

PART I: MINISTERING IN CONTEXTS OF ISLAMISM AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

The Dynamics of Islamic Fundamentalism in Indonesia and the Growth of Christianity

By Frank Preston, PhD

Frank Preston and his wife Linda (pseudonyms) have served with Pioneers for over 22 years, thirteen of those years were in Indonesia. He has published book chapters and articles in leading journals on radical Islam, especially Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia. Currently he collaborates with a multi-organizational team in facilitating CPM training events for expatriates and nationals who work amongst Unreached People Groups.

Abstract

The June 2012 edition of the *Economist* reported that the same Muslim groups in Indonesia that attacked and killed members of the aberrant Islamic group Ahmadiyah and destroyed their mosque also attacked and destroyed Christian churches in various locations. International Crisis Group observes that these groups choose violence against anyone who does not adhere to *their* brand of Islam, be they Muslim or Christian. These groups justify their attacks on interpretations of the Islamic concept of *Takfir*—apostates whom they determine are undermining Islamic principles and thus need to be neutralized (ICG, 2008, 2010). Reports from within Indonesia note that significant numbers of Ahmadiyah Muslims consider Christianity a viable alternative to the brand of Islam propagated by these radicals.

A similar pattern emerged from the failed 1965 Indonesian coup d'état by communist insurgents. Radical Islamic elements sought to take advantage of the political instability to install sharia law in an effort to make Islamic law the basis for Indonesian politics (Machmudi, 2008). Their attempts failed when General Suharto (later becoming President Suharto) crushed the coup and then installed secular governance through the 'Five Guiding Principles' (*Pancasila*) as a way of countering two destabilizing forces: communism and radical Islam. Nearly half a million Indonesians from all faiths and political affiliations were killed during the coup by the forces vying for political control (Ramage, 1995).

But in the era before the coup and in the aftermath, forward-thinking church leaders and missionaries chose to be bold in witness and to prepare indigenous leaders instead of being insular during persecution. This resulted in the largest conversion of Muslims to Christianity recorded in history, with over two million Muslims becoming Christians (Willis, 1977).

Christianity as a missionary apolitical religion

Arguably at its core, Christianity is a missionary religion. Stephen Neill asserts that, 'The church of the first Christian generation was genuinely a missionary church' (Neill, 1986). The book of Acts records the implementing of Jesus' command given in the gospel of Matthew 28:19-21 *to make disciples of all ethnê*, with the command being reiterated in Acts 1:8 *to be his witnesses to all the earth*. Clearly, Jesus' intention was to have the gospel message spread to all ethnic groups throughout the earth. History records the diligence of Christ's followers in obeying this command. Currently Christianity is the world's largest religion, with nearly two billion adherents, and is the fastest growing religion gaining new adherents *by conversion*. Islam ranks second with 1.6 billion adherents (Miller, 2009) with growth that is mostly derived from high birth rates (Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson, 2001).

Jesus established Christianity as an apolitical (non-political) entity. When discussing this issue with Pontius Pilatus (Jn.18), Jesus states that his kingdom is not of this world, thus establishing the flexibility of Christianity to be expressed under any political system, though some systems are more compatible with Christian teachings than others. The second century letter *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, is one of the earliest descriptions of Christian lifestyles under oppressive regimes. In it we find this description of what sets Christians apart from others:

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life. Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvellous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign (Roberts, 2007).

Jesus states that his kingdom is not of this world, thus establishing the flexibility of Christianity to be expressed under any political system.

The last two sentences succinctly state that Christians were able to flourish in any political environment since they lacked nationalistic inclinations.

Islam as a missionary and political religion

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca, a member of the Quraysh tribe of the Arab ethnic group. At that time, Arabs were polytheists and the Quraysh tribe was caretaker of the *Kaaba* worship centre that housed a multitude of worshiped

artifacts. Muhammad was grieved that the Arabs in general and more specifically his Quraysh tribe had departed from their monotheist roots of worshipping the one God ‘Allah’ to worshipping a multitude of idols and deities. During the month of Ramadan in 610 CE Muhammad received his first of many revelations calling for all descendants of Abraham to obey the holy books of Allah, and return to worshipping Allah only. These revelations, collectively called the *Qur’an* (literally the *recitations* of Muhammad’s revelations), affirmed Muhammad’s monotheist beliefs in Allah, and became his sermons to the Quraysh tribe, and to all Arabs, to return to the one God, Allah. Eventually his revelations in the Qur’an called for *all people* to follow Islam as the ‘right path.’ Those who did not choose to follow were classified as *kafir* or unbelievers (Aslan, 2005).

