within? In one of his lectures in Chicago in 1981, Fazlur Rahman very expertly laid out the argument that the political system in the form of the imamate/caliphate did not represent a religious commandment. "The caliphate," he said, "is not a divinely ordained political system, but that Islam needs a political power for rendering its precepts and ideals into the reality of history is no doubt divinely ordained."⁶ For me, speaking about political systems in Islam is simply the work of *ijtihad* according to the spirit of the times, as has been examined in Chapter 2.

The performance of *ijtihad* is without question a major task that needs the perspective of breadth, depth, and intelligence. For Iqbal, a *mujtahid* (one who performs *ijtihad*) must possess penetrating thought and fresh experience for a reconstructive undertaking that stretches into the future.⁷ Reconstructive work by itself contains within itself deconstructive work on the past, which we view as needing correction. There is really nothing special in this process, because if it is not undertaken, it means that we are making an idol of obsolete thinking, something so sharply criticized by Iqbal. As an important key for performing *ijtihad*, a knowledge of Arabic is indispensable, as is an acquaintance with a critical attitude toward the record of Islamic history from the earliest times to the present. This critical attitude will be increasingly stimulated by modern findings and the world these create. Without an awareness of all this, our level of intellectualism would seem to simply remain on the sidelines.

Because the Islamic world has not fully roused itself from its deep and protracted sleep, to begin its reconstructive work on the entire structure of Islamic thought, we are confronted by a number of challenges and obstacles. But these must be faced bravely. Iqbal, who called himself “the first Adam in a new world,”⁸ was well aware of how difficult it would be to penetrate the fortress of conservatism in Muslim society, which survives in three power structures:

1. Mullahism (*ulamaism*). The *ulama* have always been a source of great power in Islam. But over the centuries, and especially since the fall of Baghdad [to the Mongols, in 1258], they have become very conservative and do not provide an opportunity for the freedom of *ijtihad* in matters of the law.
2. Mysticism. The Muslim masses have been diverted by a kind of mysticism that blinds them to reality. From its elevated status as one power of spiritual education, mysticism has fallen headlong into a state of merely being a tool to exploit the ignorance and beliefs of the masses.
3. The rajas. The eyes of the Muslim rajas in earlier times (but how is this different from today?) were firmly focused on the interests of their dynasties. As long as these interests were assured, they never hesitated to sell their countries to the highest bidder.⁹

If Islam is to function with sincerity in its entirety, the means that is open is to penetrate the fortress of conservatism wisely and through dialogue, but with total courage. (Iqbal may have gone too far in describing this courage when he said, “I will not paddle my *prau* [boat] into the seas where there are no crocodiles in the waves.”¹⁰) It is not just the fortress of conservatism that must be attacked, however. The fatalistic worldview, according to Iqbal, must also be opposed, because it goes against the truth of life, which has to be enriched with the movements of endless struggle: “If you are capable of composing poetry / Touch it to the touchstone of life.”¹¹

For Iqbal, poetry does not just express a profound sense of beauty, it has at the same time the mission to enhance the quality of life. The Islamic world, which is at the margin of civilization, must give birth to the poetry of enlightenment and consciousness, and Iqbal did this with a great *élan vital* until death took the pen from his hand. Did not Allah swear to the importance of the pen: “*Nun*. By the pen and what they inscribe”?¹²

Ijtihad may be done only by someone brave enough to carry on imaginative dialogue with God. In his philosophy of the Ego, Iqbal wants

to emphasize that mankind's Ego (*khudi*) is creative and its wanderings have a definite objective. It is in this creativity that the difference between humankind and other, lower, creatures lies.¹³ In this way, the Ego is a creative force that always moves forward, never thinking of stopping. The environment is penetrated and subdued according to the will of the Ego. In an imaginary dialogue of humankind, which speaks familiarly with God in spite of its critical attitude, Iqbal gives us this poem:

God has decreed
This is the way things are
Forget about any further ideas you may have about it.

Mankind responds:
No doubt about it – that is the way things are
But this is the way they ought to be.¹⁴

For one fleeting moment, humankind looks as if it is rebelling, but it is not that we see. What is intended here is that humankind should not give up, so long as the challenge confronting it is still within the human grasp.

Humankind's answer, "But this is the way they ought to be," symbolizes just how awesome its creativity is, if it only knew. *Ijtihad* demands bringing the highest creativity to understanding the message of Islam, so as to guard against social changes veering off onto the wrong track. It is as if Iqbal invites God to discuss what God has created. If so, then why hesitate to question the result of the *ijtihad* of past generations of Muslims who were limited by their times? In this way, we see that the enemy of creative thinking is simply and solely the fear of being different, if that difference is crucial for a greater good. Why do we still not have what it takes to think big, while the reality in front of us is truly breathtaking? The Islamic world is being manipulated by other groups simply because our quality leaves us easily manipulated. I fail to understand how there still are Muslims who feel "happy" to live in false pride while floundering in the shattered greatness of the past. False pride is the refuge of people in despair, not much different from those who espouse a theology of death. If Iqbal were still living, surely the detonations of his poetry would knock down those who run from reality out of fear of facing that reality.

The Ego's advance is not movement without an objective in Iqbal's system of thinking, unlike what we find in the *élan vital* of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, which moves aimlessly. According to Iqbal, the Ego longs to approach God under its own power and effort. Borrowing power and energy from some other party is taboo, because this paralyzes

the Ego in its efforts to get close to the Absolute Ego (that is, God). The closer one gets, the more perfect one becomes (*Insan Kamil*), or in Farsi, *mard-e mu'min*, an expression borrowed by Iqbal from the linguistic treasure house of the Sufis.

In breaking through to begin its advance, the Ego always encounters a variety of obstacles. The greatest obstacles are matter and nature. These obstacles must be opposed and overcome by courageous struggle. Only someone brave can healthily develop the potential of his or her Ego. A coward will never attain meaningful goals in life; the coward is by nature a highwayman on the highway of life whose nature is unhealthy for the development of human emotions. Iqbal would like humankind to develop without fear to achieve emotional health. For this poet there is no mountain too high to climb and no valley too deep to descend into. The only condition is courage.

Iqbal was also an outspoken social reformer. His attention to the poor was especially impressive. In a letter to his son, Javid Iqbal, our poet writes:

The way of life of the rich man is not my way
I am a mendicant, a faqir,
My advice: do not sell your Ego;
Even in destitution, find time to drink your fill of satisfaction.¹⁵

How beautiful and profound is the poignancy of this advice, but how difficult it is to realize without superior spiritual training. The writer himself is still far from success in carrying out such spiritual practices, which must be grasped through devout religiosity together with deep meditation and thought.

