

RELIGIOUS VALUES AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CORRUPTION: THE CASE OF INDONESIA

(Paper presented for the Global Forum on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity Among Justice and Security Officials, Washington D.C., 24-26 February 1999).

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To speak about Islam and corruption as related to the Indonesian case is to speak about the largest Muslim country which has been reputed as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The irony and the anomaly is, how can it happen that a country of two hundred and twenty million people, ninety percent of them are, or confess to be, Muslims, is where corruption is so rampant that it sweeps the whole texture of political, social and economic life of the nation, especially among the government officials? In the words of the late Muhammad Hatta (who was, together with Sukarno, the proclamaor of Indonesia's independence), corruption has become a culture in the country.

The Indonesian case shows that there could be no relationship between adherence and non-adherence to a religion with corruption or non corruption, as it is indeed the point of scepticism of some social scientist about what is really the role of religions in human social life. But, as it is one of the purposes of this Conference, we believe that there should be some kind of relationship between religious values and the struggle against corruption, since it is taken for granted that all religions are absolutely against such a wrong doing against to humanity. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we try to understand the role of religion in such an important human struggle as fighting against corruption. Human activity of such a magnitude is always in need of authorization, validation and commitment based upon the sense of ultimate meaning of life, an answer to the problem of the ultimacy provided by a religion.

To begin with, Islam is called the religion of ethical monotheism. That is, a religion that demands its followers the recognition of the absolute unity of The God (Arabic: Allah, i.e., *Al-Lâh*, meaning "The True God") constituting the principle of strict monotheism (*Tauhid*) and true sincerity (*ikhlas*), believing that man's salvation through the pleasure of God (*ridâ Allâh*) can be attained only by the true faith and sincerity in doing righteousness and good deeds. The value of deeds is such a central theme in the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, that mere faith (*iman*) is not enough for the salvation of the soul unless it is realized in righteous and beneficial activities (*amal sâlih*).

The strong emphasis on the imperativeness of praxis is related to the central concept of man in Islam that man is created as the Vicegerent of God (*Khâlifât Allah*) on earth. The main duty of man is to promote the quality of life by reforming the earth (*"islâh al-ard"*) and safeguarding it from destruction and corruption

("tasâd", or "tasâd fi al-ard). (See Qur'an, 7:56 and 85). To enable man to carry out his office of vicegerency God bestowed upon man knowledge or the faculty of reason to understand the natural world that surrounds him. (See, Q. 2:30-33). Understanding the law of nature and the ability to use the nature on the basis of that law to promote the quality of life in this world is the kernel of man's duty as the Divine Viceregent. For this purpose, God subdues all things in the earth and in the whole universe for man as the Divine grace for him that could be discerned correctly if he uses his reason. (See, Q. 45:13). The whole universe is the signs (âyat) of God that man is commanded to observe and understand with his reason, leading to firm conviction that the universe is not created in vain by God. It is indeed suggested in the Qur'an that a negative and pessimistic view of the world is the beginning of man's unhappiness. (See Qur'an, 3:191).

Based upon the principles laid down in the Qur'an (103:1-3), and following the logic of Qur'anic anthropology and cosmology, Muslim ulama (scholars) elaborate further, that man's salvation from disgrace requires. **First**, "iman" or the true faith in God, believing in the transcendental value of human life that God is the ultimate goal of all things. **Second**, as the realization of such a true faith in God, man should pursue life activities geared to the most beneficial things for his fellow human beings and all of his surroundings ('amal sâlih). **Third**, man and its society should be open to mutual control, in the manner of the working of social "checks and balances". Indeed the Qur'an says that the law of "checks and balances" is the bountiful grace of God for humanity, such that if it were not because of the law of "checks and balances" the earth would be destroyed. (See Qur'an, 22:51). **Fourth**, to attain salvation, man should create a social system that would allow the mutual support, solidarity and steadfastness (al-sabr), especially in bearing together the burden of the struggle for the betterment of life ("jihad" in its generic meaning). This last thing is especially important, given the fact that one of the human weaknesses is impatience ("ajalah"), short sightedness and unduly hastiness. (See Qur'an, 21:37 and 17:11).