Muhammad’s last two revelations in the Qur’an (according to Bell & Watt, 1995), *The Table Spread* (Surah 5) and *Repentance* (Surah 9), make it clear that Muslims should continue to spread their religion throughout the earth through conversions, this often involved exercising military and political control to obtain conversions. For example, *Repentance* (9) verse 5 illustrates the missionary and political objective:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Yusuf Ali, 1991)

This passage can be summed up as saying that Muslims are to maintain relations with pagans (other translations call them *unbelievers* or the Arabic term *kafir*) and then to provide a means for them to repent and to become Muslims. The controversial part of this passage is: ‘fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them’ from which some radical Islamic groups use as justification for violent jihad – warring against the *kafir*. But some Muslim scholars feel the intent of this verse is a call for Muslims to practice *da’wah*, a concept similar to Christian missionary activity. The word *da’wah* in Arabic simply means: ‘inviting someone to the way of submission and surrender to Allah’.

Larry Poston argues that the *da’wah* missionary approach used by Muslims for over a millennium after Muhammad’s death involved the political conquest of a nation followed by the establishment of Islamic religious/political institutions. But this proved impracticable in the modern era¹. Most Muslims in the modern era adopted an ‘internal/personal’ process involving persuasion and a personal conversion to Islam (Poston, 1992).

¹ Scholars such as Karen Armstrong (2000) and Albert Hourani (1983) credit the influence of the Islamic scholar al Afghani (1838-1897) for demarcating the modern era of Islam.

After the dissolution of the Caliphate in 1924, Hasan al Banna (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was grieved at the decline of Islam's *da'wah* aspirations. He felt Islam needed a spiritual revival implemented through a structured approach called *tarbiyya* (literally: a system of education). The basis of *tarbiyya* was the small cell group, called an *usroh* or 'family' that had a leader and about ten members. Four 'families' made up a 'clan', five 'clans' made up a 'group' and five groups made up a 'battalion' - all of whom reported to a branch manager. In this way a large group of members could be managed while the personalized mentoring of Muslims in the tenants of Islam could occur.

Hasan al Banna's vision for how to create an Islamic revival that would eventually lead to the re-establishment of the Caliphate involved three stages: (1) making known the ideas and goals of the Society among its members, (2) forming and sustaining an effective organization which would embody those ideas, and (3) establishing a movement that would put into effect the ideals of the Society (Mitchell, 1969, p. 197).

It exceeds the bounds of this paper to describe in detail the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood internationally, but currently the Muslim Brotherhood is easily the largest Muslim organization in the world. This paper will discuss the Muslim Brotherhood branch in Indonesia known as *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party) or PKS, and how its aspirations are impacting the Christian community.

Indonesia's religious history and modern Islamic movements

Prior to the 7th century Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms ruled most of Indonesia. Muslim traders and missionaries began arriving in the archipelago of Indonesia by the 11th century and by the 14th century most of Java and Sumatra islands had turned to the Islamic religion. By 1500 CE Portuguese traders began arriving, bringing Catholicism with them. The Dutch began arriving by the 1600s, introducing Protestantism, but the religious terrain was already fairly established with 85% of Indonesia's population being Muslim and the other religions composing the balance.

Though Muslims were a majority of the population in Indonesia by 1500, they were never able to translate that majority into a unified political identity for two reasons. First, the various autonomous kingdoms controlled major swaths of the archipelago, each with their own language and culture. This hindered a common expression of an Islamic *ummah*. Second, the Dutch colonizers used this natural disunity between ethnic groups to maintain control, often pitting one ethnic group against another, and not allowing a common language that would engender expressions of nationalism.

Yet the 'Indonesian' language (a standardized version of the Malay trade language) was growing more common when the Japanese occupation supplanted the Dutch control in 1942. At the end of WWII, an Indonesian resistance

movement under the leadership of Sukarno repelled the attempted re-occupation by the Dutch. On the 17 of August 1945, Sukarno and the Indonesian resistance movement were able to declare their independence as a democratic and self-ruled state (Smith, 1974).

As Sukarno and the Indonesian resistance movement were developing the Indonesian constitution, fundamental and radical Islamic groups sought to use this political opportunity to implement sharia as the political law of the nation. Seeking to mitigate the pressure of these groups to implement sharia and thus likely cause a civil war between radical Muslims and other religions plus moderate Muslims, Sukarno established the 'Five Guiding Principles' (called *Pancasila*) that essentially declared Indonesia a secular yet religiously pluralistic nation (Ramage, 1995).