Iqbal really does liken himself to a faqir who no longer has material needs. He identifies himself as rooted in an impoverished society, not in the society of the wealthy elite. In *Rumûz-e Bekhûdî*, his affection for the humble folk comes through very clearly. The following excerpt clarifies his social stance:

I am committed to the masses
It is a real blessing to me
A maturity of my essence
Originates from the masses
Draw yourself up close to them
As close as can be
Give yourself over to the people
As Khair-Al-Bashar has said:

Only a satan
Separates us from the mass of society.¹⁶

For Iqbal, the Ego has meaning only if it unites with society at large. Outside of society, the Ego has no meaning. Is not a wave called a wave as long as it rolls along on the surface of the water? Thus, improving the quality of life of the common people both externally and internally was central in the social philosophy of the poet. His anti-elitism is keenly felt. His social philosophy fuses with the beat of the pulse of those who are discarded and ill-fated.

Brave deeds are needed to improve these social defects. The value of practicing Iqbal's thinking is located here, but it is ironic that his message was received with indifference by his fellow countrymen. His biography tells how Iqbal was very generous. He would always be ready to help anyone who came to him. For Iqbal, philosophy without practical value would only be empty speculative daydreaming, regardless of the sophistication and complexity with which such speculations might be framed.

Finally, the attitude of surrendering to fate using the excuse of predetermination in Iqbal's view shreds the teaching of Islam about the responsibility to work and to struggle, since the essence of life is stored in action (*'amal*): "In action is hidden the essence of life."¹⁷ In other words, it is only the results of our deeds that really belong to us. The results of the work of others belong entirely to them.

Now let us return to the main point of our discussion. So that we do not move too far off from these philosophically and theologically nuanced problems, let us see the response of the Quran. The first question is about the courage of Islam in confronting challenges. In one verse, the Quran issues this challenge: "And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant [Muhammad], then produce a surah the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful."¹⁸ The Quranic exegete Muhammad Ali Al-Shabuni explains the call for witnesses as follows: "And call upon your assistants and helpers who can give support to you in opposing the Quran, apart from Allah, glorified and exalted be He."¹⁹ This verse emphasizes that the Quran may not be opposed, although it can be tested with the aid of philosophers, theologians, and thinkers of whatever caliber and originating in whatever civilization.

Naturally, we know from empirical experience that this is easier said than done. Under the circumstances of a weak *umat*, one lacking in authority, someone will glibly say that all our backwardness has been

caused by the Quran, which stands in the way of human progress. If the Quran urges mankind to be intelligent, why then for hundreds of years has the Muslim *umat* been shunted away from the mainstream of civilization, the good and the bad? Regardless, Muslims not infrequently identify themselves “as the best of all *umats*,”²⁰ in spite of having fallen flat on the ground. In connection with this topic, the criticism by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana (STA), leveled at the Muslim *umat* in the Constituent Assembly (1956–1959), is worth reflecting on: “The chosen creatures who embrace the chosen religion cannot be weak, poor, and backward. That would be a betrayal of the religion itself.”²¹ This criticism was very sharp, but, I feel, delivered in all sincerity, even though in those constitutional debates STA rejected Islam as the basis of the state. For STA, the weak, poor, and backward conditions of the *umat* were the signs of betrayal by its adherents of the religion that was believed to be the best and truest religion of all. Why had the Muslim *umat* fallen into such conditions as expressed by STA? No one theory can give a complete answer to this question. The late Fazlur Rahman, in one of his lectures at the University of Chicago in the 1980s, lamented the far-from-progressive condition of the Muslim *umat* when he said, “We live in a different kind of Islam, not in Quranic Islam.”²² What did he mean? We need to explore this further.

In contrast to the accusation of some experts who link the ignorance of the Muslim *umat* to the Quran, Rahman argued the opposite. It is precisely because the Quran is no longer understood properly and intelligently that the Muslim *umat* is oppressed, ignorant, and impoverished. We are beaten in the race of civilizations and our fate in the hereafter is by no means assured. The Quran is of course still read, and is even a runner in the race, so to speak, but the spiritual atmosphere of the world of Islam, as I see it, is by no means equal to the image given in this holy scripture. That image portrays a life that is just, intelligent, prosperous, peaceful, secure, and free – all of which is the realization of the dictum “a blessing for the universe.” In its current position, however, the Muslim *umat* seems to have trouble differentiating between the straight road that must be traveled and the twisting road that must be avoided, let alone spreading the blessings of the Quran more widely. In our hands, the Quran no longer functions as *al-furqan*, the criterion that differentiates between the right and the wrong roads.²³

But the Quran forbids the Muslim community from sitting passively, “with hands on lap,” and lamenting its bad fortune. There still is a strong belief among us that we must rise up and no longer be squeezed into a narrow and stifling back alley. After having been hammered by history for centuries, sooner or later the various Muslim worlds will surely come to an overall awareness of the need for enlightenment. That is, on condition

that the initiative for “arousing” God’s attention must be made in the form of brave and creative works to penetrate and dispel the miasma of stagnation.²⁴ In this connection, the old saying, “brave because you’re right, afraid because you’re wrong,” must be changed to “being brave is right, being afraid is wrong.” This is not just a change in the wording but a change in the thought paradigm to facilitate a breakthrough. Because the Quran is an open scripture, therefore logically the Muslim community must appear to be an open *umat*. Open, and bold enough to admit all its ugliness and weaknesses so as to promptly set about correcting them in all sincerity. Leave behind the pride in fakery, use accurate parameters so we may reflect ourselves as intelligently as possible, hiding nothing, as I have said so often. Speak out and admit frankly that the past of the Islamic *umat* is filled with history’s infamies as well as the wonderful creativity of its thinkers. A balanced approach toward the past is the only approach that is just and proper. Otherwise, the picture will be distorted, dishonest, and misleading.

This transparency I call for means there remain no hidden weaknesses such as those that have been with us for decades now, if not centuries, and have been purposely concealed out of shame. A humanity that is prepared to laugh at itself shows that it has awakened from a long and deep sleep. This is important, because living in false pride is proof of dishonesty and a lack of self-confidence. Readiness to see oneself openly is a form of courage in assessing one’s naked reality. Admission of one’s own weaknesses and readiness to correct them is a prerequisite for moving forward to a better future.

In the realm of abstract intellectual thinking, the Islamic culture of which we are heirs is now almost completely the product of Muslims’ past interactions and clashes with various elements of other civilizations: Hellenist, Persian, Roman, Turkish, and Indian. Philosophy, theology, Sufism, and the political thinking that then blossomed in the Islamic world were due to the stimulation of that creative interaction. This did not always go smoothly, but it did enrich the treasure house of Islamic civilization that flourished for about five centuries, from the eighth to the thirteenth of the Common Era.

