

**The Qur’anic Worldview:
A Springboard for Cultural Reform**

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman
London: IIIT, 2011. 179 pages.

The thesis of this sophisticated book is that the rebirth of an Islamic identity can only be realized through a decisive replication of the Muslim community created through strict adherence to and implementation of the Qur’anic worldview. The specific details provided by AbdulHamid AbuSulayman in his attempt to present this thesis as credible and worthy of merit invariably expose the work as one of synthesis and the lifetime project of an intellectual who is being propelled by his wanderlust for paving the way for the Muslims’ return to the golden age of the Islamic heritage. For instance, he describes this book as his “extended reflection on the Islamic worldview” (p. xv), around which his scholarship and personal experience have revolved. He also cites this reflection as the reason why he has “grappled with . . . issues” relating to it from his early days and has continued to promote the same line of thought throughout his “writing career that extended half a century” (p. xx).

The book is divided into five chapters. In chapter 1, the author discusses the relationship between the Qur’anic worldview and human nature. He bases his argument on the premise that “every cultural system is associated with an underlying worldview which is translated into action by means of a particular

way of thinking or mindset” (p. 1). He further asserts that every thought is similarly traceable to the guiding principles that inform both their direction and outcomes. The implication of this, he insists, is that any deficiency or flaw in either the worldview or the mindset of any society will automatically affect that society’s performance and quality by bringing about its “backwardness and cultural disintegration” (p. 2).

In chapter 2, AbuSulayman explains the principles constituting the Qur’anic worldview and demonstrates their interrelatedness. For instance, he views freedom as “entailing a responsibility which in turn requires that human beings enjoy the freedom to make meaningful choices and give concrete expression to their convictions and desires within the limits of their abilities” (p. 81). This is related to his description of the principle of humanity’s divinely given stewardship, which he sees as entailing “both the right to exercise freedom in the making of life decisions, and duties, responsibilities, and accountability for our actions and the ways in which we have put our abilities and energies to use on earth” (p. 77). Similarly, he considers the principle of responsibility as one that leads “people both rationally and intuitively to the conviction that within the limits of their abilities and circumstances as they enjoy the freedom to make meaningful choices for which they must bear responsibility” (p. 84). This, again, shows the correlation between “responsibility” and the other principles.

Chapter 3 suggests the existence of an action plan that can actualize the Qur’anic worldview. Rather than pursue the translation of principles into a Qur’anic-based action plan, however, AbuSulayman only highlights that which makes contemporary western civilization a total departure from the Qur’anic worldview. He posits that it “has abandoned religion and the guidance of divine revelation for reasons having to do with its particular religions’ histories and heritages and the state in which these religions find themselves now” (p. 117). Moreover, he asserts that the message of those religions “has now fulfilled its purpose” (p. 117) following the tailoring of such a message “to the circumstances and cultural development of the people to whom it was addressed” (p. 117). If the religions the author has in mind are the two heavenly ones followed by the “People of the Book,” then one wonders whether such a statement can be more injurious and inaccurate.

The injurious nature of AbuSulayman’s claim in this regard is further exposed by his claim that “Western civilization has adopted a materialistic orientation which has instilled in it the same lifeless amoral qualities of matter itself” (p. 117) as a result of those religions’ distortion. He insists that modern civilization’s features are “in reality, concrete expressions of the law of the jungle and the propensities of the self that incites to evil”

(p. 118). If these claims were completely true, could not the author have found a more courteous, refined, non-sweeping, or less generalizing way of expressing such a sensitive view? Ironically, while offering his Qur'anic worldview, he admits that "despite its overall rejection of the guidance of revelation, modern materialistic civilization has achieved great things thanks to its commitment to the systematic, law-governed method of scientific inquiry, which constitutes one of the requirements for the task of being God's stewards and representatives on earth" (p. 120).

In chapter 4, the author offers what is expected of him in the previous chapter: an intelligible articulation of what should be done. He pursues the same line of argument until his declaration that "the Islamization of knowledge and the Islamization of the social sciences are two sides of a single coin" (p. 130). AbuSulayman henceforth labors frantically to distinguish between the two; however, he fails to provide a convincing analysis. His argument consists of three points: (1) an emphasis on the need to "identify the methodological and ideational relationship between contemporary Islamic social sciences and both the Islamic heritage and modern western social sciences on the level of sources, ideational content, and study and research methods" (p. 130); (2) the link between modern western social sciences and the Islamization of knowledge lies "at the heart of the Islamic social sciences and having to do with both content and method" (p. 132); and (3) a definition of the social sciences by claiming that "the function of jurisprudence and the law is, first and foremost, formal in nature, while the function of the social sciences is primarily intellectual or ideational" (p. 133).

There are three pitfalls here: (1) whether there is any difference between what the author describes as "formal" and what he sees as "intellectual"; (2) whether one can declare the Islamization of knowledge to be something different from the Islamization of the social sciences without declaring the social sciences to be something other than a body of knowledge; and (3) the author's references to "the issue of the Islamization of knowledge and the development of the Islamic social sciences" (p. 133), as if the latter is not subsumed under the former.

In chapter 5, AbuSulayman focuses on the educational blueprint of the International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM). This university, established in 1983 and of which he was the rector from 1983-89, allows students to major in one field or to combine a major with a minor specialization in the faculties of Islamic revelation and the humanities. The implication here is that students specialize in Islamic studies and, if they desire to pursue a secondary specialization or minor, spend an additional year (for 30 or 40 credit hours) to receive a B.A. in Islamic studies and another one in any area of humanities or social

sciences. Clearly, from the author's analysis, IIUM's curriculum is unique in many respects, such as containing courses on the family and childbearing as well as creative thinking and problem solving.

AbuSulayman has done us a favor through this masterpiece. However, the following printing and linguistic errors should be addressed to improve subsequent editions: "they follow the Gregorian calendar and labeled CE" (p. xi) should be "and are labeled"; "life's true meaning and its sublime, God-given purpose are lived out" (p. xiii) should be "life's true meaning and sublime, God-given..."; "sexual relations and the dangers it can pose" (p. xviii) should be "they can pose"; "pregnancy and all this entails by way of negative effect" (p. xviii) should be "all it entails" or "all that it entails"; "this lack of awareness and concern are among the primary causes" (p. 3) should be "is among"; "out understanding of the Qur'anic worldview" (p. 121) should be "our understanding"; the reality of life and relationships to the observed in modern Islamic societies fails to reflect many of these" (p.122) should be "fail"; and "he may not being limited" (p. 126) should be "he may not be."

There is also a need to consider the chapters' disproportionate lengths. While chapters 1 and 2 consist of 72 and 45 pages, respectively, chapters 3-5 consist of 5, 15, and 6 pages, respectively. One wonders whether these last three could be merged into a single chapter, since the themes and subthemes addressed in them are somewhat related. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, AbuSulayman has earned another round of applause as a leading promoter of the Islamization of Knowledge project. Islamic scholars, researchers, and educationists will find his book very useful.

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