

Editorial

The question of modernity in its societal, historical, and literary unfoldings is the underlying theme of several articles presented in this issue of *AJISS*. Following in the tradition of Marshall G. S. Hodgson, John Obert Voll ventures into the history of Islam as an integral part of world history. In his numerous studies, Voll has always viewed the Muslim world from a global perspective, a trait that is even more evident in his "The Mistaken Identification of 'The West' with 'Modernity.'" Voll's article is based on a profound understanding of the West in terms of the fundamental changes that have swept human life and society during the past two or three centuries. Modernity cannot be identified with the West, Voll argues, for the West, as a repertoire of traditions, was a concept related to the existence of civilizations. But "civilization," as conceived in most of the studies and analyses of world history, is now a societal lifestyle of the past. It therefore follows that the transformation of societies and lifestyles has transcended the classical West and created a new world situation in which relations between Islam and the West are predicated on different bases. While it is true that Islam's repertoire of concepts and principles is more clearly focused than that of the West, it is also true that, in the context of the global cosmopolitanism of our times, Islam and the West share a similar cultural, political, and social experience:

Islam and the West are no longer simply two rival and clashing civilizations or even two different modes of modernity. They are now interactive partners, sometimes fighting and sometimes cooperating, involved in the co-constructed reality of the contemporary world.

Voll's view of a modern shared experience is supported by Suroosh Irfani's "New Discourses and Modernity in Postrevolutionary Iran." For a society that has been portrayed in the most denigrating terms by the western media, Irfani presents a powerful human and creative image of contemporary Iran that touches upon a wide range of cultural revival: print media, film industry, literature, and music. A common denominator of the works cited in his article, which is based on extensive field research, is the "attempt to go beyond the literary level of interpretation and extant mean-

ing by enlarging, where possible, the scope of each entry by means of a juxtaposition of cultural and spiritual dimensions." Here we encounter a great religious and nationalist cultural tradition that is reinterpreted, reconstructed, and universalized by means of modern discourses, concepts, and methods. Irfani concludes that if, the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 reflected an ethics of resistance, Iran may yet initiate a mutually healing dialogue between the Muslim world and the West.

Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri's "Parables of Freedom and Necessity: A Study of the Rising Levels of Secularization as Manifested in Two Literary Works," is an immensely revealing study of Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Frankeleyns Tale" and Bertold Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*. His approach is rather different from the customary approaches of literary criticism, for he focuses on the expressions of secularism—the most cherished prophecy of modernity—in literature. It is in the historical distance between Chaucer's medieval narrative and Brecht's modern nightmarish work that Elmessiri's thoughtful analysis demonstrates its implications. Chaucer's world was one in which the necessitarianism of our secular modern times was just beginning to emerge. In Brecht's world, "all human relations are frozen and all humanity is objectified into classes and functionalized into means of production without any possibility of regeneration."

This issue of *AJISS* offers two other important contributions. The first is Chandra Muzaffar's "Accommodation and Acceptance of Non-Muslim Communities within the Malaysian Political System: The Role of Islam," in which essential questions related to the accommodation of non-Malay non-Muslim communities in the Malaysian polity are addressed with great insight. The other is Abdul Majid Al Najjar's "Classification of Sciences in Islamic Thought: Between Imitation and Originality," where the author discusses the framing of classical Islamic sources in light of the epistemological basis of the early Islamic worldview rather than its descriptive concerns.

Finally, it would be inappropriate to conclude this editorial without paying tribute to the memory of Dr. Kamil Jamil al Asali, who passed away during November of 1995. Asali's numerous works on the medieval and Ottoman history of Jerusalem represent a significant addition to the field of Islamic and Middle East history. He was a teacher whose manners and dedication earned him the love and loyalty of his students and many of his colleagues. His scholarly research in the history of Palestine and Jerusalem, which combined a deep knowledge of primary sources with modern techniques of historical investigation, makes his death an even greater loss. We salute his memory and pray for his soul.

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