During this period, the Islamic world, whether in Southwest Asia, North Africa, or Europe, was admitted to be the most advanced and civilized region. This period is usually crowned the Golden Age of Islamic Civilization, although not without a qualifying footnote in the form of friction between the famous thinkers of the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. These were not merely intellectual clashes, but also not infrequently wars between the Muslims themselves. In Indonesia, their resonance was not strongly felt, perhaps because of the geographical

location of Nusantara in the East, separated as it was from the centers of intellectual strife in Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Spain, in an era when communications were still primitive.

Because of Nusantara's position far in the East, the Islam of Indonesia has its own strengths and weaknesses. Its strength is that it can make a fresh beginning without being burdened by ideological friction that at its worst results in mutual slandering or even anathematizing opponents as *kafir* (unbelievers). The condition for making a fresh beginning is for Indonesian Muslims to equip themselves with a broad and deep knowledge, a quality that still needs to be struggled over in Indonesia. Its weakness is that Islam in Indonesia is supported by adherents who, for the most part, do not understand the Arabic language, including the readings during the congregational prayer. And yet to understand the authentic sources of Islam, command of Arabic is a requisite. This shortcoming can be overcome, so long as a person wants to study. This statement does not necessarily mean that understanding Arabic means a better understanding of Islam. That very much depends on whether or not ability in Arabic is used to understand religion and history in an intelligent and honest way within the framework of a just and civilized humanism.

The second question is, will God be silent even if the *umat* of Muhammad lacks the power to protect and maintain the Quran? The evidence of history shows that over the past fourteen centuries, the text of the Quran has been preserved. Every time soiled hands try to destroy it, the Muslim *umat* will always emerge to set matters right, because the memorizers (*huffaz*) of this holy scripture will guard against all possible harm to the Quran. As far as I know, throughout history the Quran, with its thirty sections, 114 surahs, and over six thousand lines, has been the only holy scripture that can be memorized.

The facts of the matter cannot be denied. Experience shows that memorizing Chairil Anwar's famous poem "Karawang Bekasi," which is only thirty-two lines in length, is quite difficult. How much more so it would be to memorize thousands of lines?²⁵ Why is the Quran memorizable? There is no easy rational answer to this, but empirical experience is forced to admit it. Rationally speaking, memorizing the Quran by rote is really something miraculous. Beginning with the Prophet and his companions, the memorizers of this holy scripture carry on this practice to the present day and will surely continue to do so in the future. What's more, there are a number of *pesantren* in Indonesia, for example, that specialize in developing this culture of memorizing. The weakness of this culture is that ability to memorize the Quran is not balanced by the ability to understand this holy scripture.

But the above question demands a further answer, because the expression “protect the Quran” is not only limited to the purity of the text, but also to ability of the Muslim *umat* to carry its message to the world. We can debate long and hard about this problem of ability. What is clear is that the Muslim *umat*, beginning in the eighteenth century, no longer counted for much globally, even though the Ottoman Turks were still sovereign; for the process of disintegration within was also underway there. Some of the regions of Nusantara had begun to be colonized as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Other regions were subdued gradually.

Islam and Religious Sincerity

Why must we talk about sincerity when we discuss religion or religions? What is sincerity? Can the relations between the religious faithful continue amicably and peacefully without sincerity? This is one of the key questions for which we must find the answer within the framework of Islam, humanity, and Indonesian identity, which are the main focus of this work.²⁶

I shall begin with an exploration of sincerity and its implications. *Ketulusan*, the Indonesian word for “sincerity,” from the root word *tulus*, contains the meanings “honesty, purity, truthfulness, devotion.” *Tulus* and *ikhlas* are also frequently joined together to mean “pure of heart, honest.”²⁷ *Ikhlas* comes from the Arabic root *kh-l-s*, which means “pure, clean, unadulterated, free.” *Ikhlas* means “sincere devotion, honesty, truthfulness.”²⁸ The English word “sincere” (Latin: *sincerus*) means “pure and clean, trusted, free from trickery and pretense, honest, genuine, pure, and straightforward of speech.”²⁹ It so happens that the idea of *ketulusan* means substantially the same thing; all these words contain within them the ideas of purity, honesty, and cleanliness. A proper religion must possess these main values. Otherwise, religion is no more than a ceremonial show, all symbol and no substance.

Now let us look at what the Quran says about who among humankind is sincere and what are the signs of this sincerity. According to the Quran, the prophets and Messengers are those who are *tulus ikhlas*, pure of heart, free from envy, pretense, and all the ills that can bring down the edifice of human nature.³⁰ In the same way, all religious followers are ordered by God to be *tulus* and truthful in understanding and practicing their religion, whatever it may be.³¹ Without *ketulusan*, a religion would mean nothing before God and would even mislead others as well as oneself. It seems that there is almost no civilization on the face of the earth that

does not understand these concepts in much the same way. Religion will then emphasize and exalt the meaning of the word *ketulusan*. Putting it another way, *ketulusan* is the part that fuses with primordial human nature, a nature that has never been contaminated.

A person who is *tulus* – sincere – when giving something to another person does not look to receive anything in return except the blessing of Allah, not the blessing of man. In the language of the Quran: “We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude.”³² Such an attitude of the faithful is of course taught by other religions as well, because giving without ulterior motive may fully originate in the doctrine of Heaven, although after arriving on earth it has been distorted by the partiality and weakness of mankind. Giving without ulterior motive is surely supported by the strength of true sincerity.

We do not easily come across this true sincerity in modern and secular, not to say atheistic, civilization. But religion certainly will not surrender to those worldly challenges. In traditional Abrahamic monotheism, Islam is the youngest religion, after Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, the Muslim *umat* must learn as much as possible from its “older brother religions” in confronting the attacks of atheistic secularism, even as we know that these older brothers themselves have been sent reeling from these attacks. Nietzsche’s words that appeared for the first time in *The Gay Science*, “God is dead,” present a reading of this philosophy about increasingly nihilistic³³ modern civilization, at a time when the European churches seem powerless. What is interesting is the observation of Nietzsche that it is Religious Man, pious and filled with devotion, who has slaughtered God. “For Nietzsche,” writes Gianni Vattimo, “the entire process of nihilism can be summarized with the death of God, or with the bankruptcy of the highest values.”³⁴

The paradoxical statement that the pious have killed God needs serious attention on the part of the religious *umat*. In the context of the Muslim *umat*, is our religious attitude really *tulus* (sincere) if we do not defend the principle of a just and civilized society but instead allow the poor and the orphans to be abandoned and neglected in their misery, as apparently is the general trend of Indonesian society? Centuries before Nietzsche was born, the Quran flung out this question: “Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? For that is the one who drives away the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor.”³⁵ In other words, in the eyes of the Quran, the one who cares not for the suffering of others is a liar.

