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Between Faith and Social Relations: The Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama's *Fatwas* and Ideas on Non-Muslims and Interreligious Relations

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Introduction

Recent studies suggest that the mainstream Indonesian Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), hold a centrist position in their views and attitudes toward other religions and religious minorities with some variation among the scholars and disparity of viewpoints between the elites and the ordinary people.¹ This article examines the organizational or official religious opinions or advice (*fatwas*)² and ideas (*pemikiran*) put forward by individual authors affiliated with either organization. In order to understand the shared and different perspectives on “non-Muslims” and interreligious relations the cases are divided into belief-ritual and social relations. It argues that the organizational opinions tend to reinforce religious belief and ritual while promoting social tolerance and kindness in social relations whereas dissenting authors advocate reinterpretations of certain beliefs and promote religious tolerance and inclusivism towards the people of the book, particularly Jews and Christians. It highlights the different approaches they use: the organizational rulings particularize the universal Qur’anic passages and commentaries and prioritize the jurisprudential principle of avoiding harm over bringing benefit in judging the legal status of actions involving other religions, whereas the dissenting authors universalize the Qur’anic passages and commentaries, and contextualize the other Qur’anic passages and

¹ Diana L. Eck, “What is Pluralism?”. <https://pluralism.org/>; Muhamad Ali, “Fatwas on Interfaith Marriage”, *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 9, No.3, 2002, 1-33; Muhamad Ali, “They are not all alike: Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals’ Perception of Judaism and Jews”, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 38, No.112, November 2010, 329-347; Ahmad Najib Burhani, “*Lakum dinukum wa-liya dini*: The Muhammadiyah’s Stance towards Interfaith Relations”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 22, No.3, July 2011, 329-342; Robin Bush and Budhy Munawar-Rachman, “NU and Muhammadiyah: Majority Views on Religious Minorities”, in Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu, eds, *Religious Diversity in Muslim-majority States in Southeast Asia: Areas of Toleration and Conflict* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing, 2014), 16-50. Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.42, No. 2, January 2020, 58-84.

² In this article, I use transliterations of the Arabic loan words used in contemporary Indonesia such as *fatwa*, *aqidah*, *mu’amalah*, *kafir*, *mushrik*, *mushrikun*, and *ahl al-kitab*.

certain hadiths with exclusive and negative attitudes towards other religious communities, and prioritize the principle of bringing benefit over avoiding harm.

In this article, I use Diana Eck's categorization of religious responses toward religious difference into exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism because it has been used by a number of contemporary Indonesian scholars and activists themselves in describing Muslims' views of other religions.³ I use Ninian Smart's theory of the dimensions of the sacred, particularly the doctrinal, the ritual, the social, and the ethical-legal because many Muslims have divided Islam into faith, ritual, and social relations.⁴ I find it useful Majid Fakhry and Asma Afsaruddin's perspectives on the fundamentalist-liberal and inclusive-pluralist positions in understanding the left and right spectrum,⁵ but I seek to understand the positions that the Indonesian Muslims have regarded as "moderate" and variation within these positions. I seek to look at the relational aspect of the doctrinal and non-doctrinal, and the religious and worldly dimensions in specific *fatwas* and ideas. For this purpose, a brief introduction to the Muhammadiyah and NU's production of religious advice and thought is in order before examining specific cases.

Muhammadiyah and NU's Religious Advice and Thought

Muhammadiyah, "the follower of Muhammad", which was founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, and Nahdlatul Ulama "the awakening of the religious scholars" founded in 1926, have produced different forms of decrees and thought collectively and individually. The Muhammadiyah established the *Majlis Tarjih* in 1927 to conduct study and produce religious decisions (*putusan*) on a variety of questions and problems asked by members and supporters across Indonesia and compiled them in the *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih* (Compilation of the Preferred Opinions) and *Tanya Jawab Agama* (Questions and Answers in Religion). These religious opinions or decrees are considered authoritative and binding to those who ask but also to other members who may have the same questions. More recently they produced

³ Diana Eck defines pluralism as an interpretation of plurality and an evaluation of religious and cultural diversity. For Eck, pluralism is not the sheer fact of plurality, but it is an active engagement with plurality. Pluralism is not simply tolerance, but also the seeking of understanding. Pluralism is not simply tolerance, but also the seeking of understanding. Pluralism is not simply relativism, but assumes real commitment. Pluralism is not syncretism, but is based on respect for differences. And pluralism is based on interreligious dialogue. Ninian Smart offers five positions: absolute exclusivism, absolute relativism, hegemonistic inclusivism, realistic pluralism and regulative pluralism. Diana Eck, "Is Our God Listening? Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism", in Roger Boase, ed., *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 21-49; Ninian Smart, "Pluralism", in Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). 360-364. Other perspectives and disciplinary approaches to religious diversity can be read in Chad Meister, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

⁵ Majid Fakhry, "An Islamic Perspective", Chad Meister, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 393-402; Asma Afsaruddin, *Contemporary Issues in Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 174-205.

Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah (The Guide of Life for Muhammadiyah members) in 2000, formulating the normative way of life at the levels of the individual, familial, social, organizational, professional, national, environmental, scientific, and cultural, gathering related Qur'anic passages and the hadith, as a response to the challenges of materialism, multiculturalism, and globalization. In matters of belief, scriptures (recently considered the *bayani* or explicatory approach) are the foundational sources, whereas worldly matters are approached using rational thinking or *burhani* and even intuition or *irfani*.⁶ At the same time, Muhammadiyah leaders, activists, and authors individually and collectively write and disseminate their ideas either in agreement or in disagreement with their organizational rulings showing diversity of perspectives on non-Muslims and inter-religious questions.⁷ Some of these authors' thoughts are found in *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an tentang Hubungan Sosial Antarumat Beragama*, (the Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an on the Social Relations of Religious Communities) in 2000.⁸

The idea of writing *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* occurred during the Muhammadiyah's National Conference in Banda Aceh in 1995 and its publication accompanied the 44th National Conference in Jakarta in 2000. They sought to open up a dialogue, rather than to serve as the rulings that bind Muhammadiyah members although Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (b. 1935), the then chairman, intended to promote the *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* as a guidance for members and the Islamic community in the general, and to make an intellectual contribution to the nation's undergoing problems: Muslim-Christian conflicts and tensions that had cost the loss of human lives and property. At the same time, they aimed to emphasize the importance of religious diversity and to provide other religious communities authoritative information about

⁶ Tim Penyusun, *Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah* (the Guidance for an Islamic Life for the Members of Muhammadiyah) (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2000). On these textual, rational, and intuitive sources of knowledge, Muhammadiyah scholars and leaders including the present chairman Haeder Nashir (b. 1958) and other scholars use and reinterpret the approach introduced by Moroccan scholar Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri (d. 2010).

⁷ On the diverse discourses on pluralism and liberalism among the Muhammadiyah activists and their sociological contexts such as background, reading, education, and interaction, see for example, Biyanto, "Pluralism Discourse: The Views of Young Muhammadiyah Intellectuals", *Journal of Indonesian Islam*: Vol. 3, No 2, December 2009, 314-340.

⁸ Tim Penyusun (Writer Team), *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an tentang Hubungan Sosial Antarumat Beragama Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam* (The Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an on the Social Relations of Religious Communities the Council of the Preferred Opinions and The Renewal of Islamic Thought of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah) (Yogyakarta: Majelis Tarjih dan Pemikiran Islam Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2000). Prof. Muhammad Amin Abdullah was the coordinator of the book project, the writer team consist of Prof. Syamsul Anwar, then the head of the Majelis Tarjih, Dr. Hamim Ilyas at the *Shari'a* Department, the State Islamic University (UIN) Yogyakarta, and Jarod Wahyudi, an alumnus of Masters in Islamic Studies, McGill University, Canada, student of Professor Issa J. Boullata (d. 2019) of McGill University, Canada. Personal online conversation with Prof Muhammad Amin Abdullah, August 21, 2020. See also Wawan Gunawan Abd. Wahid et al, eds., *Fikih Kebinekaan: Pandangan Islam Indonesia tentang Umat, Kewargaan, dan Kepemimpinan Non-Islam* (The Legal Thought of Diversity: Indonesian Islamic Views of the Community, Citizenship and Non-Muslim Leadership) (Jakarta & Bandung: Maarif Institute & Mizan, 2015).

