

## EDITORIAL

For this first issue, IAIS's journal *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* (ICR) is particularly privileged to have received submissions from several renowned scholars including Abderrahmane Taha, Osman Bakar, Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, Umar Faruq Abd-Allah and others. I am grateful to them for their valuable contributions. Readers will note the name change of this journal from *Journal of Civilisation Studies* to *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*; this being the first issue appearing under the new name. The volume at hand is a special issue on Islam and pluralism and features a variety of themes on the subject.

The **seven articles** that appear in this issue begin with "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" by the American Muslim scholar **Umar Faruq Abd-Allah**, a scholar-in-residence at Chicago's Nawawi Foundation, which is a non-profit educational foundation. The author argues in favour of cultural diversity within Islamic civilisation. For centuries, Islamic civilisation harmonised indigenous forms of cultural expression with the universal norms of its sacred law. By contrast, much contemporary Islamist rhetoric falls short of Islam's ancient cultural wisdom, assuming at times an attitude of prejudice toward what it considers 'the Other'. The results of such an approach may look more like a cultural no-man's-land than the makings of a successful indigenous Muslim identity. In the view of Dr Umar Abd-Allah, Islam does not merely encourage but requires the creation of a successful indigenous Islamic culture in the West and sets down sound parameters for its formation and growth. He emphasises what he calls the "traditional wisdom of Islamic law" in order to "deconstruct" counter-cultural paranoia among certain narrow-minded strata. In terms of practical solutions, he recommends an attitude that *celebrates* rather than *discourages* differences of culture as enriching.

In my own article, "Diversity and Pluralism: A Qur'anic Perspective", I begin with a preliminary discussion of the meaning and concept of pluralism and such of its allied words as diversity and tolerance, followed by a brief exposition of a set of general premises of Islam that have a bearing on pluralism. I highlight in this connection the relevance of some of the renowned Islamic principles such as divine oneness (*tawhīd*), juristic disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) and disunity (*tafarruq*) to pluralism. Human dignity (*karāmah*), the moral autonomy of the individual (*ikhtiyār*) also substantiate the essence of pluralism in Islam. The rest of the article addresses the

various manifestations of pluralism ranging from its ethno-linguistic, to religious, political, cultural and legal varieties. My conclusion argues – with reference to the particular situation in Malaysia – that issues pertaining to ethno-religious pluralism in Malaysia call for deeper and more refined approaches to meet new challenges Malaysia faces in her post-2008 election. The multi-religious and multicultural features of Malaysian society can be enriched by greater policy focus on integration that brings different religious and ethnic groups in closer proximity and contact in places of residence, learning and work. Malaysia’s well-known traditions of ‘open house’ also merit a greater role. I have, in the meantime, recommended a greater recognition and exposure to be accorded to certain aspects of the teachings of the Qur’ān that advocate acceptance of the different other in our midst.

**Osman Bakar**’s article entitled “Islam and the Challenge of Diversity and Pluralism: Must Islam Reform Itself?”, presents a counter view of the western critique of contemporary Islam with specific reference to its treatment of the problem of diversity and pluralism. The prevailing western view of Islam’s experience of diversity and pluralism is that it has failed to positively respond to this important challenge of the modern world. The basic belief underlying this view is that Islam is incompatible with modernity, political democracy, cultural diversity and pluralism, which are generally considered as the hallmarks of modern western civilisation. According to this view, only a radically reformed Islam can come to terms with these western achievements. The western critique of contemporary Islam is discussed in the context of a post-September 11 world for the important reason that it was the September 11 tragedy that generated a new phase of western interest in Islam and fresh calls for its reform. An influential voice in this western critique is Bernard Lewis who, in his decades of scholarship on Islam, has consistently argued for an Islamic reformation. This article seeks to provide a critical response to the Lewisian idea of Islamic reformation, especially concerning the issue of diversity and pluralism. It argues that a new Islamic understanding of diversity and pluralism is urgently needed in this century, but this can only come about through an authentic *tajdid* (renewal) that offers fresh interpretations of the religion without destroying its original spirit and character.

“Pluralism: Its Scope and Limitations” is an article by the renowned Moroccan scholar and philosopher Professor **Abderrahmane Taha** from the University of Rabat. It has been translated from Arabic by IAIS’s own Principal Research Fellow, Dr Karim D. Crow, who added also valuable annotations and further bibliographical information. Professor Taha addresses the limitations of pluralism by arguing against pluralism attended by unrestrained rationality. He sees reason as interrelated to faith. Such a concept of pluralism should furthermore do away

with political hegemony as politics should be based on the Good. Finally, he argues for a pluralism of ‘coinciding values’ without the defect of what he terms ‘cultural extremism’ characteristic of the current global cultural and economic hegemony pursued by the West. This suggests that planners for educational and social policies should work to ensure that limiting parochial ethnic or national identities, whether American or Malaysian, become infused with the universal values of human ‘innate nature’.

The next article, “Interpreting Islam and Plural Society”, by Singaporean scholar **Muhammad Haniff Hassan**, aims at providing an analytical perspective about how Islam can be interpreted by Muslims in plural societies. It also offers an extrapolation of Muslim attitudes and treatment of non-Muslims in two different contexts, namely where Muslims constitute the majority and where they are a minority in a non-Muslim country. These two particular contexts represent the contemporary setting, in which many Muslims find themselves today. The author offers some reasons that explain the divergence of views and sometimes even contradicting interpretations that influence and shape Muslim attitudes towards contemporary plural societies. In order to address those issues, the author recommends – in addition to the promotion of the voice of moderate Muslims – collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims on solving current problems. This would also necessitate the *political will* of the powers involved to address the root causes of the grievances which enable extremists to use them to their own advantage.

**Asna Husin**, a renowned scholar and peace activist from Aceh (Indonesia) who holds two degrees from Harvard and Columbia, argues in her article “Educating for Islamic Pluralism: Lessons from Indonesia” that Islam in our global age should be taught in as attractive a manner as possible to young Muslim minds and hearts, without compromising the sacred nature of religion and its special position in human consciousness, aspirations and activities. She looks at how Indonesian schools teach pluralism to youth through religious and non-religious courses. The model is imbued with loyalty to Islam while accentuating tolerance and respect for other faiths. Based on her own experience and practical contributions, she also surveys how an Islamic view of plurality is being taught in post-Suharto Indonesia through both conventional approaches to instructing religion and non-religious based initiatives of civic education.

Finally, “A Position on the Islamic Concept of Citizenship and Muslim Minorities” by Professor **Ahmet Akgündüz**, Rector of the Islamic University of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, offers an individual scholar’s – and therefore debatable – interpretation of the concept of citizenship and Muslim minorities from the perspective of

Islamic law, through a new branch which has become known as ‘Islamic Law for Minorities’ (*fiqh al-‘aqqaliyyāt*). In his view, Muslim minorities – once admitted as full citizens in a European country – cease to be minorities (of foreigners) according to the law, although they will always be a minority in terms of culture and, above all, ethnic and religious background. They should not be singled out and should not be considered second or third class citizens.

This time, ICR features **four viewpoints** by prominent scholars, as well as a **book review section** with six reviewed works. The **viewpoints** address matters pertaining to dialogue – dialogue with civilisations and faiths other than Islam and dialogue among Muslims themselves.

IAIS’s own Principal Research Fellow, **Christoph Marcinkowski**, an award-winning German scholar of Islam specialising in Muslim–Christian relations in past and present, argues that Pope Benedict XVI’s controversial 2006 Regensburg lecture had actually several rather positive effects. In spite of the misunderstandings that it had caused in particular among Muslims, it also enhanced the Muslim–Christian dialogue industry, placing it on a more meaningful and sincere level. Marcinkowski’s piece addresses also the possible positive perspectives for Catholic–Muslim dialogue, which seems to be particularly lively at present. In terms of recommendations for the future of Muslim–Christian dialogue, the author argues that both sides should not shun from pointing out differences, while at the same time focusing on *joint* efforts that could help solve current practical issues.

**Christian Giordano**, Head of the Department of Social Anthropology at Switzerland’s University of Fribourg, in his viewpoint, argues that individuals must also be guaranteed freedom of choice in line with their own juridical sensibility as regards to juridical mechanisms and associated procedures. Legal pluralism would thus help make the monolithic, western legal system less inflexible and dogmatic, it would encourage integration of migrants.

IAIS Principal Research Fellow **Karim D. Crow**, an American Muslim scholar, advances in his viewpoint the concept of pluralism of ideas and thought among Muslims themselves which would make them more credible when it comes to doing dialogue with ‘the Other’. In trying to analyse deficiencies among Muslims when it comes to encounter civilisations other than one’s own, he observes that “too many Muslims cling to an essentialised monolithic view of Islam with its idealised past of power and glory”. Such a glorification of the past, however, is in sharp contrast with the present impotence, poverty and degradation of many Muslims worldwide. The authoritarian abuse of Islam contributes further and even builds upon such

simplistic self-understanding. The tenor of Crow's viewpoint is therefore an appeal for more inner-Islamic dialogue and understanding. He recommends that thinking Muslims look for ways to realise and make transcendent values real and effective in our world today. This should be achieved "with humility and mutual concord, and implemented as public policy and creative educational initiatives inspired by authentic Islamic principles, in both public and private domains".

The fourth and last viewpoint in this issue is by Ayatollah **Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad**, a senior Iranian scholar, who is Head of the Department of Islamic Law at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran and Head of the Islamic Studies Department at the Iranian Academy of Sciences. Mohaghegh Damad, who is well-read in both Islamic as well as Western thought and civilisation, reminds us of the idea of the 'Dialogue of Civilisations' which was put forward by the Iranian ex-president Khatami, and which was given strong support in the agenda of the United Nations. Mohaghegh Damad emphasises ethics that are common or similar between Western and Islamic civilisations, which should enable both of them to move closer to each other in future. However, he also recommends that – while being committed to these principles – we should not confuse freedom with permissiveness, thus becoming indifferent to truth.

This issue also contains two important **documents** from the recently concluded first 'Catholic–Muslim Forum', a very substantial meeting of leading Muslim and Catholic scholars and personalities, that took place in early November 2008 at the Vatican: we are publishing the addresses of Pope Benedict XVI and of Mustafa Čerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to the participants of that auspicious meeting. The present volume also features two reports on **events** as well as a book review section containing **six reviews**.

It remains for me to express my appreciation and gratitude to all the contributors, the IAIS editorial committee and support staff, and I look forward to their continued involvement and support. Our readers might like to know that the forthcoming issue No. 3 of ICR due to appear in December 2009 is also a special issue – "The Global Financial Crisis: An Islamic Response."

**Mohammad Hashim Kamali**

Editor-in-Chief