The twin of sincerity (*ketulusan*) is truthfulness (*kejujuran*). Without exception, all religions teach honesty, even if not all their followers are honest. These qualities are the fruit of a sincere faith. This is a matter of

the heart and not the work of calculations by the brain. In daily life, I not infrequently meet with friends who profess different religions, but I feel the heart-to-heart contact is a very close one. Why? Because sincerity is there, and honesty. Differences of belief do not become obstacles to the linking of two human hearts. And if that is the case, then sincerity (*ketulusan*) is indeed of great value.

Indonesia does not lack experience in political cooperation between adherents of different faiths. Modern Indonesian history has recorded close and productive comradeship carried on by major figures of the Masyumi with Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and other leaders. The closeness of Natsir or Prawoto Mangkusasmito with I.J. Kasimo, Herman Johannes, A.M. Tambunan, or J. Leimena, both during the revolution for independence and afterwards, is still fresh in our collective memories. As is that between Burhanuddin Harahap and the Balinese Hindu Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung. Kasimo even joined with Masyumi and PSI (Indonesian Socialist Party) leaders in trying to oppose Sukarno's authoritarian political system during the Guided Democracy era (1959–1965), even though in the end they were frustrated because that system was also supported by the military and certain other political parties.

Perhaps, quite apart from the foundation of their sincere friendships, there was another factor that more and more tightened the bonds of friendship: that is, they all possessed idealism and personal integrity. They all were genuine moralists who had been born in the womb of the Indonesian nation. Ultimately, J. Leimena was coopted by the authoritarian system, although that does not diminish the respect that the Muslim *umat* has felt for him.

Sweet memories such as this have somewhat disappeared from subsequent generations in the past three decades. I see a number of possible reasons. First, later generations never experienced the revolution for independence, which succeeded in building up comradeship among the generation of Natsir-Kasimo-Johannes, and others. Later on we had the 1966 Movement, but it appears that the personal integrity of its leading figures was not as firm as that of the preceding generation. Second, the seductions of power politics were more formidable in the years that followed the Natsir-Kasimo-Johannes era; its temptations truly contaminated one's sincerity. Third, the issue of Christianization during the New Order period (1966–1998) has increased mutual suspicion, especially between the adherents of Islam and Christianity.

We most certainly cannot allow feelings of mutual suspicion to exist and to grow. The results could shatter the body and soul of this nation. The destruction of lives and property that occurred in Maluku (1999–2002) must awaken us all to correcting ourselves, so that provocateurs

cannot easily wreck the feelings of brotherhood among us that it has taken so long to build. In that conflict-ridden region, the clashes were not initially religion-based, but rather instigated by economic and political interests. But then religion was manipulated for the unhealthy objectives of stirring up emotions and exploiting solidarity.

If religion is misused the results can be very destructive and even fatal. It is easy for people to kill each other in the name of religion. Such phenomena happen not just between the followers of different religions but among believers of the same religion. Such situations become extremely complex. When religion is misused this way, sincerity and honesty as authentic proof of faith become powerless, and the whisperings of satans take over to plunge the religious communities into calamity and mutual destruction.

The next question is, will we always need religion? To illustrate religion as a source of the doctrine of sincerity, I should now discuss some musings by A.J. Toynbee (1889–1975) on the function of religion in the age of technology, which is ever more sophisticated yet ever more malignant. This historian was a Christian and an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. Toynbee wrote thirty pages to answer this central question: Is religion a perennial need?³⁶ To facilitate his response, Toynbee raised a number of sub-questions within the framework of strengthening the position of religion as an eternal need for mankind. These sub-questions included: Why are we here? For what reason are we here? Is life a blessing or a curse?

According to Toynbee, religion is an effort to give answers to these urgent questions, inasmuch as science and philosophy are unable to provide complete answers. “Religion,” he said, “is an attempt to discover how to reconcile ourselves to the formidable facts of life and death.”³⁷ What worried this British historian is how difficult it is to discover *Homo sapiens* in modern civilization. How little we show wisdom in controlling ourselves and in ordering our relations with each other, he writes. In the event that we do succeed in surviving in the midst of this technological revolution, only then will become *Homo sapiens*, in truth and in name.³⁸

If we connect Toynbee’s concept of *Homo sapiens*, which, we might say, means “the intelligent one,” to our discussion about Islam and religious sincerity, we will see a clear red thread running through the two. Sincerity is the basic characteristic that fuses with the character of *Homo sapiens*. The person who claims to be intelligent but is dishonest in his or her deeds is making a false claim. So, too, is someone who trades in religion in the name of God. At the same time this person plays dangerous games with the truth, he or she is disavowing the concept of sincerity. Treating your religion as commodity to be bought and sold tarnishes that same

religion, for once it is traded, religion degenerates into a worldly good of no value. In this situation, religion no longer is perennially needed. That is the reason Toynbee categorizes religions into “higher religions,” which are those religions oriented to Heaven, and “lower religions,” those religions that cleave to the earth and busy themselves on behalf of low interests. Nationalism, for Toynbee, is part of the lower religions, which often trigger conflicts between countries.³⁹

We return to the issue of relations between and among religious adherents. I have seen that it is often the case that among religious communities quantity is emphasized over quality. For the former, the total number of followers is the important thing, even at the cost of mediocre quality. So it comes as no surprise that their people think of ways of getting the most fellow-members. If necessary, they herd the inhabitants of the earth like livestock into having the same faith as they do. Such an arrogant and intolerant attitude is harshly criticized by the Quran in the following verse: “And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed – all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?”⁴⁰

This verse, and still more others, strictly forbid people from using force, whether gently or harshly, in religion. Elsewhere in the Quran, the pluralism of religions and cultures from thousands of years ago is a hard fact of history, and thus must be respected and acknowledged with thanks. This is because, when seen in a wider perspective, such phenomena have enriched the universal edifice of humankind, so long as we are capable of managing them. But the small-minded see the historical fact of pluralism in religion, culture, customary law, ethnicity, and civilization as a threat to their existence. If such narrow views are allowed to dominate in society, religion will no longer be a blessing but a curse and a doctrine of compulsion. Ethical systems born out of them will surely be authoritarian and will attempt to monopolize the truth.

If that happens, how difficult will this life be? God has created diversity, but humanity instead chooses honesty-killing uniformity. Genuine friendship can only be built on a foundation of firm belief that engenders sincerity and honesty. As to the issue of relationships across religious lines, I would offer this formula: “Be varied in your friendship and be friends in your differences.” Otherwise I am afraid that religion will no longer function as a source of tranquility and peace, but rather be source of discord, disorder, and even war. Therefore, the Quran warns: “So take warning [from the experience of the past], O people of vision.”⁴¹ The genuine *Homo sapiens* are those who know well how to glean deep wisdom from the human experience, experience gained in layer upon layer of centuries and eras. History in this sense is a laboratory of wisdom.

But how dearly bought is that wisdom! And, too, how often history is written for the benefit of the rulers, so that when we search for wisdom, falsehood is what we find.