how to communicate and cooperate with Muslim communities and how to build an equal and unified nation.⁹ Methodologically, they gather and study the commentaries of the Qur'anic passages containing *ahl al-kitab* or people of the book, the hadith, and modern Muslim and Western scholarships on interfaith relations. In particular, they adopted a double movement approach proposed by Pakistani-American scholar Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), in analyzing the scriptures: starting with a problem to address in the present, moving to the text, exploring its context in the past and finding its universal purpose and ethics, and then moving back to the present using that universal value to solve the present problem. Classical, modern, and contemporary scholarships, including non-Muslim, may be useful and applied.¹⁰

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have produced their rulings (*fatwas*) and their compilations through a committee *Bahsul Masail* (a committee on research on addressing religious questions) created in 1926 and are considered authoritative and binding to many of their members and sympathizers across the country.¹¹ Normatively, their rulings are based on the authoritative scholarships belonging to the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (the People of the Tradition of the Prophet and the Community) and the legal thought derived from the Qur'an, the hadith, the consensus of the scholars (*ijma'*) and the rational analogy (*qiyas*) for matters not addressed in the Qur'an and the hadith. Actual religious issues are usually asked by members and the committee explores the Sunni legal thoughts, discuss and use them as the main reference for addressing these issues. For instance, in 1929, they responded to a question whether a Muslim should pay the alms (*zakah*) on a piece of land rented to a non-Muslim; in 1933, to a question whether a Muslim is permitted to rent his house in which a non-Muslim put an idol to worship in it; in 1934, to a question whether a Muslim can read books authored by Christians; in 1937, to a question whether one may be buried Islamically if he died in the state of not declaring Muhammad as the Prophet; and more.¹² In 1939, in response to a question whether the Old Testament and New Testament are as original as the *Taurah* and the *Injil* in which the Muslims

⁹ Sambutan (Preface), *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, v-vii.

¹⁰ The sources include the medieval and modern Qur'anic commentaries, the hadith literature, Arabic lexicography, jurisprudences and the foundations of the jurisprudence, contemporary Muslim works such as the one by South African scholar Farid Esack as well as non-Muslim scholars such as Rudolf Otto (d.1937) and British philosopher Bernard Russell (d.1970), with some reference to concepts in social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, and religious studies. *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, viii-xvii.

¹¹ There are a number of compilations of the fatwas, including *Masalah Keagamaan Nahdlatul Ulama* (The Religious Matters of NU) and *Ahkamul Fuqoha: Hasil Keputusan Mukhtar dan Permusyawaratan Lainnya* (the Laws of the Legal Scholars: The Results of the Conferences and other Deliberations) "Ahkamul Fuqaha", October 20, 2012, <https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/40369/ahkamul-fuqaha>

¹² Other questions relate to the legal status of Muslim parents with non-Muslim kids, inter-religious marriage, English translations and commentaries by non-Muslims, interfaith prayer, and non-Muslim political leadership and representatives. Rumadi Ahmad, *Fatwa Hubungan Antaragama di Indonesia: Kajian Kritis tentang Karakteristik, Praktik, dan Implikasinya* (The Legal Advice on Interreligious Relations in Indonesia: A Critical Study on Characteristics, Practices, and Implications) (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2015), 102-121.

are required to believe they stipulated that they are not the same and do not constitute the scriptures in which Muslims are to believe.¹³

Apart from the central organization's rulings, NU scholars and activists have produced their own works, individually or collectively, including *Fikih Kebangsaan* (The Legal Thought on Nationhood) published by the Islamic boarding school Pesantren Lirboyo, East Java, in 2018. The authors said that the publication was intended for the students and alumni of the pesantren in particular, but also for the Muslims at large, to remind them about the need to protect Indonesia from external treats such as the colonial powers and the internal enemy such as the rebels against the nation-state and the movements that seek to revive the caliphate system. They were concerned about anarchism, intolerant and anti-governmental actions and wanted to avoid political instability and national disintegration. They noted that the traditional Islamic schools, teachers and students had given their significant contributions to the formation and defense of the nation-state, a contribution that the present generations should be grateful for and defend. They were also concerned about the global and regional conflicts in the Middle East, including the Arab Spring, that could have ramifications in Indonesia, exacerbating the internal tensions and conflicts, the weak sense of nationalism, and the lack of loyalty to the state ideology of Pancasila (the Five Pillars, consisting of monotheism, humanism, nationalism, democracy, social justice) and the national slogan of unity in diversity (*bhineka tunggal ika*).¹⁴ Methodologically, the authors use the works, both medieval and modern, and sustain them by making reference to relevant Qur'anic commentaries and the hadith. They begin discussion with a chapter on the need for unity and obedience to the legitimate government, followed by a chapter on difference as a necessity, which is divided into sections including the principle of tolerance towards non-Muslim and cases of interreligious interaction.

For both Muhammadiyah and NU, rulings are based on, or are not in contraction with, the Qur'an and the hadith, that can be extracted or supported by theological and legal thoughts as well as the classical, medieval, and modern references, although the non-official thoughts by

¹³ The fatwa refers to the book *Izhār al-Haqq* which was written in Arabic by Kairanvi in 1864 during the British India, as a response to other books by Christian authors charging Islamic belief. The book used former Muslim scholarships including Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taimiyyah as well as Western Biblical criticism and theological work in refuting aspects of Christian theology. The book had been translated into English, Urdu and other languages, and one of the editions became the reference for the NU authors when issuing their fatwas in 1939. One of the principles used is the harm versus benefit consideration: if an action harmed Islam, it became categorically prohibited (*haram*); if it benefited Islam, it became good (*baik*); and if it neither harmed nor benefited Islam, it was merely allowed (*jaiz*). See Rumadi, *Fatwa Hubungan Antaragama*, 106-107.

¹⁴ KH Maimun Zubair, "Menyelaraskan Ide-ide Keislaman dalam Konteks Kebangsaan (Reconciling the Ideas of Islam in the Context of Nationhood)"; "Sambutan Pengasuh Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo (Preface by the Leadership of the Islamic Boarding School of Lirboyo)" by KH. M. Anwar Manshur"; "Sambutan Ketua HIMASAL Pusat (Preface by the Chairman of Central Board of HIMASAL) KH Abdulloh Kafabihi Mahrus", Tim Penyusun, *Fikih Kebangsaan: Merajut Kebersamaan di Tengah Kebhinnekaan* (Lirboyo: Lirboyo Press dan LTN Himasal Pusat, 2018), iii- vii.

different authors show more freedom in using these references. Their textualism or scripturalism intersect with contextual reasonings and interpretations of the contemporary problems such as interreligious conflicts and national disintegration, serving as their intellectual and religious contributions to finding practical answers for their members in particular and the Indonesian Muslims more generally. The extent to which such rulings have been followed by members and their thoughts shared or supported by other members is beyond the purpose of this article.

We now turn to examine how the official and individual authors have viewed non-Muslims and addressed interreligious cases, divided into belief, matters of social relations, and matters between belief and social relations.

Matters of Belief: *Aqidah* and *Ahl Al-Kitab* as Non-Muslims and the Question of Salvation

Doctrines are central to many religions although belief is not necessarily fundamental to them. Doctrines and belief have varied and changed over time even within one religion.¹⁵ But for Muslims generally, including the Muhammadiyah and NU leaders and followers in Indonesia, belief takes a central, foundational place in the religious and worldly life, including the interreligious. Belief defines the Muslim and communal identities lying down what is held true and what is false. Belief can be described as a vivid, intense conception of an idea, a subjective judgment, deemed superior to reason, and intuitive. Religious belief is considered “qualitatively different from other forms of belief because it is an assent to that which can never be justified by conventional means.”¹⁶ The equivalent words in Arabic that Indonesian Muslims use are *iman* (belief) and *aqidah* (creed), interpreted often in relation to the other beliefs which are considered false, deviant, heretic, or heterodox, as can be attested in the rulings. Because belief can be weak and impure, religious authorities feel the need to strengthen and protect it and to discourage questioning, doubt, and rejection.

For Muhammadiyah, belief is not only central but also fundamental to Islam, the core of which concerns one God or *tawhid*, although the belief in angels, prophets, scriptures, the Day of Judgment, and God’s decrees, as systematized in the hadith, are crucial. Muhammadiyah formulated five concepts: religion (*agama*), the worldly (*dunia*), *ibadah* (worship, ritual), *sabilillah* (the struggle in the path of God), and *qiyas* (analogy) as in the *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih* in 1954. According to this formulation, only those who hold the principles of belief as commanded in the Qur’an and the authoritative Hadith belong to the group of the truth, as opposed to those of the false innovation and the deviant (*bid’ah* and *sesat*), with the hadith cited: “the Jews have been divided into seventy-one or seventy-two factions, and the Christians

¹⁵ Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 56.