Prophet Muhammad (salla 'l-Lâh 'alayh wasallam) gave a good example ("uswah hasanah") for the believers in putting the Islamic principles in reality by establishing Madinah. The Arabic word "madinah" itself terminologically means "city", but etymologically it means "system of obedience or lawfulness", since the word is derived from the root "dâna-yadînu", with the basic meaning "to obey". Thus conceptually "madinah" means "pattern of human life in a social system characterized by obedience to rule and law (shari'ah) that results in the establishment of civilization ("madaniyah"). (It is interesting to note here that such an understanding of the Arabic word "madinah" corresponds to the concept of the Hebrew word "medinat", which means "state" that the official name of Israel is "Medinat Yisra'el"--see Britannica. Prophet Moses prepared the Israelites for the "medinat" by drilling them to obey the Law of God through the rituals of worshiping Him, facing the Ark of the Covenant which was placed at the center of "meshkan" or "tabernacle").

With the creation of Madinah by Prophet Muhammad, as it is aptly observed by Robert N. Bellah, the famous American social scientist,

"...Arabian society made a remarkable leap forward in social complexity and

political capacity. When the structure that took shape under the Prophet was extended by the early caliphs to provide the organizing principle for a world empire, the result is something that for its time and place is remarkably modern. It is modern in the degree of commitment, involvement, and participation expected from the rank-and-file members of the community. It is modern in the openness of its leadership position to ability judged on universalistic grounds and symbolized in the attempt to institutionalize a nonhereditary top leadership. Even in the earliest times certain restraints operated to keep the community from wholly exemplifying these principles, but it did so closely enough to provide a better model for modern national community building than might be imagined. The effort of modern Muslims to depict the early community as very type of equalitarian participant nationalism is by no means an unhistorical ideological fabrication... In a way the failure of the early community, the relaps into pre-Islamic principles of social organization, is an added proof of the modernity of the early experiment. It was too modern to succeed. The necessary social infrastructure did not yet exist to sustain it." (Robert N. Bellah, "Islamic Tradition and the Problem of Modernization", in Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Beyond Belief*, New York, Harper & Row, 1976, pp. 150-151). (What Bellah suggests as the failure of the experiment of the early Islamic community is the fact that the examples given by Prophet Muhammad lasted only for forty years, beginning with the time the Prophet declared the establishment of Madinah and ending with the assassination of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth caliph).

After all of the discussion of some of the Islamic basic teachings, and considering the judgment made by Robert Bellah of the nature of Madinah, we may come to a safe conclusion that the failure of Indonesian Islam is that the Muslims still show a very grievous discrepancy between faith (*iman*) and praxis (*amal*). Particularly, the Muslims have been for so long depriving themselves of the Prophet's exemplary experiment in creating Madinah, a social system that, in the judgment of Robert Bellah, was so modern, with the main feature of the high degree of commitment, involvement, and participation from the rank-and-file members of community, an equalitarian participant nationalism.

In other words, Indonesia has failed to establish a true participatory democracy. Our mistake for the last fifty years since independence has ended with social, political and economic disaster that makes us now four times poorer than we were two years ago. Fortunately, the reform movement in Indonesia attained the momentum of success mid last year, that now the road toward true democracy is widely open. But everything is still in the process of experimentation with unavoidable trial-and-error. We need to learn from the experiences of the established democracies in the world. Our coming general election, scheduled on the 7th of June, will be our most important attempt to experiment with true democracy, hopefully rooting out all those corrupt political, social and economic systems from which Indonesia has been suffering for the last half of a century. This time Indonesia is having a golden opportunity for democracy. Indonesia simply cannot afford to fail the golden opportunity and to return to the systems of Sukarno and Suharto. With open and participatory democracy of the type of Prophet Muhammad's example of Madinah, the best system would have the good chance to prevail. *Inshā' Allah*.