

*Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourses in Twentieth Century Indonesia: A Critical Survey.* By Fauzan Saleh. Leiden: Brill NV, 2001. 343 pp.

Fauzan Saleh's book, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourses*, is important for at least two reasons. First, after the 11 September tragedy, in the United States, Islam including that in Indonesia has come under the spotlight. The U.S. government is concerned about the growth of militant Islamic groups related to terrorism, which it believes are operating somewhere in Indonesia. Secondly, the tragedy has shown that so little is known about Muslims in Indonesia. Academic studies about Islam has so far concentrated on the Arab countries.

Fauzan's book about the development of theological thinking among Indonesia's Muslims can fill this gap. Fauzan attempts to scrutinize efforts within mainstream Muslims to find the true interpretation of Islamic missions and the relevance of Islam to current problems. In Indonesia, various and conflicting interpretations about Islam have taken place since the early twentieth century. In general, Fauzan is able to identify representative Muslim theologians, such as Mas Mansyur, Hamka, Harun Nasution, and Nurcholish Madjid, whose voices and thoughts have been commonly heard. His selection of theological thinking also includes those of organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam (Persis), and Nahdatul Ulama (NU).

In contrast to writings about Islam that deal mainly with political or sociological factors when explaining relations between Islam and social and political life, Fauzan looks at this subject from a theological perspective. He uses Yves Congar's concept of theology, which defines theology as a "discourse through which believers develop and express the content of their faith as they have confessed it" (p. 13). Muslim actions and thoughts should be in line with their faith, which means that a Muslim should follow the right conclusions from the Qur'an and Hadith based on valid reasoning. Those who interpret the holy texts should do so with the purpose of building social order and happiness as well as for eternal bliss (p. 14). Using this framework to study Indonesia's Muslims, Fauzan describes the contesting claims among Muslims to represent the true, original, and pure meaning of Islam as conveyed

by Prophet Mohammed. Fauzan posits that such contesting claims came about because much of the Islamic practices and thoughts among Indonesian Muslims are not in line with the true spirit of the faith written explicitly or implicitly in the Qur'an and the Hadith.

The first chapter in the book describes those practices that are considered as violating the true spirit of Islam. Fauzan attempts to discuss the discourse of Islamic theology prior to the advance of the reform movement in early twentieth century. However, it is important to note that Fauzan does not state how long did the impact of the pre-reform discourse last since it continues to influence many Indonesian Muslims today. Pre-reform Islam was mixed with traditional Hindu and Buddhist practices, particularly in Java. This happened because Islam had spread into Java as culture and did not completely erase pre-existing traditional practices and religions. To some extent, Islam has adapted to the local culture, which made the conversion to the religion incomplete. For a long time, the Javanese still kept the traditional practices of Hinduism and used Islam and its *shari'a* (law) for Javanese spiritual life only in a pro forma way. Those who still practise this form of Javanese spiritualism are called *abangan* or nominal Muslims. *Abangan* Muslims are often contrasted with the *santri*, who have converted to Islam more comprehensively and deeply. *Santri* Muslims normally live in the coastal cities in Java and if outside Java, in Aceh, Banten, West Sumatra, and Makassar; many *abangan* live in Central Java.

In chapter II, Fauzan examines the dynamics of theological discourses seeking to purify the practices and teachings of Islam in Indonesia. The theological discussions revolve around the claims of some Muslims to represent Islamic orthodoxy and seeking to use this as a basis for distinguishing between right and wrong Islamic teachings. In Indonesia the claim to orthodoxy is anchored on the Sunni tradition practised by the followers of Ahlussunah wal Jamaah. This tradition adheres to one of four main Islamic paradigms (*mahzab*): Malikite, Shafiite, Hanafite, and Hanbalite. It stands in opposition to the Shi'ah tradition as practised in Iran, which follows only Imam Ali, the Prophet Mohammad's son-in-law.

Indonesia's two main Muslim organizations: Muhammadiyah and the NU are followers of the Sunni tradition. Both organizations have

developed different religious practices (*ibadah*) and claim to represent the true meaning of Islam. Their contending theological claims were once matters of serious conflict, particularly because Muhammadiyah, since its inception in 1912, have attempted to erase traditional Islamic practices commonly performed by NU followers, which it said did not exist in Islam. Despite their differences, both groups belong to the *santri* community, which is earnest about adhering to Islamic precepts. In addition, according to Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid, there should not be conflict among Muslims because within the Ahlussunah wal Jamaah tradition, there is the principle of *ummah*, which is unity among Muslims. Muslims are also linked by the spirit of *jamaah* (belonging to one group), which upholds inclusivism and non-sectarianism. This concept, according to Madjid, is in congruence with the modern principles of a pluralistic and democratic community.