¹⁶ Donald S. Lopez, Jr, “Belief”, in Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21-35.

into the same fractions, and my community into seventy-three factions. All of them will go to hell, except one faction: those who follow my path and my companions.”¹⁷

Belief is fundamental to religion, or *agama*, which, according to Muhammadiyah, is defined in two ways: one is the religion of Islam as brought down to Prophet Muhammad through the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet which stipulate commands and prohibitions for the wellbeing of humankind in this world and in the hereafter. The second meaning is the religion as revealed by Allah through His prophets, in commands and prohibitions and guidance for the wellbeing of humankind in this world and in the hereafter. In the *Pedoman Hidup Islami*, Islam is described as “the religion of Allah revealed to all His messengers, as a guidance to all humankind in all times, that ensures the wellbeing of life materially and spiritually in this world and in the hereafter. The religion of Islam is the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad as the prophet of the final age, teachings sent down by Allah comprising commands, prohibitions, and guidance for the wellbeing of humankind in this life and in the hereafter.”¹⁸ These two layers of meaning are inseparable, but the final, perfect version of the religion is the one of the Prophet Muhammad. *Ibadah*, or ritual, is defined as being close to Allah by obeying His commands and avoiding His prohibitions and implementing all that He has permitted. The ritual is divided into all the deeds that Allah permits, and the specific actions that Allah has instructed to perform already with detailed procedures in the Qur'an and through the Prophet's way. Hence belief and ritual are held to be the entwined dimensions of the religion, elaborated only from the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition.¹⁹

Islam that all the prophets bring about accords the *fitrah* (nature) of human beings, and the Prophet Muhammad was sent down to humankind to serve as the blessing (*rahmah*) for all the worlds. This religion is the only religion that pleases God.²⁰ This definition universalizes the meaning of Islam as the religion of all prophets and all times but prioritizes the only religion of the Prophet Muhammad and his community of believers that God approves.

The authors of *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* however seek to expand the meaning of Islam as the religion of *fitrah*, “primordial human nature”, a universalized consciousness of the existence of God, who is holy, transcendental, and deserves worship. Following Palestinian-American Muslim scholar Ismail Ali Al-Faruqi (d. 1986), the authors say that Islam recognizes an *ur-religion*, a meta-religion, a natural religion, a *sensus numinous*, “the sense of the divine”, borrowed from Rudolf Otto, in reinterpreting the Qur'an 30:30 “So direct your face toward a straight path; the *fitrah* of God who creates human beings on that basis. No change should be

¹⁷ Tim Peneliti, *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih* (The Compilation of the Preferred Opinions) (Yogyakarta: Majelis Tarjih Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 1967), 21; Abdul Munir Mulkhan, *Masalah-masalah Teologi dan Fiqh Dalam Tarjih Muhammadiyah* (The Problems in Theology and Law in the Tarjih Council of Muhammadiyah) (Yogyakarta: Sipsess, 1994), 159-162.

¹⁸ Tim Penyusun, *Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah* (the Guidance for an Islamic Life of the Members of Muhammadiyah) (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2000), 8-11.

¹⁹ *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih*, 276-277; Asjmun Abdurrahman, *Manhaj Tarjih Muhammadiyah: Metodologi dan Aplikasi* (The Method of the Preferred Opinions of Muhammadiyah: Methodology and Application), 4th edition (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 23-83.

²⁰ *Pedoman Hidup Islami*, 9.

there in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know". The authors recognize that the *din al-fitrah* may serve as the basis of historical religion and a breakthrough to the cultivation and building of interfaith relations. They emphasize difference between the primordial belief in Islam as the path of submission to God and the belief in an Islam exclusively belonging to Prophet Muhammad and his followers.²¹

For the *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* authors, the belief in one and only God (*tawhid*) is shared by the Prophet Muhammad and the *ahl al-kitab* or the people of the book. They suggest that the Qur'an is critical and corrective toward the people of the book but it also appreciates and invites them to hold a common belief in one and only God (*tawhid*) as the common word (*kalimah sawa*) shared by the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'an (according to Quran 3:64). The Qur'an's criticisms against "exclusive" attitudes of Jews and Christians that Muhammad encountered imply Qur'anic praises of the opposite attitudes. They reason that the criticisms are not against their religions as such, but against the manipulation of religion done by some of the Jews and Christians of the time. There is some recognition of the common spirituality of the *ahl al-kitab*, as interpreted from Qur'an 3:113-115. Belief alone does not guarantee one's salvation, and Jews, Christians, and Muslims are no exception to the norms.

They further comment that the Qur'an indicates that the peoples of the book are not the same: some are pious, believe in God and the Hereafter, follow their religion, enjoin the good and forbid the evil and are the good people (Qur'an 3:113-115). Following modern scholars such as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Taba'tabai (d.1981), and Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), the authors argue that the notion of the people of the book is not static, has a wide spectrum, and varies at times. They suggest rethinking and reapplying the concept in interfaith relations in the modern world.²² Thus, the categories of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Shabiun, Majus, and *mushrikun* could be applied to peoples in other times and places because the Qur'an is believed to be applicable in all times and places, and, citing Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) and Indonesian scholar Muhammad Quraish Shihab (b. 1944), they include Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians for they also have scriptures.²³ In supporting their argument on Islamic inclusivism of the people of the book, the *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* authors cite Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945) which states, "the religion of the Prophet was a simple monotheism, uncomplicated by the elaborate theology of rite Trinity and the Incarnation. The Prophet made no claim to be divine, nor did his followers make such a claim on his behalf. He revived the Jewish prohibition of graven images and forbade the use of wine. It was the duty of the faithful to conquer as much of the world as possible for Islam, but there was to be no persecution of Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians-the "people of the book," as the Koran calls them, i.e., those who followed the teaching of a Scripture."²⁴

²¹ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, 15-16.

²² *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, 132, 138, 141.

²³ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, 147-8, 151.

²⁴ Bernard Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945) 420-21, the Indonesian translations as quoted in *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* (the Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an), 153.

The reference to Russell on Muslims' tolerance of the people of the Book does not signify the acceptance of their salvation before God in the hereafter unless they followed the common belief and obeyed their scriptural teachings. In response to even greater challenges faced by the Muhammadiyah today, Dr. Hamim Ilyas and Prof M. Amin Abdullah seek to reinterpret the notion of *tawhid* and the potential salvation of the followers of other religions. Hamim Ilyas observes that *tawhid* has been interpreted and formulated in different and changing ways throughout Islamic history and emphasizes the mercy and love (*rahmah*) as the nature of the Divine for all His creation rather than His wrath and punishments, based on Qur'an 6:12 and 1:1-7. For Ilyas, God's monotheism and ethics are inseparable.²⁵ For Abdullah, recognition of exclusive and inclusive passages of the Qur'an should lead to the other, more universal passages stressing the common doctrine (*kalimah sawa*) on divinity and humanity particularly between Muslims and Christians. For Abdullah, the question of salvation should be left to God alone.²⁶

Moving to NU, the official publications also hold that belief in divine unity is fundamental. The Prophet Muhammad in Mecca put his priority on preaching belief and it was only after the belief became strong that he introduced and developed the ritual and social domains. For NU, the hadith on the division of Jews, Christians and Muslims, mentioned above, serves as a confirmation of a particular theological school *Ahl Al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. It has developed in relation to other Islamic theological schools such as the Mu'tazilah, the Khawarij, the Murji'ah, and the Shi'ah, and to other contemporary theologies and ideologies. In the NU's formulation, the theology holds the principles of moderation (*tawassuth*) between the use of revelation and reason, and between left and right extremities, and tolerance (*tasamuh*) in matters of social interactions. In matters of belief, the theology considers the pillars of divinity (*uluhiyyah*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and eschatology (*ma'ad*), without relativism and syncretism, although it recognizes diversity and variation in the interpretation of the divine qualities and attributes and in the interpretation of whether or not one shall see God in the Day of Judgment literally or allegorically, physically or spiritually.²⁷

For the authors of *Fikih Kebangsaan*, there is no tolerance in matters of faith (*aqidah*). Tolerance does not mean "religious pluralism" in the sense that all religions are true in the view of Allah. Tolerance takes place only in the social and cultural contexts, which means to

²⁵ Hamim Ilyas, "Tawhid Rahamutiyah: Reinterpretasi Doktrin Tawhid dalam Muhammadiyah untuk Merespons Perubahan Sejarah (The Divine Unity of Mercifulness: Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Divine Unity in Muhammadiyah in Response to Changes in History)", unpublished essay.

