

Editorial:

BANK INTEREST, PILGRIMAGE, AND MODERNISM

Two phenomenal issues arise within Indonesian Muslim society recently: the *fatwa* of the Indonesian Ulama' Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*/MUI) about *riba* and the pilgrimage case. Bank interest and *riba* is a classical problem not only for Indonesian Muslims but also for Muslims all over the world and therefore the current *fatwa* of the MUI about proscription of bank interest is not a new issue. Prior to this *fatwa*, the Council has issued a similar *fatwa* in the 1970s, which was initiated by other *fatwas* of certain international Islamic organizations. Initially, some observers predicted that the recent *fatwa* of the MUI would create significant rush in some conventional banks and most Indonesian Muslims would transfer their money to Islamic/Syari'ah banks. However, the prediction was not proved to be true; no rush and no massive transfers. This fact has initiated a polemic amongst several Muslim leaders in the Indonesian mass media, and many theories were proposed. First, Muslims do not consider the *fatwa* as an important advice from the MUI because they do not really understand about *riba*. Second, Muslims consider bank interest as a reasonable benefit and they have been enjoying it during their life time. As bank interest is one of the phenomena of modernity that should be faced by Muslims all over the world, there should be a profound discussion about this issue so that a meeting point for the Indonesian Muslims can be proposed.

The case of pilgrimage is also an essential issue for the Indonesian Muslims. The abortive attempt of about 30,000 Muslims to go to Mecca for pilgrimage could not be considered as a trivial issue. Regardless of

the Indonesian government's efforts to overcome this problem, these Muslims have already lost their trust to the government. Although there are certain Muslims who consider this incident as a test for them to be more patient, the government, in this case the Department of Religious Affairs, could not deny that this is due to their misstep. The frankness and sincerity of these Muslims to accept this circumstance could not be misused by the government as the reason for not improving its service quality. Since we live in modern era, we should employ modernization which would provide some alternatives to address problems faced by Muslims.

Al-Jami'ah Journal of Islamic Studies is an international journal which accommodates modern views on Islam, either from Muslims or non-Muslims. The journal views that modernity does not contradict Islamic teachings; on the contrary, it helps Muslims to be more devout. In its attempt to demonstrate its modern views, the journal accommodates the diverse thoughts within Islam. From eight articles in this volume, we proudly present some articles on modern perspectives of Islam. David Splawn's article compares 'Isa in Al-Qur'an and Jesus in the New Testament. M. Abdurrahman and Ahmad Baidowi discuss two main sources of Islam with new perspectives. Other articles examine Islam in its relations to language and culture. In general, all articles in this edition are important for those who want to better understand modern views of Islam. (*Muhammad Wildan/Editor*).