Symbolism: Salt and Lipstick

Comparing salt to lipstick, as I interpret it, comes from something Mohammad Hatta said in 1976 in the context of teaching the Muslim *umat* of Indonesia to be wiser in struggling for the Islamic politics they aspire to. The Muslim *umat*, according to Hatta “should use the science of salt: it is tasted but not seen. This is different from the science of lipstick: seen but not tasted!”⁴² Even if Hatta may not have further explained what he meant by this, for me it is a guide to a cultural strategy that it is exceedingly important for the Muslim *umat* of Indonesia to reflect on deeply. The science of salt and lipstick is a part of the response by Hatta to this question from Z. Yasni: “Mr. Hatta, what pushed you to form a new party, the PDII [Partai Demokrasi Islam Indonesia – the Indonesian Islamic Democratic Party]?” Hatta replied, “The main objective was to educate the Muslim *umat* in Indonesia on how to have political parties with an Islamic basis in a responsible democratic life in a state that is founded on the Pancasila.”⁴³

This idea of Hatta’s was very clear. Its objective was to educate the Muslim *umat* to be skillful and clever in carrying itself in its fight for the teachings of Islam in Indonesia. To be frank, my brain and my heart have wrestled long and hard with these thoughts of his, given the actual sociological conditions in Indonesia. I finally arrived at the conclusion that Hatta’s idea should be greeted positively, because of course it embodies the crucial issue that has for decades burdened our Muslim *umat* when speaking about the relationship of Islam and politics. As I have said repeatedly, if people want to fight for Islamic teachings in Indonesia, use “the science of salt, not the science of lipstick.” When salt dissolves into food, it leaves no visible trace, but its effect in the taste is certainly decisive. In contrast, the lipstick worn by women is eye-catching red, but it is tasteless. Hatta was very sharp in perceiving the connection between Islam and the Indonesian soul. So far, I have yet to find such advice from anyone else, including from the top leaders of the Islamic parties in the past, let alone today.

These words by Mohammad Hatta were so strategic in interpreting and dissecting the link between Islam and Indonesianness that I am going to take several pages here to discuss them. Who does not know Mohammad Hatta, the leader with a character as strong as coral? He was

as well a moralist seldom matched in modern Indonesian history, an authentic Pancasila leader in theory and practice. I would definitely react if any group called Hatta a secularist, simply because of the matter of the “seven words” that went missing from the Jakarta Charter in the summer of 1945.

With his sincere belief, Hatta was unwilling to witness Indonesian Islam as lipstick, visible but not tasteable, occupied with ceremony but lacking in substance, bellowing “*Allahu akbar!*” while wrecking and defaming other people. For Hatta, faith was something subtle that teaches humankind to be civilized and to possess an elegant courtesy in human intercourse.

To see Hatta’s character from a distance, let us look at what Arnold Mononutu, a companion of Hatta’s since 1923 in the Netherlands, had to say, and then we will consider Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX’s impression of him.

In April 1923, when the Indische Vereeniging was about to change its name to PI (Perhimpunan Indonesia), Mononutu was invited by Alex Maramis to be present at The Hague to witness this name change. Mononutu at first doubted whether Hatta and his friends in the PI would want him there, because he was “neither Indonesian nor Dutch.” What happened next? Mononutu was accepted with great warmth. This is the testimony of that Christian nationalist figure: “I was greatly moved that I was accepted as I was by Bung Hatta, Soebardjo, Nazir Sutan Pamuntjak, Iwa Koesoemasoemantri – the leaders of the PI. From then on, I no longer danced and drank liquor at the hotels, and I worked only for Indonesia, from 1923 in the PI up until now [1984]. From that moment, Perhimpunan Indonesia gave me an Indonesian nationality! From 1923, Bung Hatta became my loyal comrade until he passed away.”⁴⁴

This statement proves that it was the PI in 1923 that infused the “virus” of nationhood into Arnold Mononutu. Before that, he was only a young Minahasan who did not feel he was Indonesian – Indonesia as a nation, of course, had not appeared before the 1920s. Because he was directly affected by Hatta’s strong character, Mononutu gave up his playboy life in Europe.⁴⁵

When Hatta visited Paris, he would usually work in Mononutu’s room at the Hôtel du Progrès. One day, Hatta wanted to borrow Mononutu’s typewriter. “Arnold,” he said, “lend me the typewriter. I want to type a letter.” Because the typewriter had already been pawned, this was Mononutu’s reaction:

I made a pretense of looking for it. Bung Hatta watched me and said, “Ach, Arnold, the typewriter’s not something small. Why are you looking

for it like that? Where is it?" I was forced to admit that Soebardjo and I had pawned it and the money had been spent on messing around in bars. Hatta got really angry and exclaimed, "That's national property, and you had the nerve to interfere with national property! That is absolutely no good!!"⁴⁶

Mononutu was quite honest about the past, even though it was very spotty, as one might say. Mononutu did not want to pretend he had been pure; he examined himself critically as he really had been. This is the sign of a great-spirited person.

And now the testimony of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX about Hatta when the capital of the republic had to move from Jakarta to Yogyakarta to continue the revolution. Here is what he had to say:

While the other leaders were busy relating their travels, Bung Hatta was totally absorbed in the political situation. After his own exhausting journey, the first thing he asked was about the fighting spirit of the people in Yogya. Could the economy of the people support the struggle for independence? Did they understand what it meant to be independent? He said very little about himself. I got the positive impression that what he put above all else was our struggle and the condition of the people. This really impressed me. If everyone had had his spirit, there would have been no power in the world that could have crushed our revolution for independence.⁴⁷

Now that we have seen the testimonies of these two national figures about Hatta, the next thing will be an analysis of "the science of salt" and "the science of lipstick" in the context of the history of modern Indonesia. It was Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005) among the Indonesian intellectuals who gave quite serious thought to the right form for the relationship of Islam to Indonesian identity. Very unlike the Muslim leaders of the older generation, Nurcholish did not want to drain away any more energy in pitting Islam against Pancasila. He saw that they were not truly in opposition. As Nurcholish wrote, "Some Islamic values are actually found in the national ideology, especially Pancasila."⁴⁸ He even added that "so far, Pancasila appears to be satisfactory and now, practically speaking, it constitutes the single ideology of the nation."⁴⁹ But, he continued, Pancasila, in the hands of irresponsible politicians, has been a bitter experience for this nation, in that it has strayed from its real function "as a foothold and a common value."⁵⁰ Yet although it has been misappropriated, for the Indonesian nation "the basis of Pancasila is a factor that gives color and character to each political or social idea

that grows in its soil.”⁵¹ In support of Hatta’s view, for Nurcholish “the principle of God the One and the Only is the primary principle and the main one that spotlights and becomes the source in human life.”⁵²

As I have said earlier, the acceptance of Pancasila as the philosophical foundation of the state by the younger Indonesian Muslim thinkers has been a conscious acceptance, neither from calculation of power politics, nor to replace Islam with Pancasila, which in any case would be impossible. These thinkers are an educated generation who live in times far different from the earlier years that were preoccupied by exhausting clashes over the foundation of the state. Lines of thinking and intellectual strategies are now different: “The science of salt is more important than the science of lipstick.” They value Hatta as the visionary father of the nation when they peer into the future of Indonesia. They know that it cannot be torn apart by useless and tedious philosophical debates, and that the spirit of the sharia in the form of justice for all the people is far more important than the official form, devoid of content and quality.