In chapter III, Fauzan further attempts to reconstruct the theological discourse developed by the reformist to sustain orthodox beliefs. In their formative years around the 1930s to the 1950s, the two organizations Muhammadiyah and Persis made early attempts to purify belief in one God (*tauhid*) and eradicate polytheism. Fauzan begins by looking at Muhammadiyah, which attempted to erase traditions and practices regarded as not being in line with, or unclearly written in, the Qur'an and the Hadith. As represented by Muhammadiyah theologian Mas Mansur, this effort was to make sure that the true Islamic spirit could be rediscovered and implemented in daily life. The efforts to purify religious belief and the emphasis on rational thinking in understanding scriptural evidence by some Muhammadiyah theologians were continued by H. Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or Hamka and then by Muhammad Amien Rais. Hamka introduced Muktazili's concept of freedom of action, rational interpretation of religion, and moral responsibility. He criticized the fatalistic doctrine, which was responsible for the backwardness of the Muslims. He urged Muslims to improve their living conditions. Another Muhammadiyah theologian mentioned in this book is Rais, who introduced the concept of *tauhid sosial*. By *tauhid sosial*, Rais tried to link *tauhid* (belief in one God) to the necessity of promoting social justice.

The second organization discussed is Persis. The claim to orthodoxy in Persis is explicitly motivated by efforts to overcome the poor social conditions of Indonesian Muslims. According to A. Hassan, the main leader of this organization, Muslims would not fall in misery should they follow the principal doctrines of the Qur'an and Hadith.

In addition to the efforts of members of Muslim organizations, academics and individuals who do not belong to any Islamic body have also contributed to the theological discourse. In chapter IV, Fauzan discusses the works of Harun Nasution, who was influenced by both the rational tradition of the Mu'tazili group and the neo-modernist approach of Nurcholis Madjid. Nasution criticizes the majority of Indonesian Muslims for relying too much on Ash'ari doctrines that gave Muslims a fatalistic world-view. For Nasution, in order to cope with modernity and progress, Muslims should adopt the rational thinking initiated by the Mu'tazili group, a rational and liberal community that was part of the early Muslim tradition. As a lecturer at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Institute for Islamic Studies in Jakarta, Nasution urged his students to review critically Islamic thoughts and understand them in their proper context.

Another reformer, Nurcholis Madjid, is grouped within neo-modernism and recognized as one of the supporters of cultural Islam. Neo-modernism in the Indonesia context relates to efforts to combine modernism and traditionalism. Neo-modernists also emphasize the need to accommodate new ideas with local traditions. To interpret the modern phenomenon, neo-modernists use *ijtihad* or hermeneutic methods by combining their traditional Islamic background and Western style of education. Muslims, according to Madjid, should therefore understand their religion and the spirit of its doctrine to cope with modernity. To become modern, for Madjid, does not mean to be Westernized. Rather, Muslims have to be selective and take advantage of modernity.

In understanding social life, neo-modernists believe in the idea of religious pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance, political relativism, mutual respect, and non-sectarianism. Madjid's famous concept regarding the political context is "Islam yes, Islamic party no" and "desacralization and secularization". He has criticized the Islamic parties in Soeharto's New

Order era (1970s and 1980s), which claimed to represent Islam but actually used Islam as a political tool. For him, Islam should be freed from becoming a political ideology, because the latter would restrict its space for expression. Madjid argues that the Islamic spirit should belong to all Indonesians and this can be fulfilled only if Muslims deliver Islam by peaceful means, and in cultural rather than political ways. The cultural approaches of Islam had happened in the history of the spread of Islam in Indonesia.

Madjid's neo-modernist approach to tolerance, secularism, and Islamic parties is strongly criticized by Muslims of the scripturalist group. Muslim political activists such as M. Natsir and A. Qadir Dajelani believe that Islamic parties fail not because of the fact that the parties are unable to offer a clear and attractive agenda based on Islamic ideology, as argued by Madjid, but because of the government's political structure. The latter has limited Islamic political parties' activities and privileged those of the governing party, Golongan Karya (Golkar). The NU activist Ahmad Baso also criticizes Madjid's ideas of renewal. Baso argues that Madjid's argument is based on Islam's past glory. According to Baso, Madjid's justification of ideas of democracy, pluralism, and tolerance was based only on the practices during the time of the Prophet and the four Caliphs. This tendency to glorify the past comes about because Madjid only reflects the establishment of Islam during the time of the Prophet in Mecca and Medinah and not the teachings of latter-day thinkers such as Mohammed Arkoun and Hassan Hanafi.

