

Muslim Contributions To World Civilization

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Why This Book

I have been privileged to give the annual al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīnā memorial talks at the annual IMANA conventions several times. I recall the first time I was invited to give the al-Rāzī talk, my response was – Who is al-Rāzī? I state this simply to point out the lack of any education during my medical school training in Kashmir regarding the great scholars like al Rāzī, Ibn Sina, etc and my guess is that my experience was not at all unique. As I progressed along in my professional academic career in pulmonary medicine, one of my associates, Dr. Ayman Soubani, wrote an excellent paper highlighting the historical fact that Ibn al-Nafis had discovered pulmonary and coronary circulation three centuries before Harvey, who is often credited with the discovery of pulmonary circulation (Soubani A, Khan F: The Discovery of Pulmonary Circulation Revisited. *Annals of Saudi Medicine* 15:185-186, 1995.)

Thanks to the diligence and perseverance of Dr. Husain Nagamia, most IMANA members now know a lot more about the glorious past of Islamic Medicine. The International Institute of Islamic Medicine established and nurtured by Dr. Nagamia has a large collection of excellent material on this topic, including a traveling exhibit.

I am also reminded of the early days of IMANA, when a few of us met with representatives of some Muslim consulates in New York. Dr. Bashir Zikria explained to the various officials: “We want to bring out the buried treasures of Islamic contributions to civilization and expose them to the bright light of the Western civilization.”

So, it should come as no surprise that JIMA chose this book for review.

Brief Description of the Book:

This easy-to-read 150-page paperback is a con-

cise summary of some key issues that the Muslims are facing in America and globally, issues that affect our daily lives. The eight chapters, authored by eight individuals well known in their respective fields, cover a range of topics including:

- 1) What the West has Learned from Islamic Civilization, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman
- 2) Overcoming the Religious – Secular Divide-Islam’s Contribution to Civilization, Louay M. Safi
- 3) Principles of Islamic Political System, Syed A. Ahsani
- 4) Euro-American Jurisprudence and the Islamic Alternative, Peter M. Wright
- 5) Middle Eastern Origins of Modern Sciences, Dilnawaz A Siddiqui
- 6) Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars: 700-1600 AC, M. Basheer Ahmed
- 7) The Feasibility of an Islamic Economic System in a Modern Economy, Mohammed Sharif
- 8) Islamic Financial Institutions in the USA, Abdel-Hameed M. Bashir
- 9) Where do We Go from Here? Syed A. Ahsani

My Impressions

I found the material in the book very informative, particularly in areas I know little about. I found the points the authors made quite cogent and well thought out. Here are a few highlights from some of the chapters:

History’s Black Hole: When we do some reading on the history of human development we find very little written about the time from 300 AC to 1500 AC. These 1,200 years witnessed tremendous advances in social, political, and scientific development during the height of the Islamic civilization, some authors refer to the “omission” of this period from history books as the “History’s Black Hole”.

Commonalities of Civilizations: Close examination of the Islamic and Western civilizations reveals remarkable similarity and common commitment to social justice, equality, common good, social welfare, political participation, and religious freedom.

First Constitution of an Islamic State: The

Covenant of Madinah and its principles formed the basis of governance of the early Islamic State. It defined the rights of all members in a clear manner. The details are worth reading in Chapter Two, authored by Louay Safi, and Chapter Three, authored by Syed A Ahsani. I personally had heard about the famous Madinah covenant. This was an opportunity to read about it in detail.

Origins of Modern Sciences: In Chapter Five, Dilnawaz Siddiqui traces the origins of modern sciences to the contributions of the scientists and scholars from the Middle East. He has made the reading rather easy by tabulating the major key scientists from 720 to 1621 and the areas in which they made their mark. The areas of focus are chemistry, philosophy, mathematics, geography, astronomy, optics, etc. I recommend the tabulated format as an educational tool.

Muslim Physicians Contributions: In this chapter M. Basheer Ahmed describes the contributions of Muslim physicians and the role played by Muslims, Jews, and Christians in advancing knowledge in a friendly and competitive environment. A great example is Maimonides, perhaps the greatest Jewish scholar of all times, who was a product of this great civilization. (See Raddawi HM, JIMA, 2006;38:123-6) We also read and learn about the establishment of hospitals both for physical and mental ailments, introduction of residency training, and professional licensure examinations for physicians.

The introduction of the art of paper manufacturing, which the Muslims learned in China and brought to Europe, opened up the field of mass reproduction of written materials and opportunities for education.

This chapter concludes on a rather somber note. The author laments on the current status of Muslim scientists. While the worldwide Muslim population is about 25%, fewer than 1% of the scientists in the world are Muslims. This chapter concludes with a challenge to the youth, particularly in the West, to rise to the occasion and get busy in acquiring knowledge.

Islamic Economic System in the Modern Era: The author draws a distinction between the capitalist, communist and Islamic economic system with a clear understanding that in the Islamic system a *moral code* has to be incorporated in the business enterprise while in the other systems that is not a requirement. The author makes some very impor-

tant distinctions between economic growth and economic development and stresses the need for an emphasis on the latter. He laments on the fact that in the U.S. more than \$70 billion a year is spent on the criminal justice system. This translates into more than \$35,000 per year for each inmate. The chapter is sprinkled with anecdotes from the Prophet's life showing how he stressed work over handouts for those in need. The figures for increasing poverty in the United States are sobering with severe misdistribution of wealth, the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The author concludes with an "out of the box" solution to this disparity. Implementing a zakat model of 2.5% could generate \$472 billion, which would pull the 32 million Americans out of poverty within a year.

The final two chapters deal with the need for developing viable financial institutions in United States, which can operate both under American banking regulations and the tenants of the *shari`a*. There is a clear need for new services, new instruments and new institutions in the financial sector.

American Muslims are estimated to number seven million with an annual growth rate of 6%. Their total financial assets are estimated to be more than \$100 billion. Their annual expenditure in financial services is estimated to be \$16 billion. More than 25% of them earn over \$100,000 annually, compared to 15% of the overall U.S. population. More significantly over 65% of American Muslims complete college or graduate degrees. With these enormous advantages, American Muslims have a unique and unparalleled opportunity to take the lead in the third renaissance, a point made in the book's final chapter. (Data about American Muslims provided by Capitas Group – personal communication)

The last chapter lays out a road map and work plan of how American Muslims can get the job done, bring about a third renaissance and the role, which organizations such as AMSS/IMANA need to play in helping accomplish this.

Conclusion

I recommend this very informative book. After absorbing all the information provided in the book you will be able to address the many questions asked by members of other faiths. What do Muslims have to offer? How do you reconcile living in the United States, which has clear separation between church

and state, and your faith, which does not make the distinction? Why are Muslims intolerant of other faiths? There is nothing more effective than a factual response such as: In year 929 Caliph `Abd al-Raḥmān appointed a Jewish rabbi as his prime minister for the Muslim empire in Andulasia, or that Maimonides emerged from a Muslim environment, etc. The editors have done a great service for the community by compiling in one place information regarding the numerous contributions Muslims have made to civilization and by challenging the present

generation to duplicate or improve upon the past accomplishments.

Submitted by

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