This, of course, suggests another question, if the “science of salt” is also not effective in improving the character and morals of the Indonesian nation, then what science must we look for to do this? Those who profess “the science of lipstick” will surely let out loud cries: “We’ve reminded you all along that you won’t get anywhere with the cultural approach without formal protection by a constitution like the Jakarta Charter.” This succinct argument does make sense, but if we want to think calmly and with an eye to history, the facts speak differently. Let us take the example of Pakistan, which, following its proclamation of independence in 1947, was driven by the energy and spirit of Islam, and which in 1957 officially called itself the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Apart from having become a nuclear power, Pakistan in actuality is not better than our Pancasila Republic. Fighting between political parties never stops, there have been a string of military coups, and corruption there is no less awful than in Indonesia. Do our friends who advocate “the science of lipstick” close their eyes to a reality such as this one? Jamaat-e Islami (the Islamic Congress), the party created by Abul A’la Maududi (1903–1979), which was so enthusiastic and hard-working with the purely Islamic label, never received significant backing from the Pakistani people. The zigzag course of the party between opposing and supporting the government has brought it to a steady loss of authority.

Meanwhile, in the global order, the world of Islam is still very nervous and vulnerable. “The science of lipstick” is on display everywhere, while “the science of salt” seems to be ignored. The late Fazlur Rahman, in one of his classes at the University of Chicago early in the 1980s, bemoaned

how problematic the world of Islam was, even to the point of uttering these words: "We live in a different kind of Islam, not in a Quranic Islam." I have often repeated this tragic statement in different forums to show just how wide the gap is between the ideals of the Quran and the reality of the fragmented brotherhood of the Muslim *umat* – for nothing is more emblematic here than how difficult it is for this *umat* to raise up the spirit of brotherhood that this holy scripture so explicitly and keenly commands. Look at what is happening in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq, which are being torn apart by bloody strife between ethnic factions. It is as if these dramas are the gift of the world of Islam to the twenty-first century. It really is a tragedy.

Of course we can validly accuse others of playing us off against our fellow Muslims. But we must not forget that these others can only create turmoil in our ranks because our ranks are themselves in turmoil. When corruption fills the *umat*, that is the very time that external foes are the most eager to weaken us, if not destroy us, and then rob us of our wealth. We are often powerless. Indeed, a number of Muslim countries really do have great assets coveted by foreigners, in the form of tremendous mineral wealth that has highly strategic value in the "game of global chess": oil, coal, gold, and timber. All of that has been in foreign gunsights for decades now, particularly oil, a large proportion of which is buried in Muslim soil.

A basic question is, with so much potential wealth, why are the majority of Muslim countries impoverished, while a minority of them prosper? The answer is simple: the sense of inter-*umat* solidarity has long been feeble. There are drops of needed assistance here and there for the poor of the *umat*, not to empower them, but only to keep them from starving to death. That is why we feel so deep and piercing a heartache at seeing such wealth; instead of bringing our hearts ever closer, as fellow Muslims, to help each other, it drives us farther and farther apart. Not infrequently, oil is made into an instrument by rich Muslim countries to oppress and force other Muslim peoples to submit to hegemony, for the sake of power politics.

Over the course of the history of the *umat*, Islam as the cement of brotherhood is so often neglected, as if this religion has lost its energy to unite us. Even more ironic is the fact that Muslim countries that are rich in oil often surrender their purses to be squeezed by foreigners, who are unwilling to see Islam emerge as a force in determining the direction of global civilization. The strange thing is, those who are squeezed actually feel protected. The rich region of Southwest Asia has long been under the strong influence of the United States, even while this region's political rhetoric speaks out against foreign domination.

The Islamic world has yet to awaken to the commands of its religion to emerge as the arbiter of human civilization. How far we are from that position! Truly, we “live in another Islam.” But as Muslims, we naturally may not lose hope, no matter how dark the path we have to tread. The divine word of Allah in the Surah Yusuf tells us: “[They continued] until, when the messengers despaired and were certain that they had been denied, there came to them Our victory, and whoever We willed was saved. And Our punishment cannot be repelled from the people who are criminals.”⁵³ This is a sign to the Muslim *umat* to continue acting and working sincerely, earnestly, and creatively as we await the assistance that, sooner or later, must come. We believe that surely this *umat*, after being bludgeoned by history, will understand in time, and Islam will again be the great force in joining together the hearts that have been scattered. The Quran still awaits the Muslim *umat* to consult it to find solutions to the many complex problems that confront humanity, as I will now explain further.⁵⁴

The Global Map: Between Hope and Alarm

If, when we scrutinize the face of Islam, we see that it is still marred and blemished at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we also see that the map of global civilization is far from perfected if seen from the system of prophetic values.⁵⁵ In fact, these values are all the more cast adrift, whether in the stream of secularism and atheism, or in the current of religious fundamentalism. Richard Falk, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University, and an anti-Zionist American Jew, wrote this in early 1998, two years before the turn of the century:

The advent of the new millennium leads us, at the very least, to embolden the imagination. It is a marker thrown on the shore in the darkness of night while the river of history rushes by. We see no more and no less than what imagination allows, especially our deepest hopes and our most dreaded fears. This millennial passage encourages extremes of expectation: the end of the world or the beginning of a new order.⁵⁶

This excerpt is very poetic. The river of history has flowed for well over a decade since Falk’s words appeared. The world has indeed not yet ended, but a new order, more friendly and bringing hope to all of humanity, has yet to show its face. Several Muslim nations such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine are still lashed by suffering. The hope for full independence for Palestine has not yet been realized. Indonesia, the biggest Muslim nation,

still has not recovered from its various social illnesses. The arrogance of the superpower state is not abating. Religion and the values of sincerity have long ceased to be important considerations in relations between civilizations. Economic considerations and power politics appear to have replaced religion as the highest moral reference points. It is as if God has no place and is “powerless” in the modern world.

