

Editorial

It is with a deep sense of humility that I take on the responsibility of editing the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (AJISS), a journal established in 1984 to promote Islamically oriented scholarship in the social sciences. Now in its twentieth year, the journal has provided scholars with a forum for exploring and debating issues and concerns from diverse Muslim (or Muslim sympathetic) perspectives. It is a privilege to join the list of eminent scholars who have overseen the production of AJISS over these years – most recently, Louay Safi, a scholar with profound insight into both the Islamic and the western worlds. His is a hard act to follow. May Allah guide me.

Budgetary constraints have forced AJISS to combine this year's last two issues (summer/fall 2003) into one – albeit a rather expanded volume. We hope that this is only a temporary measure, and that AJISS will return soon to publishing four volumes a year. Of course, the articles and reviews themselves still represent the high-quality scholarship we have come to expect from contributors to AJISS.

Though not specifically theme-based, an underlying theme does unify the articles in this issue: the ongoing dialogue between Muslims and the West over issues having to do with Islam's encounter with modernity. Each article examines some aspect of this encounter: Necva Kazimov looks at the relationship between various reforms made to Egypt's divorce law and that country's reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Fathi Malkawi analyzes the role and future needs of educating Muslim children in the United States, and Mohamad Fauzan Noordin discusses why wisdom has to be a priority in implementing and using information and communication technology (ICT). Then, Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad analyzes constitutionalism from the comparative perspective of the American Constitution and the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Madinah Covenant, Glenn E. Perry looks at the relationship between sovereignty and law in the democracy-Islam compatibility debate,

and lastly, Pernille Ironside draws our attention to the Shari`ah penal law in northern Nigeria and its relationship to Nigeria's secular-based system of law.

Although the topics covered by these articles are disparate and speak to different concerns and academic communities, they all share an assumption that Muslims can respond to the challenges of the modern era from a faith-based perspective. So, unlike the contemporary neo-Orientalist "experts" who have captured the attention of the mainstream media and popular opinion, and who purvey the negative stereotypes of Islam as an inherently backward, anti-civilizational force that must be met head-on and countered strongly by the West, this volume of AJISS attests otherwise. Indeed, some of the articles turn the tables, so to speak, by highlighting what Islam, as a religion with a spiritual content, can *bring* to modernity: Noordin's focus on wisdom and ICT, or Ahmad's examining the American Constitution in light of the Madinah Covenant, rather than the other way around.

That said, as the articles on Egypt and Nigeria demonstrate, there is still a lot of work to be done in the Muslim community at both the theoretical and practical levels. While Muslims in the West like to proclaim loudly that "Islam dignifies women" or that "Islam gave women rights 1400 years ago," the situation for women on the ground is often one of deprivation, or mutation, of rights. Kazimov's survey of the debate in Egypt over women's predicament in the nation's divorce courts is a case in point. The unfortunate ever-present backdrop to discussions of women's rights, even in Muslim countries when Muslims are debating among themselves, is the western critique of Islam as a religion that oppresses women. Those who would defend Islam from this accusation often hide behind traditions and customs that have a devastating impact on women, because of their fear that any change represents *westernization*.

Of course, this is not a new phenomenon. As feminist scholars of women and nationalism in the South have long highlighted, women's rights are the stage upon which issues of change, authenticity, tradition, and resistance have been played out since the earliest colonial encounters – usually with women themselves as the casualties. Nevertheless, it is time for Muslims to erase the western backdrop from their discussions, and focus instead on what is best for their communities – for the sake of what is good, not for the sake of proving some point about being "different" from the West. If an article in a UN Convention protects women from the negative effects of unequal and arbitrary divorce, Muslims should embrace it as being

in tune with the Shari`ah, even if it means abandoning some time-honored customary – and in actuality, disadvantageous – view of women. This is an Islamic response, not one of westernization.

In this issue, we also offer a couple of reviews of the anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic books that have appeared since the 9/11 tragedy. We hope to devote an entire issue to this discourse in the near future, as we feel that Muslims must respond to the neo-Orientalist onslaught of misinformation and negativity.

AJISS provides one of the best forums for scholars and practitioners to discuss these kinds of issues and concerns. In the pages of this journal, scholars are able to assess and examine critically Muslim communities and their interactions in the global community; think through issues of theory, and propose practical solutions. The underlying presuppositions are always ones of hope, optimism, and confidence that Islam offers its followers the creative tools with which a Muslim can live in the modern era and still be faithful to Islam as a faith-based system of living.

Finally, we would like to correct a mistake that appeared in the last issue. Ali Paya, author of “Karl Popper and the Iranian Intellectuals,” was listed as being “associated with the National Research Institute for Science Policy ...” He is, in fact, an “associate professor of philosophy and senior research associate/fellow” at that institute, as well as a senior research associate and visiting lecturer at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster (UK). We apologize for the oversight.

Katherine Bullock