²⁶ M. Amin Abdullah, "Divinitas dan Humanitas dalam Islam dan Kristen (Divinity and Humanity in Islam and Christianity)", in Ansar Waleed El-, et al, eds., *Kata Bersama Antara Muslim dan Kristen* (The Common Word between Muslims and Christians) (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2019), 304-327.

²⁷ NU holds a system of belief as formulated by Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari (230-324 AH), and Abu Mansur Al-Ma'turidi (w. 333 AH) and the legal thoughts elaborated by Abu Hanifah (w.179 AH), Malik ibn Anas (w.179 AH), Al-Shafi'i (w.204 AH), and Ahmad bin Hanbal (241 AH), and the mystical knowledge enriched by Imam Al-Ghazzali (w.505 AH), Imam Abu al-Hasan Al-Shadhili (w. 656 AH), and Junaid Al-Baghdadi (w. 298 AH). Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah: Sebuah Kritik Historis* (The People of the Tradition and the Community: A Historical Criticism) (Jakarta: Pustaka Cendekiamuda Jakarta, 2008), 8, 50, 52; Abdul Muchith Muzadi, *NU dalam Perspektif Sejarah & Ajaran* (The Nahdlatul Ulama from the Historical and Doctrinal Perspectives), 4th edition (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007), 145-148.

reject discriminations against others. For them, there should be limits to tolerance. Tolerance should not enter the matters of faith (*aqidah*) that leads to disbelief and deviance against the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* theology, such as showing agreement and pleasantness with other religions and believing that all religions are true. Tolerance does not permit one to do prohibited actions or to express fascination with or glorification of other religions. To support this argument, the authors make a reference to the medieval Persian scholar Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1210 CE) in his *tafsir*: “If a believer gives his loyalty to disbeliever, it signifies one of three manifestations: firstly, if he is pleased with the disbelief (*kufir*) of the disbeliever and he gives loyalty to him because of it, then it is forbidden because his agreement with the disbelief is a disbelief and his pleasantness with it is also a disbelief...secondly, good relationship with the disbeliever is not prohibited. Thirdly, the middle position, namely making friendship and giving loyalty and help and support to the disbeliever, does not turn a believer into a disbeliever, but it is prohibited because friendship and loyalty in this meaning implies his agreement with the way of the disbeliever and confirmation of his religion which takes him out of Islam. The book also cites Ibn Hajar Al-Haitami (d. 974 AH/1567 CE) who wrote that whoever does not believe in the disbelief of disbeliever such as the Christians or doubt the other's disbelief or approves his path of disbelief then he is a disbeliever even if he demonstrates his Islam and belief.²⁸ For the authors, the categories *ahl al-kitab*, Jews, Christians, *mushrikun*, and *kafirun* are all “non-Muslims”, and to protect the Muslim community from their false doctrines and actions is a religious obligation implemented through Islamic calling (*da'wah*) and even struggle in the path of God (*jihad fi sabilillah*) when attacked or persecuted.

Other NU authors however, have discussed matters of belief, the people of the book and interreligious relations in inclusive approaches, including an approach that emphasizes Qur'an Chapter 2:62 that suggests the believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds will be rewarded with no fear and grieve, as being applicable beyond the time of the revelation. Zuhairi Misrawi and Abd. Moqsih Ghazali, for example, offer some perspectives on the potential salvation of the people of the book, particularly those of the Abrahamic religions. Abd Moqsih Ghazali (b.1971 CE), for example, wrote in his book on religious pluralism (2009 CE), “Islam recognizes the existence of religions and accepts some of the principles of these religions. This does not mean that all religions are the same. For each religion is unique and different. One religion does not abrogate another because every religion is born in historical contexts with their own challenges. Nonetheless, all religions, especially those which are in the same Abrahamic roots, lead to the same goal: salvation in this world and in the hereafter. Considering this common goal, the exoteric differences should not be a concern. This common goal is what makes Islam confirms the principles of the previous religions and gives a theological recognition to the salvation of the followers of these religions.”²⁹ For Misrawi, Islam does not abrogate the previous

²⁸ *Fikih Kebangsaan*, 58-59.

²⁹ Abd Moqsih Ghazali, *Argumen Pluralisme Agama: Membangun Toleransi Berbasis Al-Qur'an* (The Argument for Religious Pluralism: Building Tolerance on the Basis of the Qur'an) (Depok: KataKita, 2009), 240-241.

religions, but confirms the common belief in God in the previous religions and includes all the adherents to receiving God's blessings and salvation. Belief and good actions constitute the fundamental dimensions of Islam.³⁰

Other NU authors present their views as well. Some argue that Muslims are close to the Jews who followed the true Torah: they had similarity in the belief in one God and shared some of the rituals, such as the circumcision for boys, the *halal* (permissible) way of slaughtering animals, the prohibition of pork, and the forbidding of statues in mosques or synagogues, following the comment by Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (b.1926). A writer to NU online website suggests that both Muslims and Jews had suffered from persecution after the fall of Islam in Andalusia, Spain. Problems happened after Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine.³¹ Other writings suggest that Muslims learn from the Jews: their rise due to their intelligence and fall due to their arrogance and arbitrary actions against God and the prophets. Other nations, including Muslims, should not be arrogant if they don't want to be punished by God.³² Another contributor to the NU's official website comments that Prophet Muhammad asked his secretary Zaid ibn Thabit to learn Hebrew language so he could communicate with the Jews.³³ In response to other Muslims who often blamed Jews and Christians for tensions and conflicts by referring to Qur'an 2:120, "Jews and Christians will not be pleased with you until you follow their religion", Nadirsyah Hosen, another scholar and university professor, interprets that it was meant for the Prophet and his early followers, not to all Muslims and not to Islam. The Jews and Christians were those of that time of revelation, Jews in Medina, and Christians in Najran, and not all of them. The verse invited the Prophet to focus on conveying God's message for the sake of obtaining His blessings, rather than for the sake of pleasing the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Najran.³⁴ These particular writings invite Muslims to differentiate between Zionists and Jews, and between Jewish peoples and Judaism, and between Jewish peoples at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and other Jews living in other times and places.³⁵

³⁰ See Zuhairi Misrawi, *Al-Qur'an Kitab Toleransi: Inkusivisme, Pluralisme, dan Multikulturalisme* (The Qur'an as the Book of Tolerance: Inclusivism, Pluralism, and Multiculturalism) (Jakarta: Penerbit Fitrah dan P3M, 2007); Sa'dullah Affandy, *Menyoal Status Agama-agama pra-Islam* (On the Status of Pre-Islamic Religions) (Bandung: Mizan, 2015).

³¹ "Syekh Qardawi: Islam tidak membenci Yahudi (Sheikh Qardawi: Islam is not hostile to Judaism)," May 6, 2008. <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/12276/syekh-qardawi--islam-tak-membenci-yahudi>

³² "Umat Islam Harus Pelajari Kisah Bangsa Yahudi (the Muslims Should Learn from the Jewish People)", May 20, 2009. <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/17240/umat-islam-harus-pelajari-kisah-bangsa-yahudi>

³³ "Saat Nabi Perintahkan Zaid ibn Tsabit Mempelajari Bahasa Yahudi (When the Prophet Muhammad Instructed Zaid ibn Tsabit to Study the Jewish Language)", September 26, 2019. <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/111417/saat-nabi-perintahkan-zaid-bin-tsabit-mempelajari-bahasa-yahudi>

³⁴ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Tafsir Al-Baqarah 120: Yahudi dan Nasrani Tidak Rela dengan Islam? (The Commentary of Al-Baqarah 120: Are Jews and Christians not Pleased With Islam?)" , May 13, 2018. <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/90316/tafsir-al-baqarah-120-yahudi-dan-nasrani-tidak-rela-dengan-islam>

³⁵ See Muhamad Ali, "They are not all alike: Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals' Perception of Judaism and Jews", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 38, No.112, November 2010, 329-347.

Interpreting Qur'an 1:7: "Guide us to the straight path, the path of those you have given blessings, and neither the path of those you are angry with nor the path of those who are deviant.", Nadirsyah Hosen comments that the deviant paths in the Qur'an could be the ones of the *Jews, Christians, idol worshippers, mushrik, fasiq, ahl al-bid'ah, kafir, or munafiq*. Following the authoritative Qur'anic commentaries, Hosen argues that the peoples who deserve the wrath of God were specifically Jews and Christians: those who reject the truth of the religion of Allah and commit destruction on earth, and those who are deviant include everyone who knows the truth or does not know the truth by a correct way or change the true guidance.³⁶

In describing the positions discussed so far, we saw elements of exclusivism and inclusivism in both official and individual works, if we use Diana Eck's categories of religious responses toward difference: exclusivism ("our religion is the one and only truth"), inclusivism ("there are many truths but our own are the culmination of the others, superior to the others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms"), and pluralism ("truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one religion").³⁷ In addition, to borrow Ninian Smart's categories, Muhammadiyah and NU's positions can belong to those of "absolute exclusivism", seeing their religion as true and others as false, and "hegemonic inclusivism" in the sense that they see truth in other faiths but assert the priority of their faith. Smart describes Islam's inclusive position toward the peoples of the book, especially Jews and Christians in the Qur'an and in history.³⁸ And for Jonathan Smith, for Jews and Christians, Muslims have become the "proximate others", and for Muslims in Indonesia, Christians are the proximate others due to history and demographic condition while Jews are remote others, although proximate scripturally and imaginatively. Hindus, Buddhist, Confucian, Baha'is, and indigenous religious communities are present in different parts of Indonesia, and only occasionally receive attention and no official *fatwas* regarding them.³⁹

Nonetheless, Eck, Smart, and Smith's formulations do not explain well how and why Muslims have claimed that they are theologically exclusive, but socially tolerant and inclusive. The Muslims' scriptural reasonings and justification for exclusive truth claim over other religions, and the commands for socially inclusive through acts of kindness and justice towards them are not regarded as a contradiction. The truth claim could encourage Muslims

³⁶ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Benarkah ada yahudi dan Nasrani dalam Ayat Terakhir Al-Fatihah (Are there Jews and Christians in the Last Verse of the Chapter the Opening?)", July 15, 2019, <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/107497/benarkah-ada-yahudi-dan-nasrani-dalam-ayat-terakhir-al-fatihah>

³⁷ Diana Eck, "Is Our God Listening? Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism", in Roger Boase, ed., *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 21-49.

³⁸ Ninian Smart, "Pluralism", in Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). 360-364.

³⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other", "What a Difference a Difference Make", *Relating Religion: Essays on the Study of Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230-302.

to act intolerantly and unjustly towards others, but it could also lead to tolerance, kindness and justice. There are some possible explanations as to why. Firstly, although there is critical assessment of other religions, scriptures and peoples, there is discouragement toward insulting their gods and practices and disrespecting their religious symbols, rituals, and houses of worship. The same God and the Prophet who invited them to believe and obey their commands, also invite them to call to their path in wisdom, with good teaching and the best debate if necessary (Qur'an 16:125). To believe correctly is fundamental, but not sufficient for God's acceptance if there is no good action. In other words, correct belief (orthodoxy) and correct action (orthopraxy) for them are intertwined. They too see diversity of religions and peoples as both fact and opportunity rather than a threat to their belief and truth claims. In belief they have to be firm and in human relations and social interaction, they are commanded to act kindly and justly toward others.

The Worldly Matters of Social Relations: Showing Kindness and Justice

In the social domains, Muhammadiyah and NU's official and individual scholars show little difference in their normative positions concerning tolerance, kindness, and justice although the formulation and meaning of these concepts and the interpretations vary. For them, the word *mu'amalah* involves all the domains that do not belong to religious belief and ritual, but what constitute the *mu'amalah* varies. In the formulation of the *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih*, social relations are considered the matters of *dunia* (the worldly), which, is "all affairs that are not the responsibility of the prophets and given instead to other human beings according to their wisdom."⁴⁰ The *Pedoman Hidup Islami* further elaborates the matters of *dunia* as the worldly social relations (*mu'amalah duniawiyyah*). In the social life, it states that Islam teaches a Muslim to create brotherhood and good human relationship with neighbors, who have their rights and dignity: when they are sick, in danger, in need for help, Muslims and non-Muslims are to act in goodness and justice. Muslims should build cooperation with others to attain a prosperous society, to cultivate tolerance, to respect the freedom of others, to fulfill their promises, to show compassion, not to have negative thinking and prejudices to others, and to compete in goodness toward "the implementation of a truly Islamic society."⁴¹

The command to act in kindness (*tabarru*) and justice (*tuqsithu*) are derived from the Qur'an and the hadith. The *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an* authors suggest that treating peoples, including the non-Muslims, with goodness and justice is in accordance with Qur'an 4:135; 5:8; 16:90; and 57:25. They cite scholar Issa Boullata who makes reference to Muhammad Rashid Rida: "To Rashid Rida, difference in religion is an opportunity to compete in goodness, not in fanatic deeds that could lead animosity and there is the divine purpose behind religious pluralism that should not be ignored."⁴² They also cite the hadith *qudsi* which states

⁴⁰ *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih*, 276.

⁴¹ *Pedoman Hidup Islami*, 66-72.

⁴² *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur'an*, 33.

that “God has prohibited himself from acting unjustly. Treat people as you want to be treated.”

⁴³ They contextualize the Qur’anic verses that prohibit creating an alliance (*wilayah*) with the people of the book only during hostile circumstances. Kindness and justice should remain the norm when the non-Muslims neither insult nor treat Muslims unjustly such as attacking and expelling Muslims from their homes.⁴⁴ They note that the recognition is a profound and far-reaching concept to create alliance and cooperation between religious communities for the wellbeing of humankind.⁴⁵

In social interactions, the NU’s official publications emphasize the ethics of moderation, tolerance, and balance. They prioritize public good over personal interests and promote Islamic solidarity, national solidarity, and human solidarity as formulated by Achmad Siddiq.⁴⁶ Human solidarity (*ukhuwwah basyariyyah*), for example, extends to non-Muslims and non-fellow Indonesians, as neighbors and as the inhabitants of the world and the creation of God, as they learn from Qur’an 49:13 indicating God’s creation of diverse sexes, tribes and nations, and Qur’an 17:70 which suggests the dignity of the children of Adam.⁴⁷ Religion, nationalism, and humanism are deemed not a contradiction.

In the same way, the *Fikih Kebangsaan* authors also advocate the ethics of kindness and justice to others, including non-Muslims. They emphasize that difference is a necessity and encourages tolerance (*toleransi* in Indonesian, or *tasamuh* in Arabic), towards non-Muslims. Tolerance is to let others to believe and practice their religions and not to discriminate against them. The basis for Muslim and non-Muslim relations is not conflict and war but peace in which there are mutual protection, safety, and social interaction. They assert that Islam rejects mistreating others and insulting peoples of other religions.⁴⁸ The book’s authors make reference to medieval scholars including Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) in his *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Renewing the Sciences of the Religion), who explains the hadith, “one who believes in Allah and the Final Day should honor his neighbor...”. Al-Ghazali also notes the hadith indicating three types of neighbors: a Muslim family neighbor has three rights, a Muslim neighbor two rights, and a “non-Muslim” (*mushrik*) neighbor one right. Another reference is made to the *Tafsir Ruh Al-Bayan* (The Commentary of the Spirit of the Guidance) which mentions the hadith “one who believes in Allah and in the Final Day should honor his guest”, and another hadith saying that they should honor their guest even a *kafir*. Other notes are made regarding the permissibility and encouragement of visiting a non-Muslim neighbor who is sick, in order to attract him to Islam or for other good reasons. The authors cite Ibn Hajar

⁴³ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an*, 56-57.

⁴⁴ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an*, 79-98.

⁴⁵ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an*, 152.

⁴⁶ Achmad Siddiq, *Khittah Nahdliyyah* (The Steps for the Nahdlatul Ulama) (Surabaya: Lajnah Ta’lif Wan Nasyer Jawa Timur and Khalista, 2006 (1979)).

⁴⁷ The three layers of solidarity or brotherhood were formulated by Achmad Siddiq, as cited and elaborated in Abdul Muchith Muzadi, *NU dalam Perspektif Sejarah & Ajaran* (NU from the Historical and Doctrinal Perspectives), 4th edition (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007), 170-171.

⁴⁸ *Fikih Kebangsaan*, 49.

al-Ashqalani (d. 1449) on the chapter visiting a *mushrik*, who points to good intention as the main rationale for permission.⁴⁹

The *Fikih Kebangsaan* authors further reason that the Qur'an recognizes difference in religion and faith as a necessity Qur'an 11:118-119: If your God has willed He could have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to differ, except those whom your God has granted blessing, and for that He created them. But the word of your God is to be fulfilled that, "I will surely fill Hell with Jinn and men all together." It suggests that the theology of *Ahl Al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* prefers love and tolerance toward other religious peoples. Tolerance in the social and cultural context means attitudes and acts which do not discriminate against different groups. The building of human brotherhood and the creation of harmonious relationship reflect the true Islamic teachings. Citing Al-Shathibi (d. 1388 CE), the book comments that people are divided because they follow evil, human desires, but Islam teaches compassion and mercy. Following Ibn Al-Arabi (d. 1240 CE), the book notes that one should be kind to a believer and a non-believer, the good and the bad alike. The discrimination against the protected non-Muslims (*dhimmi*) stated in the classical works was contextual and political. On the basis of a greater public good, the concept could change according to changing times, places, and political conditions, citing *Ahkam Ahl Al-Dhimmah* (the Laws concerning the Protected Peoples), by Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751 AH). More references are made to support the contention. Muhammad Said Ramadhan Al-Buthi (d. 2013 AD) writes in *Al-Ghuluw wa Al-Tatharruf* (the Excess and Extremes) that one of the Muslims' excesses in interaction with non-Muslims is their misapplication of the hadith instructing his companions not to greet Jews and Christians as they meet them on the street and to ask them to move aside. Muslims should pay attention to the context of such instructive hadith and differentiate between God's message and politics. Ramadhan Al-Buthi said the Prophet welcomed Christian priests from Najran and honored them and allowed them to pray their prayers in the mosque. If the Prophet instructed to disrespect the people of the book, then he would have disrespected the *mushrikun* in Mecca after his victory. Therefore, moderation and justice should be demonstrated instead of excesses and extremities.⁵⁰ As one of the NU writers advised, "Act just to everyone, including the Jews."⁵¹ This code of behavior towards others is also central to Muslims' sense of identity and morality. For them, good or bad action is an expression of strong or weak belief.

In cases where particular actions do not have clear and explicit instructions in the Qur'an and hadith, the official positions rely on other ways of resolving how Muslims should act, including the application of the legal principles on the intentions of the actor and on the potential harm and benefit to the religion and sense of community as we will discuss in the following.

⁴⁹ *Fikih Kebangsaan*, 70.

⁵⁰ *Fikih Kebangsaan*, 53-55.

⁵¹ "Sikap Nabi Muhammad saat Sahabatnya Dibunuh Yahudi (The Prophet Muhammad's Attitude towards a Jew who killed his companion)", May 19, 2019. <https://islam.nu.or.id/post/read/106509/sikap-nabi-muhammad-saat-sahabatnya-dibunuh-seorang-yahudi>

Between Belief and Social Interaction: Avoiding Harm versus Bringing Benefit

In the cases where belief, ritual, and social dimensions intersect, such as saying “Merry Christmas” to Christians, joining other religious holidays, interfaith marriage, interfaith greeting, entering other religious houses, and sending children to non-Muslim schools, the Muhammadiyah and NU official publications have pointed to the centrality of belief and the application of a jurisprudential principle of avoiding harm versus bringing benefits to the Muslim community. In the following, we shall discuss two cases to suggest how these characteristics operate.

The first case is the ethical and legal status of greeting non-Muslims in multireligious venues. A reader of *Suara Muhammadiyah* asked for a ruling as he had heard a preacher prohibit saying Merry Christmas to Christians, but he had also heard a Muhammadiyah university rector saying the greeting. The *Majlis Tarjih* replied to the question by referring to the *fatwa* issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (the Council of Islamic Scholars, MUI) regarding the prohibition of a joint celebration of Christmas. The *fatwa* suggests that Muslims may work and interact with non-Muslims in worldly (*keduniaan*) matters, based on Qur’an 49:13, 31:15, and 60:8. Muslims are not allowed to mix Islam with the matters of belief and ritual of other religions, based on Qur’an 109:1-6 and 2:42. Muslims should believe only in the prophethood of Isa Al-Masih, based on Qur’an 19:30-32, 5:75, and 2:285. Anyone who believes that God is more than one, and that God has a son and Isa Al-Masih is His son, is *kafir* and *mushrik*, based on Qur’an 5: 72-73 and 9: 30. Islam teaches that Allah is only one, based on Qur’an 112:1-4. Islam teaches the believers to avoid matters that are legally unclear (*subhat*) and all God’s prohibitions and to prioritize rejecting harm than obtaining benefit. This is based on the hadith stating that what is permitted (*halal*) is clear and what is prohibited (*haram*) is clear and there are unclear matters unknown to people and based on the principle of Islamic jurisprudence (*qa’idah fiqhiyah*): preventing harm is preferable to receiving benefit. In agreement with the MUI, Muhammadiyah saw that the celebration of Christmas in Indonesia which aims at honoring the Prophet Isa Al-Masih, cannot be separated from the belief and ritual, and issued the *fatwa* that joining the Christmas for Muslims is prohibited (*haram*). To greet Merry Christmas (*Selamat Hari Natal*) is categorized into the unclear matters (*subhat*) that should be avoided.⁵² In these matters, if a certain action ends in both good and harm, then it is preferable to thwart off harm. If benefit is much greater than the harm, then that action could be applied.

The *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an* authors discuss the issue of offering salutations and greeting (*tahiyyah*) and came up with a view different than the Majlis Tarjih, and do not follow that jurisprudence axiom. The authors emphasize the principle of not abusing the gods of other religions and of debating in the best way with others when necessary. For them to say *salam* to others means to spread safety and peace, as they agreed with Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha. For them, the norm was that such greeting was not prohibited. They cite and

⁵² Tim Penyusun Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah Majlis Tarjih (Writer Team of the Central Board of Executives of Muhammadiyah’s Council of Preferred Opinion), *Tanya-Jawab Agama* (Questions and Answers on Religion) Volume II (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Suara Muhammadiyah, 1992), 236-237.

contextualize the hadith: If the people of the book greeted you, respond by saying “likewise”, or “and you as well.” They cite Andalusian scholar Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE) who documents that Muslims’ reply would be “may peace not be with you,” or “a stone for you”. But they contextualize the hadith: ‘Aishah replied “death and God’s curse to you too” to Jewish folks who greeted her “God’s curse to you”. These negative replies were conditioned by the supersession belief in that Islam supersedes Christianity and Judaism and occurred during interreligious tension and conflict. They emphasize the same hadith that suggests God loves gentleness in everything. To support their argument further, following Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha, they pointed out other *salaf* scholars who had permitted answering a greeting by a non-Muslim. Ibn Abbas (d.68 H) is reported to have said, “whoever God’s creation says a greeting to you, reply to him even if he is a Magus (or Zoroastrian) because God says, if you are offered a greeting with one, reply it with a better one if not similarly.” Another *salaf* scholar Al-Sha’bi (d. 104 AH/722 CE), replied to a Christian’s greeting by saying “And peace be upon you and God’s blessings to you.” Al-Sha’bi was criticized by other Muslims for including “God’s blessings to you” in his reply, but he rhetorically answered, “Isn’t it that the man also lives under God’s blessings?” The authors highlight the specific circumstances for the negative and minimum replies and argue that the hadiths could not serve as general guidance for Muslims greeting non-Muslims in all circumstances.⁵³ Therefore, they argue, it is not prohibited for Muslims to reply non-Muslims with an Islamic greeting, as can be interpreted from Qur’an 4:86. Moreover, they make reference to the Prophet Ibrahim who greeted his *kafir* father, as recorded by Qur’an 19:47: “Ibrahim said (to his father): May peace be upon you, and I ask my God to forgive you. He is kind to me.” The authors explain this by citing Al-Qurtubi who permits Muslims to greet non-Muslims using the basis of the Qur’an and the acts of the Prophet’s companions as well as other scholars such as Ibn Mas’ud (d. 32 H/652 CE) who practiced greeting non-Muslims. In cases where non-Muslims preferred not to be greeted with an Islamic greeting, a Muslim should refrain from saying an Islamic greeting to them.⁵⁴

The question of saying Merry Christmas is also addressed in the *Fikih Kebangsaan* book, discussing the classical and medieval literature. The norm is that greeting Merry Christmas to Christians was prohibited or *haram*, because the act approves the Christians mission and a Muslim who said it could be punished. However, in emergency situations, such as when public officials, community leaders and individuals are required to say it they are permitted to say it only because they seek social harmony following the suggestion that wearing the dress of the *kafirun* and saying the word of *kufr* without detesting it is a *kufr*, but if that benefits the Muslims and the need were stronger for the benefit, then it became only detestable (*ikrah* or *makruh*), not prohibited (*haram*). Greeting the disbelievers with specific greeting on their religious holidays is prohibited but if saying the greeting would prevent the believer from being harmed and he says only what is kind and prays to God to give them guidance, then it would be permitted. The book includes a reference to contemporary Syrian scholar Muhammad Ramadan Al-Buthi who wrote that to say Christmas to non-Muslims is permitted for the sake

⁵³ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an*, 65-72.