In the late 1980s, the Indonesian Ministry of Religion began sending students to Egypt to pursue advanced degrees in Islamic religion as a way of neutralizing the influence of radical groups. Many of those students were introduced to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology in Egypt. Upon returning to Indonesia as scholars in leading universities, they began establishing *usroh* study circles and followed a similar pattern of recruitment and training as was practiced in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. These *usroh* circles sought to encourage piety by Muslims and not engage in confrontational mobilization tactics used by radical Islamic groups. This is a core philosophical difference that sets Muslim Brotherhood Indonesia (calling itself Prosperous Justice Party or 'Partai Keadilan Sejahtera' - PKS) apart from radical Islamic groups.

Though Muslims were a majority of the population in Indonesia by 1500, they were never able to translate that majority into a unified political identity.

Essentially PKS, like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, followed the three stage approach of Islamizing Indonesia by (1) making known the ideas and goals of PKS by recruiting Muslims to their cell groups, (2) establishing PKS cadre into effective organization that embodies PKS ideas and then (3) influence all society through its political and religious agenda (Machmudi, 2008).

At this point the size of PKS is unknown, but it is well established that they are the most politically influential Islamic organization in Indonesia. In the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2007, PKS lost by a small percent after all the other twelve political parties joined into a coalition to defeat the popularity of PKS. In the forthcoming 2014 national election, PKS appears to be a strong contender in the selection of the next president.

PKS aspirations are to strengthen the religiosity of Indonesian Muslims through *usroh* cells (now called *liku*) and to advance political *da'wah* of Islam in Indonesia. Scholars have observed that PKS has been successful in Islamizing Indonesia. There is significant concern that PKS' third stage will lead to

institution of sharia as the basis of national politics (Collins, 2004; Machmudi, 2008).

This assertion could be considered hyperbole. Yet, my discussions with senior PKS leaders, as well as scholars' understanding of obscure language in Muslim Brotherhood documents (Boykin & Soyster, 2010; Habeck, 2006), support the desire for implementation of sharia and reinstallation of the Caliphate. That means a political government in an Islamic majority country must be under the control of a prominent Islamic group like Hizbut Tahrir, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, al-Qaeda or the Muslim Brotherhood. Once a Caliph is installed, that leader can exercise the obligation of Surah 9:5 (*Repentance*) to resume the Islamic march toward control over the world. There are significant doubts among political analysts that such a world domination scenario is plausible, but such an aspiration does capture the imagination of many fundamentalist Muslims and incites jihadism (Roy, 2004).

Modern Christian movements in Indonesia

In the 1950s and 1960s, a new wave of Christian missionary groups began to make inroads into Indonesia. Baptists and Pentecostals were founding new styles of churches, medical institutions, and seminaries throughout Indonesia, yet predominately in areas that were classically 'Muslim' territories. This was a departure from the approach of the historical Dutch Reformed denomination where Christians and Muslims did not make incursions into each other's domains. The Javanese Dutch Reformed denomination² and the Baptists began to distance themselves from the practice of requiring local leaders to meet extensive foreign criteria to become pastors or missionaries, and they began to encourage more lay people in outreach activities. Likewise, missionary groups began using mass media in presenting the gospel through radio and print (Willis, 1977).

On the 30th of September 1965, the communist party (PKI) was alleged to have killed the six top military leaders of Indonesia as a way of starting a coup to overthrow the Sukarno regime. The remaining senior officer, General Suharto, called for a mass retaliation against all members of the PKI. Chaos broke out and over the course of several months, nearly 500,000 people were killed. Various Muslim groups participated in purging all those involved in the communist coup, as well as anyone they considered an enemy of Islam. In various parts of Indonesia, Christians gave asylum to those threatened. In essence, certain Muslim groups chose a path of violence to accomplish their goals whereas Christians chose a path to thwart such violence.

Avery Willis documents significant church growth among the ethnic Javanese populations during this chaotic period. Between 1965 and 1970 some

² Several Javanese reformed denominations would fit into this category.

two million Muslims became Christians. Of the reasons for rapid church growth during the period of crisis, the following were most noted: *extensive use of the laity, nurturing of people movements, planting of hundreds of new congregations, use of small groups for Bible study, prayer, training programs for the laity, special evangelistic emphases and missionary spirit* (Willis, 1977, p. 196).

