

## *Editorial*

Noraini M. Noor  
noraini@iiium.edu.my

Development and progress are essential to achieving higher standards of living and enhanced quality of life. Muslim countries, after independence, have aspired and struggled for development and a decent life without fully comprehending the underlying rationale that formed the basis for this striving. It would be instructive, therefore, to reflect on Martin Lings' explanation of the concepts of "development" (*taṭawwur*), "progress" (*taqaddum*), "renewal" (*tajdīd*) and "renaissance" (*nahḍah*). His explanation, given in a public lecture, is all the more significant as it was meant largely for Muslims, delivered at Al-Azhar University in Cairo in the Arabic language, which has subsequently been translated and made available in *A Return to the Spirit* (2005, pp.60-64).

To Lings (2005), "development" means moving away from the principles, and this is necessary when one wants to apply them. But, this movement should not deviate too far from the principles. Every individual hopes to "progress" and a Muslim pleads for progress when she/he prays, "Lead us unto the straight path." Communities, however, do not progress – the hope of communities lies in renewal, where "...renewal is the opposite of development for it means a restoration of something of the primordial vigour of Islam (p.61)." Therefore, for Muslims, renewal is a movement of return – of the way of the Prophet (SAW), his companions and those who followed in their footsteps. Therefore, any movement, whether an idea or a book, that lures people away from the principles of Divine guidance embodied in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad, SAW), is not progression, but degeneration.

Lings cautioned against the term “renaissance” (used synonymously with “renewal”) because of its portentous associations with foreign ideas. According to him, the European Renaissance was but a renewal of the paganism of ancient Greece and Rome, marking the end of the traditional Christian civilization and the beginning of this modern materialistic world. In promoting the centrality of money and possessions in life, materialism becomes the antagonist of the spiritual, thwarting or distorting its expression. And, in combination with individualism, it frees the individual from social regulations, resulting in deviations and compromises within religion, including a greater tolerance of consumerism and self-gratifications, thus removing any need to choose between “God and Mammon” (Eckersley, 2007). Eckersley lamented the ills of the impact of these two factors on religion which negate its beneficial effects.

Lings talked at great length about how this renaissance has enthusiastically been taken up by Muslim countries. After independence, these countries have welcomed everything from the West without making the slightest discrimination. In Islam, *Hukm Taklifi* (normative rule) classifies behaviour into five categories: obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*mandūb*), permissible (*mubāḥ*), discouraged (*makrūh*), and prohibited (*ḥarām*). The first and fifth categories are clear and absolute, the second and the fourth are less so and therefore easier to be infiltrated. These two terms, *mandūb* and *makrūh* have changed their significance, where in the eyes of the advocates of this “renaissance”, the stakes have changed – what is to be “discouraged” is everything that is left of the Islamic civilization, whereas what is “recommended” is everything that comes from the West. Thus, in the wake of striving for progress and development, Muslims are following the West oblivious of their Islamic heritage. Currently, life seems to be embracing Islam rather than Islam embracing life. In other words, when the spiritual content of religion is replaced with other things like materialism or nationalism or any other “ism”, religion’s transcendental dimension is lost and it can no longer serve its higher purpose. It will then be an immense challenge to keep our faith in God and our identity as His servants, intact. That is why we need to take a back seat and cogitate on the Divine message, rather than chasing a blind trail. We have our own

measures by which we can judge our societies, but alas, we have replaced them with contemporary understandings of “development”, “progress” and “renaissance” – devoid of the spiritual. The transcendental dimension is important and hence *A return to the spirit*, as in the revealing title of Lings’ book is of utmost necessity.

In this issue, the first article by Mohd Kamal Hassan is a reminder to us Muslim scholars as to where we should be heading and what we should be doing. It is an iteration of the principle of what makes International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) came into being in the first place. Kamal Hassan highlights that the secular and modernistic paradigm of development that underlies the present world system, devoid of the spiritual, is not in line with the worldview of *Tawhīd*. As such, he calls upon Muslim scholars to return to the basic – the Qur’ānic paradigm of development and integrated knowledge via inculcating a community of *ulū al-albāb* or people who are excellent in character and imbued with understanding. To do so, the present system of education needs to integrate worldly knowledge with religious knowledge in a meaningful and dynamic manner, to enrich and complement each other.

Louay Safi’s article on the *Maqāṣid* approach and rethinking political rights in modern society examines the extent to which the state is authorized to enforce faith and religious law on society. Of late, the term “*Sharī’ah*” (the Islamic code of behaviour and law) has been bandied about by a number of people desiring an instant dose of controversy. It is not difficult to see why the word has emotional overtones – as in the case of the Iranian woman, Sakineh Ashtiani, who has been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery or the prosecution of the Afghan convert to Christianity. Louay Safi’s article starts by comparing the notion of law in both Western and Islamic traditions, and then analyzes the difference between the ethical and legal within the *Sharī’ah*. He shows how Islamic law grew historically by working to limit the power of the state, and points out the need to maintain the distinction between the state and civil society for the proper implementation of *Sharī’ah*. Therefore, those who assert the state to enforce all rules of *Sharī’ah* on society rely on a faulty theory of right.

Wahabuddin Ra'ees examines the impact of democracy and democratization on contemporary Muslim societies. While it is often argued that Muslim societies would be better off if they democratize and it was apparently for this reason that the United States led the war into Iraq in 2003, the reality is more complex. Ra'ees argues that to understand the impact of democracy and democratization on contemporary Muslim societies, one needs to understand the interplay between the philosophical dimension of Western democracy (i.e. secularism) and the Muslim's philosophy of life (i.e. Divine guidance). Secularism marginalizes religion, and democracy rejects the right to rule following the divine guidance. The Muslim approach to democracy seeks to attain values that are divine. That is why wholesale adoption of democracy as advocated by the West is problematic and leads to destabilizing ideological polarization and division into supporters of secularism and political Islam. Ra'ees ends by imploring the West to accept Islam as an alternative worldview.

Akhtarzait Abdalaziz, in her article, applies the principle of *dharâ'i'* (means or ways of obtaining an end or attaining a goal) to some practical aspects of *takâful* or Islamic insurance within the constraint set by *Maqâsid al-Sharī'ah*. Because conventional insurance is not allowed in Islam due to the elements of *ribâ* and *gharar*, the Islamic model of insurance that conforms to the criteria of the *Sharī'ah* as outlined here is needed. Though insurance is a recent development in financial and economic activities, in principle it is a contract of mutual financing and the philosophy behind the insurance industry is not totally absent from basic Islamic teachings.

The final article by Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan examines issues that were introduced and discussed by the women and the impact they made in Malaysian Parliament. Malaysia's system of government is modelled on that of the British, a legacy of the past. Race plays a large role in Malaysian politics, and many Malaysian political parties are ethnically based. While Islam is the official religion, religious freedom is guaranteed. Via textual analysis of nine years of the Malaysian Parliament (1999-2007), Atiyah's results show that women MPs participated in children-related issues more than men, and that they managed to influence some policy changes, despite differences in party affiliation, race or religion.

Reiterating what was highlighted earlier, the West should not be taken as the measure by which other societies must be judged. We, Muslims, have our own standards.

On a final note, we, the Editorial Board members, would like to convey our sincere condolences to the family of the late Professor Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi, for their recent loss.

## **References**

Eckersley, R.M. (2007). Culture, spirituality, religion and health: Looking at the big picture. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 186, S54-S56.

Lings, M. (2005). *A return to the spirit*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae.