Dear Sam:

This is my follow up on the article. My apologies for the length. I think I may have tackled the religion and forgotten the article.

I’d like to make a list of “information known” to set the stage, if you will.

• Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with 90 million members;

• NU membership comes from Indonesia, one country;

• WEA is 600,000,000 in 130 countries (however, I don’t know the full extent of WEA’s dialogue with Islam as a whole);

• NU represents between fifteen and twenty percent of all Islam;

• NU, translates as, “Revival of the Ulama (community)”; this can mean a community at large, or much smaller group, such as the ulama of theologians, or those who attend a local mosque;

• NU is a traditionalist Sunni Islam movement following the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence (not to be confused with the militant Salafi sect) ;

• The Shafi’i madhhab (school) is one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence in Sunni Islam;

• It was founded by the Arab scholar Al-Shafi’i, a pupil of Malik, in the early 9th century;

• Like the other schools of fiqh (thought), Shafi’i relies predominantly on the Qur’an and the Hadiths for Shari’a – Islamic law;

• The Shafi’i school was widely followed in the early history of Islam, but the Ottoman Empire favored the Hanafi school when it became the dominant Sunni Muslim power;

• The Shafi’i school is now predominantly found in over fifteen countries, including Indonesia.

In just a brief check, I’ve not found any reference to jihadists acts of terrorism involving NU. While knowing the name, Nahdlatul Ulama, I have to admit I’m not that familiar with them, and only a bit more familiar with Shafi’i, probably because most of what I follow makes the headlines, usually in some sort of jihad attack.

I think any effort that seeks to bring religious freedom is worthwhile and should be pursued. But, let me mention a few things as I see when it comes to Islam.

The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, states, “Moderate Islam? There is no moderate Islam. Islam is Islam.” I think he takes a very hard-line on Islam, but a line that many believe.

The Grand Ayatollah and Supreme Leader of Iran, Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, is a Twelver Shi’a Marja’ (source to follow), who has stated that Islam is currently in their seven years of tribulation which began in 2014-2015, and Islam can expect the Mahdi (Islam’s savior) to appear in/by 2022. At the same time, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of ISIS, and a follower of the Wahhabi/Sunni denomination before his
demise, made a similar statement. It’s rare that the Sunnis and Shi’as agree on anything, much less an eschatological belief.

This is hard-line Islam. But, if one reads the Qur’an and follows abrogation, there can be little doubt of where it’s going.

There is a current movement taking place that seeks to alter the statement made by Erdogan (above). It concerns a reformation of sorts. But, I don’t see how it can take place, due to the strict/harshness of Islam under Shari’a. Abrogation would have to be denied; Muhammad declared a non-prophet (no pun intended) . . . it would no longer be Islam. It would have to be something entirely different, i.e., a brand new religion.

So, with all that being said, is an effort seeking better relations, religious freedom, seeking to curb violence, and overall peace worth while? Most definitely. But, first, the ground rules have to be set, questions asked, answers provided.

- Is the Allah of Islam the same God of Judaism and Christianity?
- Is Islam a religion of peace?
- How does the NU interpret the Qur’an – using abrogation?
- Etc., etc.

I’m sure the NU will have its own set of questions for which they are seeking answers to, as well. It will be hard to find agreement on the big things if there can be no agreement on the little things. Common ground must be found.

There are several books which you might have or be familiar with, but if not, I recommend them. All four can be found on Amazon.com in various formats (hardcover, paperback, Kindle):

*No God but One: Allah or Jesus?: A Former Muslim Investigates the Evidence for Islam and Christianity* by Nabeel Qureshi

*Questioning Islam: Tough Questions & Honest Answers About the Muslim Religion* by Peter Townsend

*Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World through Islamic Eyes* by Tamim Ansary

This last book is literally hot off the press. I’ve had it ordered for sometime, and only found out yesterday that it’s now on back-order:

*The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam* From HarperCollins

Sam, I hope the above is helpful in someway; if I’ve missed the mark, I apologize.
Jay

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