Fauzan's concluding chapter posits that the process of theological reformation is in line with the growth of the *santri* cultural domain, which for Fauzan also means the growth of orthodoxy in Indonesian Islam. At least four factors have influenced the growth of orthodoxy. First, the effort by Muslim theologians to stress the importance of knowing Islamic doctrines has introduced a more genuine form of Islam, one that is free from superstitions. For example, Harun Nasution's rational theology, which rejects any form of old superstitions, has made it possible for Muslims to cope with and adjust to modernity. Secondly, some government policies during Soeharto's New Order regime contributed unintentionally to the spread of orthodoxy. In particular, Soeharto's "konsep massa mengambang" (floating mass concept) — which banned

mass mobilization and limited the activities of opposition political parties to the national level, and adopted Pancasila as the sole ideology — reduced political-religious conflicts between Muslims and the other faiths in Indonesia. Muslims could thus concentrate on organizing Islamic social activities such as building Islamic schools and hospitals. Thirdly, religious education improved because religious lessons were provided at almost all levels of education. At the university level there was greater interest in acquiring a deeper knowledge of Islamic doctrines. Fourthly, there was intensification of Islamic *dakwah* activities to spread Islamic teachings as well as revitalize the faith in many areas of Indonesia.

The richness of Fauzan's analysis is that he always compares the different strands of reformist thinking. He also refers to the influence of earlier Muslim theologians such as the reformer Muhammad Abduh and other thinkers such as Salaf, Muktazilah, and Asharites. The comparisons and attempts at tracing the roots of reformation provide the intellectual nexus that links the Islamic discourse in Indonesia with the original teachings of Islam. This is also reflected in some individual efforts as represented by Harun Nasution and Nurcholis Madjid. Nasution was strongly influenced by the Mu'tazili group, which regarded rational thinking as the source of its theology. Madjid was also influenced to a certain degree by the rational thinking of Mu'tazili, Abduh, and Fazlur Rahman. Madjid also refers to the ideal type of Muslim society during the Prophet's time and the glory during the period when the four Caliphs replaced Mohammad. By elaborating on theological reformation in this way, Fauzan does not see the reformist attempt as merely responding to the needs of modernity, democracy, and pluralism, as some political analysts do; instead he sees it as an attempt to purify and link Islam to its original spirit as encapsulated in the early thinking of the religion soon after the death of the Prophet.

On the whole, Fauzan's book is a worthwhile read. The author is able to describe the mainstream thoughts of reformation among Indonesian Muslims. He shows the compatibility of Islam with modernization, rational thinking, moderation, and tolerance. The book was written before the New York World Trade Center tragedy but it may help leaders of mainstream Muslim organizations to convince the world commu-

nity that Islam in Indonesia has characteristics that are very different from that in the Middle Eastern countries. Since the early years of Islam's arrival in this part of the world, Indonesian Muslims have practised moderation and shown tolerance when dealing with non-Muslim communities.

However, the book may be strengthened with more engagement with writings that are critical of mainstream narratives in theological discourse. The works of scholars from the NU, the largest Islamic organization, have not been given sufficient attention in Fauzan's writing. The concept of "modern" advocated by Fauzan, which is in line with the Western concept of modernity and progress, has prevented him from looking at Islamic theological views from a broader perspective. As a consequence, theological discourses among NU supporters, which flourished well under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid in the last two decades, seem to be excluded simply because they emerge from a traditional Islamic organization.

The same criticism may also apply to the exclusion of the so-called scripturalist group in Fauzan's discussion. However negative and "traditional" the scripturalist interpretation of Islam might be, it has a certain theological underpinning in Islamic history. Although this school of thought is not of the mainstream, its voices are vocal and can be heard everywhere. Groups such as Laskar Jihad, Laskar Hisbullah, Hizbut Tahrir, and Jamaah Mujahiddin, for example, follow the scripturalist line in dealing with non-Muslim communities. They also use Islamic symbols and some Qur'anic verses to discredit the United States, and they have a different conception of democracy and sovereign power. For them, sovereignty is in the hands of God, not man. They also think that the United States does not really support democracy but uses democracy only to support and fulfil its own interests. The theological background of this group certainly merits discussion as well.

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