

Mohd Kamal Hassan, *Voice of Islamic Moderation from the Malay World* (Ipoh, Malaysia: Emerging Markets Innovative Research (M) Sdn Bhd., 2011). viii+358 pp. ISBN 978-967-10700-1-7. US\$ 60.00.

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This volume collects eleven essays produced over the past decade by ‘Distinguished Professor’ (the highest academic distinction in Malaysia – in Malay: *Professor Ulung*) Mohd Kamal Hassan, who took his doctorate in Contemporary Islamic Thought from Columbia University (1976). Professor Hassan’s intended audience is non-Muslims worldwide as well as in Malaysia. He states in his introduction: “We purposely chose to address and converse with the Western-educated and middle class non-Muslims who read and communicate in English, because they have been exposed the most to Western thought and the biased Western perspectives on Islam and Muslims. It is important to our mind that this group be made to understand mainstream Muslim thought and the discourse of moderation from Islamic perspectives” (p. 3). His perspective is a scholarly, apolitical, and non-partisan approach which commendably exhibits self-critical awareness.

The eleven essays are arranged into three parts: 1) “Promoting the Common Ground amongst Religions and Cultures;” 2) “Changing the Muslim’s Mindset: A Civilisational Approach;” and 3) “The Meaning and Implications of Islamic Moderation.” A bibliography provides the sources drawn on for composing his essays, highlighting the author’s debt to the writings of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (twenty-six titles listed) as well as works by Abū ‘l-A‘lā’ al-Mawḍūdī (eight titles) and other twentieth century thinkers. A glossary of Arabic words (pp. 331–358) giving helpful definitions for key Islamic terms and concepts caps this work.

Professor Hassan is a prominent academic figure and educational authority in Malaysia where *inter alia* he served as Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia from 1998-2006, and then held its Ibn Khaldun Chair (2006–2008). In addition to his numerous outstanding services to Islamic higher education in Malaysia, Professor Hassan is well known internationally as an independent Muslim intellectual who projects a compelling holistic perspective on pressing issues confronting Muslims in the present age with its resurgence of religions and pervasive dynamic of globalisation. The overriding concern shining through his thoughtful well crafted essays is “the need to emphasise the concept of moderation as a universal Islamic discourse” (p. 5). However, Professor Hassan tempers his idealism with the cool appraisal of a realist who does not blink from registering disturbing signs of incompetent or mediocre responses to modernity on the part of Muslims.

Two essays in particular highlight the need for Muslims to rethink and re-appropriate timeless aspects of their own tradition in terms of more adequate

responses to transformed global conditions – Chapter 5, “Challenges of Globalisation: Changing the Muslim Mindset in Malaysia,” and Chapter 10, “Islamic Moderation and the Necessity for Behavioural Changes Within the Muslim Community” (pp.73-104 and 241-59). Here his emphasis on the necessity for Muslims to *change* their thinking and their conduct is most apposite, and one hopes his appeal and reasoned persuasion does not fall upon deaf ears. Professor Hassan stresses three basic aspects of this dynamic in his remarks at the Institute of Policy Studies in Islamabad in 2004: “Recent trends in the world economy and international affairs confirm strong earlier suspicion in the South that globalisation is also a convenient tool for a new economic, cultural and political control – a type of neo-imperialism – of the powerful capitalistic forces of the world over the weak countries, in particular the Muslim world.” Then the next lines reiterate that “the Muslim community’s mindset is ill-equipped to face the challenges of globalisation”; regarding the Malay community in particular “the results have not been very satisfactory.” Finally he observes that reaching the right solutions on these two issues “is crucial to the survival of the Muslim community in Malaysia” (pp. 73-74). His following analysis of the threat and promise presented by globalising forces across a number of arenas ranges from higher education, economic inequalities, the negative impact of transnational capitalist ‘development-modernisation’ to inculcating a true knowledge-based economy.

It is worth citing Professor Hassan’s take on the predominant trend in higher education to appreciate his acute comprehension of the forces now shaping Muslim futures. He states:

Higher education is now part of the “global market place”. The advancement in ICT is creating a revolution in higher education through completely new forms of learning and teaching. A market-driven higher education curriculum premised upon the idea of education as a “product” or “commodity” and students as “clients” or “customers” demands new ways of delivering knowledge and skills and evaluating the quality of courses and programmes in public universities. [...] The commodification of higher education would no doubt affect the way teachers/instructors perceive their role. [...] Tension or conflict is bound to rise between the humanistic goals of education and the materialistic ethos involved in the new educational enterprise. The social and moral costs have been sidelined or swept under the carpet. (p. 74)

His warning needs to be heeded more actively. In chapter 10 he stresses seven main points “necessary for committed Muslims and good believers to undertake in the context of the present world situation”, beginning with changing the obsession with form and outer appearance, rather appreciating reality and substance, then moving from talking and bickering to service and performing good deeds, and changing “from bigotry and exclusivism to forbearance and inclusivism” (p. 249). This is a frank self-critical diagnosis to be listened to. In his chapter 7, ‘Building Ethical

Values and Accountability: Role of Education, Media and Civil Society', Professor Hassan tackles head on the question of "the rise and fall of human integrity". Offering eminently pragmatic suggestions on how to advance towards this goal, he underlines the necessity for "total commitment of both the government and the people" and the weighty responsibility for leadership as standard bearers for the formation of a moral society. One senses the sincerity and honesty of his timely advice, regardless of the cynicism which prefers to marginalise its urgency and wisdom.

His optimism may be highlighted here: "People do wake up from their slumber of complacency and will want to break away from their self-imposed prison of political myopia when calamities or disasters descend upon them [...]" (p. 99). The message this inspired educator conveys is that Muslims should transform their response to our global era, and take control of their own future by actively implementing necessary changes in thinking and behaviour instead of waiting to be compelled by force of circumstances. If they awake, they may discover that the moral compass and intellectual resources required for this transformed response are potentially ready at hand within their own Islamic legacy.

Throughout these essays one hears the voice of a committed intellectual and educator whose dispassionate witnessing of both the obstacles and potentials of Muslim society and governance distils his wide experience and committed concern. One hopes Professor Hassan's book receives a wide readership both in Malaysia and globally.