⁵⁴ *Tafsir Tematik Al-Qur’an*, 74.

of good relationship and not one of the matters of faith and worship. The same tolerance allows a Muslim to visit a non-Muslim who suffers from illness. So long as a Muslim does not participate in the worship (*ibadah*), a Muslim may say their religious greetings to the people of the book on their occasions of happiness and mourning.⁵⁵

The NU of East Java branch, through their department of their regional *Bahsul Masail*, felt the same need to respond to the interfaith greeting issue and wanted to contribute to serve the community, the nation, and the state. They issued a religious decree that the Muslim officials were advised to greet others with *Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi wabarakatuh* (Peace be upon you, and God's blessings and mercies be upon you), and if necessary, followed with national greetings such as *Selamat Pagi* (Good Morning), *Salam Sejahtera bagi Kita Semua* (Greetings to all of us), and the like. Nevertheless, under certain conditions for the sake of maintaining national unity and preventing division, Muslim officials are permitted to add an interfaith greeting: offering the Christian, Buddhist or Hindu greetings directed to them. The principle of Islam as the blessing of all the worlds should mean spreading the message of peace among peoples. The message of peace can be conveyed in the gesture of greeting others that has become the tradition of the monotheist religion since the Prophet Adam. The Prophet Ibrahim greeted his father who was not a monotheist, as can be interpreted from Qur'an 19:47: "Ibrahim said, 'Peace will be upon you, I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is ever gracious to me.'" A hadith says that the Prophet Muhammad also greeted the *mushrikun* (polytheists and worshippers of idols) and a group of Jews who were in the same venue with Muslims. The Prophet's companions and the following generation permitted the greeting of non-Muslims. It is common for spreading peace greetings and it is a universal tradition across different cultures and religions, with different styles and ways in different times and places. The religious decree also makes another reference indicating the approval to greet the disbeliever when necessary and for the public good, and for demonstrating the goodness and compassion of Islam, and for other good reasons. They agree that it is a *kufr* to wear the uniform of the *kafir* and to say his word without disliking it, but it becomes detestable (*makruh*) if there is the goodness of the Muslims or a need to do it as exemplified by Sultan Salahuddin allowing his Muslim soldiers to wear the Christian uniform and saying their words during the Crusades because of the need for protecting the Muslims. Other scholars advise the permissibility of greeting the infidels, making reference to the Qur'an 60:8, and the hadiths and their contexts and the interpretations of scholars such as Al-Tabari who points to the early Muslims greeting the people of the book. They cite another work suggesting it is an innovation (*bid'ah*) that is not forbidden for the kings and leaders in the councils and meetings to greet the greetings of the infidels.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Fikih Kebangsaan*, 60-61. See also Muchlison, "Hukum Mengucapkan 'Selamat Natal' (the legal opinion of saying "Merry Christmas")", October 14, 2019, <https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/112152/hukum-mengucapkan--selamat-natal->

⁵⁶ "Keputusan Bahtsul Masail Pengurus Wilayah Nahdlatul Ulama Jawa Timur tentang Hukum Salam Lintas Agama (The legal decree of the Bahtsul Masail, the regional board of executives of the Nahdlatul Ulama of East Java, concerning inter-religious greeting)", 12 November 2019. See also "NU Jatim Tidak Melarang Pengucapan Salam Lintas Agama (The NU of East Java does not forbid interreligious greeting)", November 13, 2019. <https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/113465/nu-jatim-tidak-melarang-pengucapan-salam-lintas-agama->

Interestingly, regardless of their official *fatwas*, many Muhammadiyah and NU leaders and members greet non-Muslims during their religious celebrations such as Christmas and Hindu and Buddhist holidays. In official occasions and social media, many Muslims say the salutations of other religions such as the Hindu “*Om Swasti Astu*” or “May the God grant you with goodness and happiness” and the Buddhist “*Namo Buddaya*” or “Praises be to the Enlightened One”.⁵⁷

The second issue to discuss here, to highlight the application of avoiding harm versus bringing good, is whether Muslim parents may send their children to non-Muslim schools. The Muhammadiyah *Majlis Tarjih* responded to a question asked by a reader of Suara Aisiyah on March 9th, 2015 by issuing a *fatwa* in the same month. The *fatwa* cites the Qur’anic verses regarding education for children (4:9), and religious education for children (66:6) and interpret them as instruction for parents and teachers to teach Muslims’ children about their faith, ritual and morality only according to the teachings of Islam. They interpret the hadith, “every child is in the state of *fitrah* and it is the parents who make them Jewish, Christian or Majus,” to mean that every child is in the state of *fitrah*, a “Muslim”, until his parents and the environment make him otherwise. A Muslim should be educated to nurture a strong Islamic faith and be provided with adequate religious knowledge. In this *fatwa*, the principles of Muslim-non-Muslim relations are restated, interpreting Qur’an 60:8-9, as the basis for peaceful and amicable social relations with non-Muslims. They cite another hadith regarding the Prophet asking non-Muslim captives to teach Medinan Muslim kids about reading and writing, but interpret it contextually that during that time Muslims had not had Muslim teachers and that it was improbable that the non-Muslim captives who were under the Prophet’s control would turn the Muslim children away from Islam (*murtad*). Another textual reference to Qur’an 109:1-6 is made to support the principle of prohibition of mixing Islamic faith and ritual with another.

In addition to the scriptural references that point to their responsibility over their family, the makers of the *fatwa* make reference to the Indonesian laws emphasizing human rights and religious freedom. The Law 39/1999, concerning human rights, says “everyone shall have the freedom to observe religion and worship according to their religion and faith”, and “every child shall have the right to worship according to their religion, to think and express according to their level of intellectuality and cost under the guidance of their parents or guardians.” The *fatwa* also cites the Law 23/2002, on the protection of children and the Law 20/2003 on

⁵⁷ This practice posed a concern among the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)’s regional leadership in East Java. The council argued, the common practice of Muslims’ greeting a multi-religious audience with the other religious greetings is a religious innovation (*bid’ah*) and contains legal ambiguity (*subhat*) that should be avoided. The council called the Muslim community in general and public officials in particular to greet only in their own religious ways. For Muslims, they wrote, *Assalamu’alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuhu* “Peace be upon you and God’s mercy and blessings”, is a proper way of greeting non-Muslims since it would not damage the purity of religious faith. See “Taushiyah MUI Provinsi Jawa Timur Terkait dengan Fenomena Pengucapan Salam Lintas Agama Dalam Sambutan-sambutan di Acara Resmi, (The Advice by MUI of East Java concerning the Phenomenon of Inter-religious Greetings in Official Venues””, signed by the chairman KH Abdusshomad Buchori and the general secretary H. Ainul YAqin, East Java, November 8, 2019.

national education system. The law on the protection of children states that “a child shall be educated according to his religion” and that “before the child decides on his choice of religion, his religion should follow the religion of the parent”. The Law 20/2003 law stipulates that “every educational participant in an educational institution shall have the right to receiving religious education according to his own religion and provided only by educators of the same religion.” On the basis of these scriptural references and prevalent legal stipulations, the Majelis Tarjih decides that parents are responsible for the salvation and the purity of the faith of their children. The *fatwa* considers it prohibited (*haram*) for Muslim parents to send their children to schools that harm their faith, prevent them from studying Islam, and do not teach them the religion of Islam, and it is prohibited for them to allow their children to get non-Islamic education and subject matters. Beyond these points, Muslims may send their children to non-Muslim schools under certain conditions: the schools are not at the early child years and the undergraduate levels because at these levels, children are easily influenced by the faith of other religions. Other conditions for permission are that they have no Islamic educational institutions in the areas such as the non-Muslim majority areas, that Islamic subjects are taught in the school and that parents should continue maintaining their Islamic identity, awareness and action.⁵⁸

