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(The Voice of Freedom)

19 September 2012

NU Observer, Holland Taylor

Studying the Babad Tanah Jawi (History of the Land of Java) with Gus Dur

SM/A Adib. Relaxed and chatting: Dr. [sic] Holland Taylor converses nonchalantly with Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, Deputy Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council. Both attended the NU's recent National Deliberation and Conference held at Pondok Pesantren (Madrasah) Kempek in Cirebon, West Java.

Developments within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) are of interest not only to its followers, but also to non-Muslims and foreigners. One of the latter is Mr. Holland Taylor, an American citizen.

Many attendees at the Nahdlatul Ulama's National Deliberation and Grand Conference—held from 14 – 17 September at Pondok Pesantren Kempek (Madrasah) in Cirebon, West Java—suddenly turned their attention that morning to the Caucasian man, Mr. Holland Taylor (56). This father of three appeared quite different from most Americans, who usually attend important meetings wearing a full suit and tie. His dress was also somewhat different from that of other attendees at the National Deliberation and Grand Conference.

This particular gentleman, who lives in Magelang, Central Java, wore a formal suit jacket and a sarong, but no skullcap [unlike everyone else]. He was not in the least awkward when he arrived at the conference site. As a matter of fact, he immediately began mingling with a number of attendees and well-known religious leaders, such as Kyai Haji Yahya Staquf and Kyai Haji Chasib Chasbullah. He also greeted everyone with whom he crossed paths, and all who approached him. Of course, it's natural that he would be familiar with them, because he is the head of the International Institute of Qur'anic Studies, or IIQS.

Mr. Taylor founded this organization with the former Chairman of the NU, Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid ("Gus Dur"). He tells how he first came to Indonesia in 1996, when he was in the telecom business. One day he visited the National Museum in Jakarta, where the profound richness and spirituality of Javanese culture struck him like a revelation.

After he retired from the telecom business in 1999, Mr. Taylor relocated to Java and would often visit sacred locales for prolonged periods of meditation. At Parangkusumo, he received a message [from God] to study the process of the Islamization of Java in the 15th and 16th centuries. "I spent four years researching this subject, which included reading the [17th-century] book *Babad Tanah Jawi* (*History of the Land of Java*), which describes the ideologically-driven conflict between a harsh and supremacist understanding of Islam, and that which is spiritual (ed. note: Sufism), a la Sunan Kalijogo and his disciples, including Joko Tingkir (Sultan Adiwijoyo), Ki Ageng Pemanahan and Senopati ing Alogo, founder of the Second Mataram Kingdom."

It was during the course of his research that this University of North Carolina and Princeton alumnus met Gus Dur and became a close friend of Indonesia's fourth president. Both were profoundly attracted to the *Babad Tanah Jawi* and to Islamic spirituality—recognizing the vital role these could play in our contemporary world. "Through Gus Dur, I came to know a number of *kyais* [NU religious leaders], such as Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri ("Gus Mus") from Rembang, a role model who truly embodies *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin sejati*," he explained [Islam as a source of love and compassion for all sentient beings].

Through his relationship with these *kyais*, Mr. Taylor became convinced that the Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesian Islam and the aforementioned spiritual figures had the potential to help dispel misconceptions about religion that threaten international peace, including both Islamophobia and ideologically-motivated violence perpetrated by Muslims themselves. Yet only *kyais* who embody God's universal love and compassion, and actively convey this love to others, are capable of performing this vital role, which opportunistic and materialistic religious leaders cannot fulfill. For ever since the collapse of the WTC's twin towers in 2001, Islam's image has been severely tarnished in the West. This is because many Europeans and Americans believe that the perpetrators of that attack acted in accord with the true teachings of Islam.

Primary Message

Mr. Taylor regards the NU as an Islamic organization that has succeeded in promoting genuine Islamic values. He also considers it capable of dispelling Western antipathy towards Islam. "The NU is helping to overcome misconceptions about religion, and Islamophobia, by propagating the view that Islam's primary message is one of universal love and compassion," said this LibForAll/IIQS activist.

The powerful impact of this message can be gauged from the reaction of top government officials, journalists and the general public in the West, when Gus Mus visited Europe and the U.S. [in 2010 and again in 2011].

"I understand *shari'a* to be not a set of laws, but rather, 'a path to water,' a path to God, and believe that every religion has its own valid *shari'a*," says Mr. Taylor. "I agree with Gus Dur, Buya Syafii Maarif and other religious leaders who say that Islamic law needs to be reinterpreted, in order to align the lives of contemporary Muslims with the primary message of Islam as a source of universal love and compassion, and with the principles of *shari'a* in the broadest sense. The NU has officially endorsed the theological validity and appropriateness of 'opening the doors of *ijtihad* (interpretation),' but the actual process of reinterpretation has not yet begun, or just barely so."

This chairman of the International Institute of Qur'anic Studies believes that the impact of Gus Dur's many contributions to humanity are not yet fully visible, and will only be grasped by future generations, once the various movements he launched have succeeded in fundamentally transforming our world for the better.

Mr. Taylor adds that NU faces a number of challenges, including the phenomenon of urbanization (NU members moving to the city), technology (including television), corruption related to political parties infiltrating the NU in search of votes, and transnational [i.e., extremist] ideology.

The NU's virtues include the traditions of *ahlus-sunnah wal jama'ah* (Sunni Islam), whose profound spirituality is capable of rendering nature verdant, and creating a social environment that is cool, tranquil and full of genuine love and compassion.

When asked what most impresses him about the NU leaders with whom he so frequently associates, Mr. Taylor describes being struck by the range of their esoteric and exoteric knowledge, and profoundly moved by their ability to convey the sublime values of religion to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including the possibility—and awe-inspiring beauty—of the human soul experiencing intimacy with God. The barrier [to such divine realization] is human ego.

"The solution [to the myriad problems that arise from a shallow understanding of religion] is genuine spirituality, which opens and illuminates the human heart, so that we may experience the presence of God, and share love and compassion with others," said the husband of Nining Niluh

Sudarti and father of Charles Bhagaskoro Taylor and Carolina Bhanurasmi Taylor, who live on the northern slope of the Menoreh Hills, near Borobudur Temple. [Their first son, Suryo, is buried nearby.]

One thing is certain: Mr. Taylor believes that the NU is successful at promoting the true values of Islam. "As the world's largest Muslim organization, the NU has a vital role to play in dispelling misconceptions about religion, including Islamophobia," said this LibForAll activist. "Propagating the NU's understanding of Islam as a source of universal love and compassion will help educate Muslims worldwide—and those of other faiths—about the values of Islam."

In his assessment, many [extremist Muslim] groups claim to represent the most "true" or "complete" understanding of Islam, while actually having little or no comprehension thereof. "The NU represents Indonesian Islam, which—as a general rule—is kind, gentle, highly nuanced and far from monolithic. Many people claim that their [absolutist] understanding of Islam is better than anyone else's. Yet it is precisely the NU which is capable of providing intellectual and spiritual illumination to others," explained Holland.

The NU also has a responsibility to consider how Muslims and non-Muslims can live together in harmony. In Mr. Taylor's opinion, this issue should be the subject of profound reflection, because life in the contemporary world is far different from that in the past. "To assure inter-communal harmony and concord requires a wise approach, that inspires people to enjoy their lives in peace and harmony, without disturbing others," closed the man, who speaks eloquent Javanese [sic] in addition to Indonesian. (A Adib-71)

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Pengamat NU, Holland Taylor

Belajar Babad Tanah Jawi pada Gus Dur

SM/A Adib bincang SANTAI: Dr Holland Taylor berbincang santai dengan KH A Mustofa Bisri saat mengikuti Munas-Konbes Nahdlatul Ulama di Pondok Pesantren Kempek, Cirebon. (58)

Kiprah Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tak hanya menarik para pengikutnya, melainkan juga memikat umat nonmuslim, dan warga mancanegara. Salah satunya adalah Dr Holland Taylor, warga Amerika Serikat.

PERHATIAN sejumlah peserta Musyawarah Nasional dan Konferensi Besar (Munas-Konbes) Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) di Pondok Pesantren Kempek, Cirebon, Jawa Barat, 14-17 September 2012, siang itu tiba-tiba tertuju pada pria bule, Dr Holland Taylor (56).

Bapak tiga anak tampil beda dengan kebanyakan orang dari negeri Paman Sam yang biasa mengenakan pakaian jas lengkap (full dress). Saat itu, dia juga memakai busana agak berbeda dengan peserta musyawarah (musyawirin) lainnya.

Laki-laki yang kini tinggal di Magelang itu mengenakan jas, tidak bersongkok dan mengenakan kain sarung. Dia tak canggung saat tiba di pesantren tersebut. Dia pun langsung berbaur dengan para peserta dan sejumlah kiai, seperti KH Yahya Staquf, KH Chasib Chasbullah.

Dia juga menyapa setiap orang yang berpapasan dan didekatnya. Wajar jika dia sudah akrab. Sebab, dia adalah Ketua International Institute of Quranic Studies.

Organisasi tersebut didirikan bersama almarhum mantan ketua umum PBNU KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Dia bercerita, dirinya kali pertama mengunjungi Indonesia pada 1996, ketika berbisnis telekom. Suatu hari, dia mengunjungi Museum Nasional dan terbuka matanya, melihat tentang kekayaan budaya Jawa.

Setelah pensiun dari bisnisnya pada 1999, dia pindah ke Jawa dan bersemedi di beberapa tempat.

Di Parangkusumo, dia mendapat petunjuk untuk meneliti proses Islamisasi Jawa pada abad 15 dan 16. “Saya menelitinya selama 4 tahun, termasuk membaca buku “Babad Tanah Jawi” yang menceritakan tentang konflik pemahaman antara Islam garis keras dan Islam spiritual (tasawuf-Red) ala Sunan Kalijaga dan para muridnya, termasuk Joko Tinggkir (Sultan Adiwijoyo), Ki Ageng Pemanahan, dan Senopati Ing Alaga, pendiri Martaram kedua.

Dari situ lah lulusan University of North Carolina dan Princeton University di bidang sastra tersebut berkenalan denga Gus Dur dan menjadi teman Presiden RI ke-4. Mereka berdua tertarik pada Babad Tanah Jawi, spiritualitas Islam, dan perannya di dunia kontemporer. “Melalui Gus Dur, saya menjadi kenal sejumlah kiai, seperti KH A Mustofa Bisri (Gus Mus) dari Rembang yang merupakan figur panutan Islam rahmatan lilalamin sejati,” jelasnya .

Dari perkenalan dengan sejumlah kiai itu, dia yakin NU, Islam di Indonesia, dan tokoh-tokah spiritual tersebut mempunyai potensi membantu dunia untuk mengatasi kesalahpahaman tentang agama yang dinilai mengancam kedamaian dunia ini, termasuk Islamophobia di Barat dan kekerasan dalam lingkungan umat Islam sendiri.

Peran itu diperlukan para kiai yang sungguh-sungguh berbagi kasih sayang Tuhan dengan sesama makhluk (bukan kiai-kiai materialistik).

Sebab, setelah runtuhnya menara kembar WTC pada 2001, wajah Islam di dunia Barat menjadi tercoreng. Hal ini disebabkan karena pandangan masyarakat di sana yang menuduh umat Islam menjadi dalang di balik serangan itu.

Pesan Utama

NU dinilai sebagai ormas Islam yang berhasil mempromosikan nilai-nilai Islam yang sebenarnya. Juga dianggap bisa menghilangkan fobia Barat terhadap agama Islam. “NU juga membantu untuk mengatasi salah paham agama dan fobia Islam di Barat. Dengan konsep pemahaman bahwa Islam adalah rahmatan lilalamin,” ujar aktivis LibForAll Fundation itu.

Hal tersebut bisa dilihat reaksi pejabat, wartawan, dan masyarakat Barat saat Gus Mus mengunjungi Eropa dan AS. “Saya paham syariat sebagai ëjalan ke airí atau ëjalan ke Tuhaní, dan berpikir bahwa semua agama punya syariat masing-masing.”

“Saya setuju dengan Gus Dur, Buya Syafii Maarif, dan tokoh lain yang menyatakan bahwa seharusnya ada ijtihad baru untuk menyesuaikan hidup umat Islam kontemporer dengan pesan utama Islam (sebagai rahmatan lilalamin) dan prinsip-prinsip syariat (dalam makna luas). NU, sudah meresmikan kepantasan membuka pintu ijtihad, tetapi prosesnya belum atau baru sedikit terjadi.’’

Dia menilai pengaruh Gus Dur belum jelas dan akan dipahami generasi masa depan saat dampak gerakan-gerakan yang dimulai kiai tersebut sudah berhasil mengubah dunia ini secara fundamental.

NU menghadapi sejumlah tantangan, termasuk fenomenon urbanisasi (warga NU pindah ke kota), teknologi (termasuk televisi), korupsi terkait dengan parpol yang menyusupi NU untuk menarik suara, dan ideologi transnasional.

Kelebihan NU adalah tradisi ahlussunnah wal jamaah yang kental dengan spiritualitas (sufisme), yang bisa menghijaukan alam semesta, dan menciptakan suasana sejuk yang punuh rahmat sejati.

Kesan utama dia saat bergaul dengan ulama NU adalah terharu menyaksikan ilmu mereka yang mumpuni secara lahiriyah dan batiniyah, ketulusan dan kemampuan mereka meyakinkan orang nonmuslim maupun muslim tentang nilai-nilai luhur agama, kemungkinan dan keindahan mendekati Tuhan. Hambatan adalah pamrih.

“Solusinya adalah spiritualitas sejati yang membuka hati manusia supaya bisa mengalami dan mengakui kehadiran Tuhan dan menyayangi sesama manusia,”tutur suami Nining Niluh Sudarti dan bapak dari Charles Bhagaskoro Taylor, Carolina Bhanurasmi Taylor yang tinggal di lereng Bukit Menoreh, dekat Candi Borobudur.

Yang pasti dia meyakini NU sebagai ormas Islam yang berhasil mempromosikan nilai-nilai Islam yang sebenarnya. Juga dianggap bisa menghilangkan fobia barat terhadap agama Islam. “NU sebagai ormas Islam di dunia, juga membantu untuk mengatasi salah paham agama dan phobia Islam di Barat. Dengan konsep pemahaman NU bahwa Islam adalah rahmatan lil alamin,” ujar aktivis LibForAll.

Menurut Holland, NU mempunyai peran besar dalam memberi pemahaman bagi umat Islam atau umat agama lain dalam pemahaman tentang nilai Islam.

Dia menilai, banyak organisasi yang tidak paham mengenai Islam, tetapi mengaku seperti yang paling mengerti Islam. “NU mewakili Islam Indonesia yang lembut, ramah, kompleks, dan tidak monolitik. Banyak yang merasa dirinya paling paham. NU justru memberikan pemahaman,” terang Holland.

NU juga mempunyai tugas untuk memikirkan bagaimana orang muslim dan nonmuslim bisa hidup bersama dalam kerukunan. Menurut dia, hal ini perlu dipikirkan karena kehidupan masyarakat dunia pada zaman sekarang sudah berbeda dengan kehidupan pada zaman dulu.

“Untuk itu perlu dengan bijak merespons bagaimana supaya kehidupan masyarakat bisa rukun dan damai,” tutup pria yang juga fasih berbahasa Jawa ini.(A Adib-71)

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