

## Book Review

### **Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change**

*By Bassam Tibi. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990, 272pp.*

In a previous work entitled *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, Bassam Tibi argues for the understanding of religion in the social process as it is incorporated into reality as a social fact. Toward this goal, his methodology allows no place for religion as theology and metaphysics. He draws from both Durkheim's sociology of religion and Bloch's philosophy of religion but, as he explains, his intention is directed toward international relations and toward Islam as a cultural system. This intention evokes some disappointment, for despite the fact that Tibi sees international relations and the Islamic culture system as interdependent, one must conclude that his understanding of the great philosophical tradition of Islam is reductionist.

In the book under review, Tibi defines his central thesis as follows: "[R]eligion consists of sociocultural symbols that convey a conception of reality and construe a plan for it. These symbols are concerned with reality but do not correspond to it, as is the case, for example, with symbols of nature" (p. 8). This is by no means an original thesis. Tibi's new mentor is the bourgeois anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who in the late 1960s wrote an essay on "Religion as a Cultural System," in which he defines religion in the following terms: Religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in man by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods of motivations seem uniquely realistic. Tibi's focus is, therefore, on the production of meaning in Muslim societies.

In order to interpret the religious and cultural reality of contemporary Muslim societies, Tibi takes on a number of challenges. In the first chapter, he attempts to define Islam by using sociological criteria. Since he dismisses the spiritual side of religion, Tibi's endeavor emerges as yet another reductionist approach to Islam. On the basis of this approach, he ventures to discuss what he calls "the basic cultural patterns for the perception of change in Islam." He contends that Muslims from all walks of life have constantly striven to bring their actions into harmony with the message of the Qur'an and, consequently, the need to reinterpret the Qur'an has always arisen.

Tibi maintains that Muslim societies are traditional and thus incompatible with modern needs and conditions. He claims that there is an important dif-

ference between traditional and modern societies in that the former are characterized by religiocultural tradition whereas the latter are secular and rational in nature and function. Because of the structure and outlook of traditional Muslim societies, they are defensive vis-à-vis Western societies which are superior in outlook and technology.

On the whole, Tibi devotes a major portion of the book to investigating functional theories and how they might apply to Islam. His new brand of sociology of religion is fundamentally different from his earlier works and theories, which could be labelled as Marxist. His is a new form of bourgeois sociology applied to Islam.

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#### *Transformation and Continuity in Islamic Thought* by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi'

*Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1990, pp. 1-14.  
Oxford, 1990, 14 pp.

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' offers an original and thoughtful contribution to the study of Islamic thought and culture. He examines the relationship between the Islamic world and the West, and the role of Islam in the modern world. He argues that Islam is a dynamic and evolving tradition, and that it has the potential to meet the challenges of the modern world.

Abu-Rabi' begins by discussing the concept of "transformation" in Islamic thought. He argues that Islam has undergone a process of transformation over time, and that this process is ongoing. He then discusses the concept of "continuity" in Islamic thought, and argues that there are certain core values and principles that have remained constant throughout Islamic history. He concludes by arguing that the relationship between transformation and continuity is a complex one, and that it is important to understand both in order to understand Islamic thought and culture.

Abu-Rabi' also discusses the role of Islam in the modern world. He argues that Islam has the potential to meet the challenges of the modern world, and that it is important to understand the role of Islam in the modern world. He concludes by arguing that the relationship between Islam and the modern world is a complex one, and that it is important to understand both in order to understand Islamic thought and culture.