

Editorial

This issue of *AJISS* provides a multidimensional perspective of today's Islamic intellectual experience. What seems to contribute markedly to the shaping of this experience is the ongoing creative process of integrating the contemporary with the historical and the particular with the universal. The Muslims' commitment to humanity's persistent struggle for meaning and harmony is, in essence, deeply linked to their belonging to the social and discursive manifestations of the Islamic historical epoch.

Similarly evident is that neither studying Islam nor seeking the construction of an Islamic view of our times can be conducted coherently without invoking human history and intellectual achievements located outside of the traditionally defined boundaries of the Islamic intellectual venture. Examples abound. Western epistemological tools and concepts are now used widely, with little hesitation, by an increasing number of Muslim social scientists. On another level, the emergence of world global systems has left its imprint on the Muslims' perceptions of universal justice. The influences of non-Muslim suffering and struggle are becoming part of the Muslim consciousness. In a startling reflection of this development, the tragic history of Native Americans has recently been sought as an allegorical well-spring by Arab anti-imperialist poets. For Islam and the world, despite many pitfalls and dangers, this process of integration is ultimately bound to transfer the Muslims' worldview to an era that is fundamentally distinctive from the preceding "centuries of the Islamic experience."

Charles Hirschkind's "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd" provides a lucid example of how modern Islamic intellectualism and its image, the discipline of Islamic studies, are predicated on a wide variety of sources, whether historical or contingent, traditional or otherwise. The case of Abu Zayd and his prolonged conflict with Islamic circles in Egypt has been of particular interest to the western and Arab secular media alike. Emerging from the halls of the University of Cairo, the contentious debate surrounding his ideas has marched all the way to the Egyptian judiciary. But Hirschkind is not a judge, and *AJISS* is not a courtroom. The focus here is on "the contrastive notions of reason and history,"

which seem to be the underlying causes for a great deal of political and/or intellectual conflict in the contemporary Muslim world.

Salim A. Elwazani's contribution of the "Sacral Qualities of Form in Mosque Architecture: Transformation of the Arts of the Qur'an into the Arts of the Mosque," reveals a fascinating aspect of the Islamic mode of life before the advent of modernity. By analyzing the harmonious interconnectedness between Qur'anic structures and the Muslims' architectural vision of the mosque, Elwazani has uncovered highly important facets of the relations between Muslims, their society, and Islam. The Shari'ah and its primary texts did not function merely as a set of legal injunctions, but rather as a consciousness and a social discourse.

Bearing this in mind, Abdullah Saeed presents a comprehensive study of "The Moral Context of the Prohibition of *Ribā* in Islam Revisited." Though this issue is currently being discussed by modern Islamic intellectuals and scholars, Saeed goes further than the usual *fiqhī* based analysis by underlining its moral inferences. In order to crystallize his thesis, he traces the Qur'anic, Sunnatic, and *fiqhī* contexts of *ribā* before concluding that "from the outset, the Qur'an was concerned with a society's needy, poor, and economically disadvantaged members." Unless the moral dimension is emphasized, he contends, there is a danger that the present debate may become "a meaningless exercise and a quibble over semantics."

The discussion of Ray Basson and Zein Cajee, "Designing the Islamic Component of a Proposed World Religion Curriculum for South African State Schools," is very pertinent to understanding the development of contemporary minority Islamic societies and ideas within a larger non-Islamic social context. Dealing with the sensitive issue of education, they critique mainstream Islamic curriculum. In a different vein, S. Parvez Manzoor's rich and penetrating review of recent western literature on secularism, "Desacralizing Secularism," is an attempt to see and relate to the universal from the perspective of the particular. Secularism, for Manzoor, does not present a unified theory or a systematic doctrine. Muslim critics, therefore, must "resist the temptation of imparting to it a theoretical and epistemological unity that it manifestly lacks." But this should not preclude perceiving secularism as a philosophical paradigm and an ideological axiom—a view that lies at the heart of Islamic debate on secularism.

Finally, with the appearance of this issue we conclude the twelfth volume of *AJISS*. It has been one year since we introduced some stylistic changes. Once again, we urge our contributors to adhere to *AJISS*'s guidelines, as such compliance will spare all individuals involved in the publishing process a great deal of valuable time and effort.

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