The world has indeed been set loose and turned on its head. If the European Middle Ages are viewed as disrespecting the dignity of human beings in the interest of God, then, especially since the Renaissance, the situation has swung to the other pole. Thus, in the interest of humankind, “the great idea about God was repressed in modern culture,” as the French thinker Maurice Clavel has said.⁵⁷ Of course, formal acknowledgment of and respect for God still appear, including on some countries’ money, but human actions have long disregarded God. God is still stamped on us coinage (“In God We Trust”),⁵⁸ but neo-imperialist wars against powerless nations go on and on, under a thousand pretexts. The United Nations has long been barren of ideas to stop the barbaric aggressions of the strong countries. Will the course of this twenty-first century offer a scintilla of hope? This is hard for us to answer, even if we have never lost hope.

Significant religious figures have often gathered to find a common point to formulate the contribution of religion to peace, but so far without effect. Between 2000 and 2007, I, too, have joined these global ecumenical meetings. They were inspired by deep concern, but what could spiritual leaders do in the face of rulers who were deaf to them? At the same time, we must admit the bitter fact that it is far from clear that an atmosphere of peace has been realized within the religions themselves, quite apart from modern secularism’s longstanding indifference to what is called faith. On September 7–9, 2003, in Aachen, Germany, an international meeting was organized with the theme “War and Peace: Faiths and Cultures in Dialogue.” In this meeting, I delivered a paper titled “Indonesian Islam and the Muhammadiyah’s Humanitarian Mission.” It laid open my determination in the circle of the world’s religious notables to find a new formula for world peace. The main obstacle is the rulers who prefer to stir up war. In a world lacking in morals, it will be very difficult for us to see the establishment of the dictum: Right is might. What we find is just the opposite: Might is right.

Our present century is clamped in a vise between atheistic secularism and hope for peace with God. We eagerly await the creation of a new balance whereby humankind is still in the honored position, but Heaven is invited to address the world again; the present imbalance weighs us down like a shoulder pole we have lost the strength to carry. In

1937, two years before the outbreak of World War II, Albert Einstein reminded humanity of the similar functions of religion, the arts, and the sciences:

All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it above the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual toward freedom. It is no mere chance that our older universities have developed from clerical schools. Both the church and the university – insofar as they live up to their true function – serve the ennoblement of the individual. They seek to fulfill this great task by spreading moral and cultural understanding, renouncing the use of brute force.⁵⁹

The reality that stretches out before us at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not the prevalence of moral and cultural understanding, but quite the opposite, the use of brute force by the strong against the weak, resulting in thousands of innocent victims. The main targets this time are a number of Muslim nations, as I have said. Science is used, not to “glorify mankind,” as Einstein had hoped in his testimony above, but to annihilate it.

President George W. Bush was the person most responsible at the beginning of the twenty-first century for the practice of that cruelty and malignancy. The irony is that Bush sees himself as a religious person, even a devout one. This fanaticism, with the credo of “[you are] either with us or against us,” has divided the world into two sharply opposed camps – but because of America's invulnerability, the other camp, which includes the United Nations, is powerless. What is so very bizarre is that about 30 to 40 percent of those who voted for Bush often see this regime as acting in the interest of a religion of Biblical prophecy and the second coming of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ How absurd it is that, for the sake of oil, gas, and other energy, religion has been bartered by American Christian fundamentalist circles, just as Muslim fundamentalist groups have done. Bush and Osama, both fundamentalists, have made the world unsafe: Bush with his neo-imperialist acrobatics, Osama with his theology of death.

The destruction of Iraq is the result of the adventures of Bush and his neocon advisers in the imperialistic foreign policy circles of the United States. Bringing down Saddam Hussein was only a pretext to control Iraq's petroleum at its source. Noam Chomsky, an American anti-war expert, has harshly criticized the invasion of Iraq by America and its allies. He has said that people are made to believe that America would have liberated Iraq even if its main products “were lettuce and pickles, and

the main energy source of the world were in central Africa.”⁶¹ What he meant was that, if Iraq did not have a strategic energy source in the form of oil, America would not have even glanced sideways at it, a country that had a high civilization before and during the Abbasid Empire. Then, when asked about Bush, Chomsky answered that Bush was only the symbol of the people who surrounded him as “the most dangerous administration in American history.”⁶² In Bush’s hands, democracy was used as a cloak for the desire to oppress other people who were powerless and themselves too afraid to provoke America.

In a survey published simultaneously in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Mexico on November 4, 2006, President Bush was viewed by a large majority of respondents as “a danger to world peace,” ranking second after Osama bin Laden.⁶³ As I see it, Bush should be classified as a war criminal. His escapades have truly alarmed the world, including the West itself. If such adventurism is not stopped, the fast-flowing river of history, to borrow Falk’s words, will gradually fill the world with blood and tears, and civilization will no longer be distinguished from barbarism. Fortunately, in the 2006 midterm elections for the US Senate and the House of Representatives, the Republican Party was defeated, a sign that the Bush administration had been rejected.⁶⁴ It is too late to punish Bush; that is not how democracy works. Two years later, in the election of the American president on November 4, 2008, the Republican candidate was defeated by Barack Obama, who became the first black president of the United States.

To return to the question of democracy – whether or not there is a better alternative to democracy for providing people with the freedom to assess a would-be leader. This is the dilemma of democracy: people must be patient with this system, and sometimes must even suffer the results of the evil acts of an elected leader. Evil must be rejected with moral and intellectual force when it invokes the name of democracy and basic human rights. A superpower must not tyrannically manipulate humanity out of greed for wealth and power. Humanity that is still pure surely opposes criminal acts, no matter who does them, regardless of religion and politics.

In an interview by the *Pravda* journalist Lisa Karpova, Kent Mesplay of the American Green Party was asked about the difficulty of identifying an alternative presidential candidate from a third party in the United States. This is a country where everything political has been bought up by the Republican and Democratic parties: democracy with a two-party system has prevented other forces from emerging. Lisa Karpova asked him, “As we can see, the present system acts very much against third

parties. What steps do you think are needed to break the stranglehold of this two-party system?" This was Mesplay's reply:

The first step would be to allow candidates equal time and access to media coverage Running for office is a money-grab, with backup provided by the committees in the two parties that accept funding and direction from corporations [e.g., debates are not regulated impartially but rather deemed expensive "in kind" political contributions, and are corporate-driven in contents and appearance]. So, getting the money out of politics is important, such as by publicly funded campaigns. Still, rather than just have taxpayers subsidize advertising agencies, it would be better to reinstitute equal access laws. Also, having proportional representation and, as a step to this, preferential voting such as I.R.V. [instant run-off voting, with ranked choices on the ballot for a single seat] will help improve representation and alternative party access.⁶⁵

Mesplay's hopes express an ideal, to be sure, but would unquestionably be very difficult to realize at a time when politics is dominated by money and the law sides with corporations. But that ideal system of democracy needs to be aspired to and put into action so that politics does not transform into a commodity, as seen in almost every system of Western-style democracy and in other countries that imitate these systems. In Indonesia too, this money-game sickness is now an open secret, whether in electing members to seats in the legislature or leaders to the executive branch. As a result, a leadership candidate who is good but poor is almost sure to have no chance. This is a real tragedy! If people become impatient spectators at the corrupt game of politics, there will surely arise greater and greater waves of apathy, a dark advertisement for democracy in Indonesia.

