

### Book Review

## **Western Domination and Political Islam: Challenge and Response**

*By Khalid Bin Sayeed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 197 pp.*

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the direct or indirect colonization of the Muslim world by various western countries, thus representing one of the bleakest periods of Muslim history. In the inter-war years some rays of hope emerged in the Muslim world with the launching of various independence movements. This period also saw the rise to prominence of two Islamic movements that were to have a major influence on the Islamic response to the western challenge for the rest of the century: the Ikhwān al Muslimūm in Egypt and the Jama'at-i Islāmī in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. The socioeconomic, geopolitical, and intellectual-cultural challenge of the West to the Muslim world produced varying responses on the part of the Muslim world. While movements such as the Wafd Party or the Muslim League represented the "nationalist" response to this challenge, the Ikhwān and the Jama'at were manifestations of the "Islamic" response.

After more than fifty years of struggle, it is becoming painfully clear that the response articulated by these movements to the western challenge is proving to be ineffective. Despite some impressive historical achievements, they find themselves marginalized in their own countries, having almost no influence whatsoever on policy formulation and the intellectual and cultural character of society, for these areas continue to be dominated by westernized elites. As a result, Muslim intellectuals have started to ask "Why?" Why have these movements, which at one time held so much promise and even produced some impressive results, failed to respond adequately to the western challenge, and what steps need to be taken to remedy the shortcomings? Questions of this nature are being asked

increasingly in Muslim circles, and some possible answers have been offered.

Sayeed's *Western Domination and Political Islam: Challenge and Response* explores precisely these questions and issues. The author argues that the major shortcomings of the Ikhwān and the Jama'at are their commitment to ideological purity, the attendant disregard for political realism, and the failure to adhere to the logic of their own thinking (p. 37). Due to these shortcomings, Islamists have not been able to diagnose properly the true nature of the western challenge and, as a result, cannot formulate an effective response. Sayeed goes on to argue that the first step in formulating an effective response has to be a clear understanding of the nature of this challenge. It is only after this proper understanding has been developed that specific Islamic principles can be gleaned from "the world of Islamic ideas" and implemented and contextualized in order to give birth to an Islamic order (pp. 48-49). After putting forth this critique, Sayeed analyzes the Islamist response in three countries: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. These three chapters cover familiar territory in that they document events and issues that have received much attention previously. The final two chapters of the book are the most interesting, in that one detects an attempt to articulate an alternative plan of action that will allow Muslims to respond adequately to the West.

Sayeed's alternative is based on certain key principles borrowed from the thought of such prominent Muslim thinkers as Muhammad Iqbal, Ali Shari'ati, Abdul-Karim Surush, and Fazlur Rahman. According to Sayeed, first the Muslims have to realize that each Muslim state has to concentrate on its own socioeconomic development before one can even begin to talk about Muslim unity. In their enthusiasm, Islamists often glorify the concept of the ummah, forgetting that one cannot talk of a strong and united ummah if its individual constituents are weak. This is an idea that Sayeed borrows from Muhammad Iqbal. He then argues that the methodology used by the Muslims to implement Islamic principles has to be examined critically and modified. Sayeed notes that Muslims must separate "normative Islam" from "historical Islam." The implication here is that many of the cultural norms that exist in contemporary Muslim societies have nothing to do with Islam and therefore are not to be considered as binding and obligatory. Next, Muslims must engage in a process of identifying the specific problems that plague their societies and then turn to the Qur'an for guidance, identify the general Islamic principles enunciated therein, and then return to the problematical situation to contextualize the general Qur'anic principle (pp. 138-39). Here Sayeed echoes the thought of Fazlur Rahman. In his opinion, Muslims can learn valuable lessons by studying the methods of mass mobilization used by Ghandi and Mao for the purpose of building a healthy modern society. Sayeed credits Khomeini for tapping the masses' latent energy and using it to bring about political change, but notes that Kho-

meini failed to use the same resource to bring about a socioeconomic revolution.

Even though one may disagree with some of the diagnoses and prescriptions regarding the issue at hand, the author has done an admirable job in presenting his arguemnt. The book is a valuable contribution to the debate regarding the steps Muslims must take in order to respond adequately to the western challenge in the coming decades.

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References

**Islamic Economics: A New Paradigm**

By **Basit B. Koshul**, Ph.D., FRCGS, FRCR, FRCR (Soc) and  
FRCR (Gen) (UK)

The concept of Islamic economics is a relatively new one. It is a synthesis of Islamic principles and modern economic theory. It is a system of economics that is based on the principles of justice, equity, and fairness. It is a system of economics that is based on the principles of the Quran and the Sunnah. It is a system of economics that is based on the principles of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is a system of economics that is based on the principles of the Islamic faith.

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