After the rapid growth in the wake of the coup, the growth of the Christian movement stalled with no statistical increase in Christians compared to population growth until the new millennium. A new Christian movement in Indonesia can be summed up in the *Time Magazine* April 2010 edition that discusses a Pew research report:

A religious revolution is transforming Indonesia. Part of the spiritual blossoming entails Muslims embracing a more conservative form of faith, mirroring global trends that have meant a proliferation of headscarves and beards in modern Islamic capitals. More surprising, though, is the boom in Christianity — officially Indonesia's second largest faith and a growing force throughout Asia. Indeed, the number of Asian Christian faithful exploded to 351 million adherents in 2005, up from 101 million in 1970, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, based in Washington, D.C. (Apr. 26, 2010 <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1982223,00.html>)

What is reported by Pew research is consistent with observations by field workers. Researchers on gospel advancement report that over the last five years, in excess of two thousand Muslim background house churches have been planted by practitioners using various innovative approaches, comprising nearly 20,000 Muslim background believers. Similar to what occurred in the 1965 era, the more radicalism rears its head, the more attractive following Christ becomes for some Muslims.

Between 1965 and 1970 some two million Muslims became Christians.

One recent report by the Islamic group savemarium.com stated: 'two million (Muslims) are walking away from Islam every year.' Though savemarium.com's data is contested, it is clear that a significant number of Muslims are not interested in the radicals' Islamic vision for Indonesia. In a 2007 study conducted by Hairgrove and McLeod, it was found that 28% of Indonesian Muslims preferred an Islamic based government, 39% did not, and 33% were unsure. This research demonstrates that if any Islamic group imposes its *brand* of Islam, Indonesia will find a significant portion of Muslims who would be open to a religious alternative (Hairgrove & McLeod, 2008).

Conclusions

Some Indonesian Christian missions and churches before the 1965 bloodbath prepared for a large influx of converts. They did this by empowering the non-professional Christians (laity as compared to pastoral staffing). This was done by

allowing laity to lead home meetings and to administer the sacraments such as baptism. But Willis (1977) points out that forward thinking leaders also prepared for a large influx by *nurturing of people movements*. Though the elements of such training were less defined than current church planting movements (CPM) approaches, significant similarities do exist. But the ‘flash point’ was the political upheaval. Some organizations were prepared spiritually and with a vision for what God would be moving among the Indonesian Muslim population. Those who were ready saw significant church growth.

We find ourselves at a similar cross roads. The political conditions impacted somewhat by the Arab Spring and the emergence of groups like PKS and Hizbut Tahrir demonstrate that Indonesia is pregnant for a new movement much like 1967. Already workers are seeing the first fruits of such a movement.

May God grant us wisdom as we prepare for the movement of the Spirit among the Indonesian Muslims.

Works Cited

- Aslan, R. 2005. *No God but God*. New York: Random House.
- Barrett, D. B., Kurian, G. T., & Johnson, T. M. 2001. *World Christian encyclopedia 2nd Ed.*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, R. & Watt, W. M. 1995. *Introduction to the Qur'an*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Boykin, W. J., & Soyster, H. E. 2010. *Shariah: The Threat To America: An Exercise In Competitive Analysis (Report of Team B II)*. Washington, DC: The Center for Security Policy.
- Collins, E. 2004. Islam is the solution: Dakwah and democracy in Indonesia. Department of Classics and World Religions.
- Habeck, M. R. 2006. *Knowing the enemy: jihadist ideology and the War on Terror*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hairgrove, F., & McLeod, D. 2008. *Support for the Caliphate & Radical Mobilization*. Baltimore: University of Maryland.
- ICG. 2008. *Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree*. Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- ICG. 2010. *Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance*. Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- Machmudi, Y. 2008. *Islamising Indonesia: the rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the prosperous justice party (PKS)*. Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press.
- Miller, T. 2009. Mapping the global Muslim population: A report on the size and distribution of the world's Muslim population. *Washington, DC: Pew Research Center*.
- Mitchell, R. 1969. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. London: Oxford University Press.

- Neill, S. 1986. *A history of Christian missions (2nd Ed)* (Vol. 6). New York: Penguin Books.
- Poston, L. A. 1992. *Islamic da'wah in the west: Muslim missionary activity and the dynamics of conversion to Islam*. Oxford University Press.
- Ramage, D. E. 1995. *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance*. New York: Routledge.
- Roberts, R. A. 2007. Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus In A. C. Coxe, Ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325, Volume X Bibliographic Synopsis; General Index*, Vol. 10, pp. 5-7. New York: Cosimo Inc.
- Roy, O. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smith, R. M. 1974. *Southeast Asia: documents of political development and change*. Cornell, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Willis, A. 1977. *Indonesian Revival: Why Two Millions Came to Christ*. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Yusuf Ali, A. 1991. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*. Brentwood, MD: Amana.