Muhammadiyah authors and activists have debated this same question. There are Muslim students who attend non-Islamic, such as Catholic and Protestant schools and universities, especially in areas where Muslims are a minority or do not have Islamic or public schools and universities. Interestingly, the founder of Muhammadiyah, Ahmad Dahlan was inspired by Catholic and Protestant missionary schools and learned from Christian priests and schools before he founded the Muhammadiyah school. This historical precedent has been used by contemporary Muhammadiyah scholars and activists to allow Muslims and non-Muslims to attend either Islamic private schools or non-Islamic private schools beside public schools. Abdul Mu'ti, Fajar Riza Ul Haq, and Azaki Khoirudin, for example, suggest that non-Muslim students attend the Muhammadiyah schools and campuses with non-Muslim teachers teaching non-Muslim students, as in the East Nusa Tenggara and Papua provinces. In response to the negative perceptions toward pluralism, they use “positive pluralism”, borrowed from Indonesian Muslim scholar Kuntowijoyo (d. 2005) to assert that Muslims should remain firm in their belief but can accept to coexist with religious others.⁵⁹ In these cases, we are now

⁵⁸ *Suara Muhammadiyah* (the Voice of Muhammadiyah), “Hukum Menyekolahkan Anak di Sekolah Non Muslim” (the legal opinion of sending children to attend non-Muslim schools), December 31, 2019, <https://www.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2019/12/31/hukum-menyekolahkan-anak-di-sekolah-non-muslim/>

⁵⁹ Abdul Mu'ti and Fajar Riza Ul Haq, *Kristen Muhammadiyah” Konvergensi Muslim dan Kristen dalam Pendidikan* (The Christians of Muhammadiyah: Convergence of Muslims and Christians in Education) (Jakarta: Al-Wasat, 2009); Abdul Mu'ti and Azaki Khoirudin, *Pluralisme Positif: Konsep dan Implementasi dalam Pendidikan Muhammadiyah* (Positive Pluralism: Concept and Implementation in Muhammadiyah Education) (Jakarta: Majelis Pustaka dan Informasi PP Muhammadiyah & Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta: 2019), Mu'arif, “*Bisakah Puritanisme bersanding dengan Pluralisme?* (Can Puritanism Coexist with Pluralism?)”, January 17, 2020, <https://ibtimes.id/apakah-puritanisme-bisa-bersanding-dengan-pluralisme/>

seeing the Muhammadiyah members who claim to embrace the truth of Christianity either completely in their own terms or partially in Islamic terms, but their acceptance of Christian students and people in their neighborhood and localities suggest the recognition of the good in other religions and communities. Attending Christian schools does not harm their religious belief and their sense of community. Here bringing the good is given more preference than avoiding harm, in contrast to the official advice on the matter.

The same question concerned NU's leadership and people. A *fatwa* prohibited a Muslim parent sending their kid to a non-Muslim school because it could multiply their non-Muslim numbers and harm the religious belief (*aqidah*) of Muslim children or make them doubt and even disregard Islamic belief. However, the *fatwa* asserts, it was permitted (*mubah*) for a Muslim parent who have an intention and objective of applying the religion of Islam and the theology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* in these non-Muslim schools under certain circumstances: There is assurance of protecting their children's belief; There are benefits (*maslahah*) to Islam and the community, benefits that could not be obtained in the existing Islamic schools; There is nothing that contradicts Islamic teachings in the school. It is also permitted in cases where teaching in a non-Muslim school becomes an opportunity for a Muslim teacher to teach about Islam and protect the belief of the Muslim students attending the school.⁶⁰

There are no independent works by NU authors on this matter yet, but the reality seems complex. In some areas such as in North Sumatera, Protestant and Catholic students attend Islamic schools with Muslim teachers, some of the students even take subjects of Islamic ethics and Islamic history.⁶¹ In social media, independent writers have expressed their concern regarding the prohibition. A writer, for example, says, "Have I become a *kafir* because I have attended non-Muslim schools and college and being taught by non-Muslim teachers and lecturers?"⁶² In this and other cases, bringing the good in gaining knowledge and life skills for this world and in the hereafter is preferable to avoiding harm.

Conclusion

In response to Muslims' internal problems and external challenges, the two mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and NU, have conducted their studies and produced organizational, official rulings and advice concerning their views and attitudes towards non-Muslims, using select passages from the Qur'an and the hadith as well as classical, medieval and modern scholarship. Overall, the collective advice serves to guide their members and the community about how to remain true to their belief while dealing with

⁶⁰ "Hukum Menyekolahkan Anak di Sekolah Non Muslim" (The legal opinion of sending children to attend non-Muslim schools), July 26, 2017, <http://nahdlatululama.id/blog/2017/07/26/hukum-menyekolahkan-anak-di-sekolah-non-muslim/>

⁶¹ "Unik, Mayoritas Siswa di Madrasah ini Non-Muslim ("Unique, The Majority of Students in this Islamic School are Non-Muslims"), August 23, 2017, <https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/80675/unik-mayoritas-siswa-di-madrasah-ini-non-muslim>

⁶² Nurdin Taher, "Mungkinkah Saya Menjadi Kafir karena Pernah diajar Guru Non-Muslim?" (Am I a kafir because I have been taught by non-Muslim teachers?), April 25, 2017. https://www.kompasiana.com/em-noer_dm70/58fecaaccf9273702193124a/mungkinkah-saya-menjadi-kafir-pernah-diajar-guru-non-muslim

religious diversity, although the level of reception and authoritativeness varies. The norm points to distinction made between religious belief and ritual considered fundamental and fixed and the worldly social relations deemed secondary and flexible. The selected Qur'anic passages, hadith, and historical precedence from the way of the Prophet and the early Muslim community interacted with the people of the book and *kafirun* serve as the primary sources, although their interpretation vary. In the matters of belief, only the religion of Islam as practiced by Muhammad and understood by authoritative Muslim scholars could bring the correct understanding of Islam and eventual salvation in the hereafter, although individual dissenting authors have emphasized God's mercy to all those who share monotheistic belief and follow the good. The religious authorities recognize the existence of other religions without believing in their truth. The Qur'anic terms such as the people of the book, which include Jews, Christians, and Sabeans, *kafirun*, and *mushrikun*, are singled out as "non-Muslims" who are subject to Muslims' religious judgment and ethical treatment in social relations. The organizational rulings particularize the Qur'anic passages deemed universal, whereas the dissenting authors universalize certain Qur'anic passages and contextualize the other Qur'anic passages and hadiths with negative attitudes towards other religious communities. For the individual authors, non-Muslims have the same potentiality to believe in one God and do the good, thus receiving God's mercy and eventual salvation in the hereafter.⁶³

In cases of social interactions that involve non-Muslims, there is some agreement among Muhammadiyah and NU authors in promoting acts of tolerance, kindness, and justice towards religious others. If the boundaries between belief, ritual, and social interactions are deemed unclear to them, the intention without showing fascination with other religions, and the application of the axiom "avoiding harm is preferable to bringing good", are taken into primary consideration, in assessing greeting Christians, interfaith greeting and sending Muslims to non-Muslim schools. If these actions did not involve the weakening or losing of Islamic belief, then such actions would be permitted under certain circumstances. The preservation of religious belief remains central to the organizations' religious authority and sense of community, although the dissenting, marginal position recognizes the true and the good manifested in some aspects of other religious beliefs, ritual, and ethics.

There is no single analytical tool that can be used in order to understand the complex and multidimensional aspects of Muslims' views and attitudes toward others in Indonesia as well as other places, in the present and in the past. Scholars have looked at doctrines and identity as the central elements of religious responses toward religious difference. The cases of Indonesian Muslims present the centrality of belief, ritual, ethics, and the connection between religious and worldly matters, in both common and different ways. Practically, as can be seen from the official and individual authors selected and discussed, other religions and communities are understood in Muslims' terms rather than in their own terms. Promotion of tolerance and respect as well as kindness and justice towards other religions and communities

⁶³ On the variation in Muslims' views of the salvation of others as discussed by medieval and contemporary Islamic scholars, see, for example, Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Question of Others: The Salvation Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

are based on Muslims' interpretations of Islamic texts and traditions. The challenge for the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama's scholars and activists is how to begin learning and teaching about other religions and communities – Jews, Christians but also Hindus, Buddhist, Confucians, and more - in comparative, historical, anthropological, sociological, or other ways beyond religious judgments and legalistic propositions. The intention for cultivating mutual understanding has been expressed among the organizations' leaderships and membership and the opportunities are abundant to conduct such studies and educational programs, but it is hopefully just a matter of time.