Thus, it is not surprising why approximately half the people in the United States do not participate by voting in presidential elections. The citizens of this important country are fed up with the waste of taxpayer money in these elections. The domination by the two parties seems to have become an obligatory axiom in the US political system. An identical situation occurs as well in the United Kingdom with the dominance of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, which simply rotate in office from election to election.

Several Muslim countries have become the prey of brute force, to use Einstein's words. In regard to this problem, at the end of January 2008 I came out with a *Resonansi* column titled "Fukuyama, Neocons, and Mayhem." Here is an excerpt:

Why are these three terms lined up to form the title of *Resonansi* today? The answer is that they will be the core of what I will be presenting to my readers. The last sentence in my *Resonansi* of June 8, 2004, was, "It is not just the American people who have been fooled by Bush, but the whole world has been, too. This is the modern civilization (or more correctly, the barbarity) under the leadership of the White House, which has intervened in other states, on the basis of public deceit."

Thanks to this trickery, it would appear that barbarism and tumult have obtained approval among some of the public so that Bush was reelected president of the United States in 2004. Now [early 2008], after the abscess of this mendacity has been increasingly exposed, George W. Bush, who has just been called Ehud Olmert's vassal by Uri Avnery, the former member of Israel's Knesset, peace activist and anti-Zionist, has long since lost the authority to say anything at all about the imperialist foreign policy of his country.

Bush was the hero of the neocons (the "neoconservatives"), who pushed him into attacking Iraq, which spread disorder and suffering. And what about Francis Fukuyama? This influential writer is a US citizen, born in Chicago in 1952 to Japanese parents. His father studied the sociology of religion at the University of Chicago. Fukuyama received his PhD from Harvard. There he got to know Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated on December 27, 2007. One of the neocon "brains," Paul Wolfowitz, former American ambassador in Jakarta, had been Fukuyama's mentor and friend for decades. However, the US invasion of Iraq, which Fukuyama opposed, severed their association, and from 2004 Fukuyama became an apostate from the neocon ideology when he supported the Democrat John Kerry in his run for the presidency.

Fukuyama is a first-rate sociopolitical philosopher who had originally been praised by the neocon group. After he cut himself off from them, all kinds of accusations were leveled against him, including that of antisemitism. When he was still in the neocon environment, his controversial work *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) was attacked by British political philosophers as the work of a palace philosopher advocating global capitalism. In this work, Fukuyama appears to be the chief defender of capitalism and liberal democracy as the acme of history. But by taking such a position, he allowed himself to sink into the vicious cycle of blind fanaticism.

History seems to have stopped with no longer anything superior to capitalism and liberal democracy, which under the Bush regime destroyed the pillars of civilization that had initially been so glorified

by the original neocons. As a result, the neocons now have nothing to offer to the public, thanks to Bush's dark foreign policies.

I need to insert here that there are as well fanatic evangelicals supporting Bush who are very close to Zionism. For these Christian evangelicals, to quote Martin Kramer, "The American Interest" in *Azure (Ideas for the Jewish Nation* 26, 2006): "Israel is, for them, the manifestation of a divine plan, and they support it as a matter of faith." So it is not at all surprising why Bush, as Avnery sees it, is nothing more than Olmert's vassal, in view of his weakness in confronting the pronouncements of the leader of Zionist Israel.

Another view of Fukuyama's that dealt an insightful blow to the neocon contemporary political doctrine was that "Islamic terrorism is not an existential threat to the United States, that political Islam has demonstrated itself to be a failure everywhere it has taken power, and that the Islamic terrorist movement had been largely a failure prior to 9/11. Those attacks, as well as the Iraq war, gave it a new lease on life," as quoted by Robert S. Boynton in *The American Prospect* online (September 18, 2005).

In short, the 9/11 tragedy and the invasion of Iraq have given the breath of a longer life to these radical movements. But this tragedy, which also gave the Bush name the bounce it needed for a second election victory, after that [gave Bush] an increasingly "fallen" name, fallen because the opportunity to govern was not used to create a culture of global wisdom, as I had proposed to him when we met in Bali on October 23, 2003. Rather than building a civilization, the neocons have instead created an empire of barbarity and arrogance on the face of the earth.⁶⁶

The United States under Bush was truly isolated from the global discourse, a foreign policy burden that was very difficult for his successor in 2009 to overturn. Slightly encouraging was the fact that the young people of America were becoming aware of how bad had been the impact of the foreign policy adventures of the neocons. Not just bad for the rest of the world, but bad also for the American people who had been deceived by their leaders. I have repeatedly presented the idea, in various forums and media, that an imperialistic foreign policy is not just obsolete, but also legalizes barbarism in the name of democracy and basic human rights. Here is the failure of America's foreign policy that forces its will on powerless nations. That power has never been able to learn, nor does it want to learn, from its many postwar failures. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the United States become the sole superpower, and before long it suffered a relapse of its historical amnesia. Power often does blind

the powerful and kill the conscience, so that what we call global wisdom never claims its appropriate place in the foreign policy of the superpower that is steadily losing its authority.

There are writers who predict that the United States, as the only superpower of the post-Cold War era, will be destroyed just like its former rival, the Soviet Union. But according to the analyst Fareed Zakaria, what will occur is not the destruction of the United States as a nation-state, but instead the loss of its authority as a superpower to dictate to the world, because of “the rise of the rest” – especially in the areas of economics and investment. Zakaria notes that the biggest investment on earth is now in Abu Dhabi; the biggest movie industry is in Bollywood, not in Hollywood; the tallest building is in Taipei, and (as I write this) soon to be in Dubai; the biggest public company is in Beijing, not in New York; the biggest passenger plane is made in Europe, not in the United States. All these factors by themselves tell us that America’s days as the single global superpower have now ended.⁶⁷ Naturally, all these facts make America, so haughty for so long, very worried, but, I wonder, are the elite of that country smart enough to learn from history? As we read in the theories of Ibn Khaldun, whoever has reached the top has nothing to do except go back down. Humankind’s biggest problem throughout history is that the supporters of civilization are unaware that the position at the top is now headed for collapse, sooner or later.

In the history of Islam, we have the case of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted almost seven centuries but finally was unable to escape the iron law of history. This empire collapsed in 1924, never to arise again. Its decay had gone on for some three centuries. The American elite generally are interested in history, but now that their power is at its peak they have become careless and inattentive, as though their nation’s exalted position will last forever. Was President Barack Obama, with his philosophy of change, able to transform the gloomy face of America in the global order? Such enormous challenges are not easily overcome.