

this is true for Malaysia only. In such a case, the distinct case of Malaysia needs to be fully explained.

Perhaps the book would have been even more valuable had the author presented a more detailed discussion of how to practically realize the prescriptions he has made for a saner world order. For instance, the author's prescription for "...the rejection of cultural jingoism, and taking cognizance of the rich diversity of religions and traditions of mankind..." (p. 23) is well worth pursuing. Similarly, his assertion that "it is imperative that efforts to create a competitively efficient and modern economy be supported and enhanced by ethical business practices..." (p. 27) is worth following. Likewise, his advise that "rather than thriving on sensationalism, acrimony, mud-slinging and stirring up animosities, the press in Asia should seek to harness societal energies towards the realization of cherished ideals: Justice, Virtue, and Compassion" (p. 57), or that "judges ought to exercise their judicial powers in accordance with the rule of law, and not the rule of men" (p. 64), are very sound. The author could have suggested the ways as to how developing societies may realistically achieve all of the above. It must however, be noted that the advanced industrial countries have indeed failed in this regard, some more than others.

On the whole, the book does an excellent job of description and prescription. Perhaps the author can be persuaded to write the sequel to this book, which may show the world how Malaysia has succeeded (and sometimes failed) to follow the prescriptions that the author has called for.

***Even Angels Ask: A Journey to Islam in America*, by Jeffery Lang. Beltsville, Maryland, USA: Amana Publications, 1997. Pp. 230. ISBN 0-915957-67-1.**

*Reviewer:* Amber Haque, Department of Psychology, IIUM.

The author, an American associate professor of mathematics, who converted to Islam in the early 1980's relives his past of becoming a Muslim in this very well written book. It is easy to read and interesting at the same time. The reader is sure to be impressed by the sheer honesty, openness, and reasoning which the author offers for accepting Islam and advocating others to do the same, throughout the book. He challenges the traditional Muslim practice of accepting Islam passively and thus named the book, "Even Angels Ask" based on the Qur'anic

verse (2:30) where God said to the angels that He is ready to place His vicegerent on earth and the angels asked, "Will you place therein one who will spread corruption and shed blood?"

Unlike Jeffery Lang's 1994 book, *Struggling to Surrender*, which covered issues of concern to Muslim converts, the present book is broader in scope and addresses author's general concerns relating to the Muslims and Islam in North America. This is a treatise of an "emotional, psychological and spiritual" experience, which Jeffery Lang says, was primarily written for his children in the hope that "his struggle may help them in their search for meaning." It is also meant for Muslim readers—for them to understand views from one who was once an "outsider." The book is highly critical of Muslims in North America.

The book is divided into six chapters, starting with a brief introduction on the question of "purpose of life" and what attracted him to Islam. Furthermore, he focuses on the very important and much debated issue of second generation and locally converted Muslims, their identity, survival and future in North America. He suggests adopting a sceptical attitude toward creation as a whole, i.e., to question everything, including belief in God, in order to maximally benefit from the study of Qur'an as the main source of guidance.

Chapter two is devoted almost entirely to the Qur'anic quotations on the many aspects of human life that deal with the purpose and meaning of human existence. The author points out the value of symbolism, and analogies used in the Qur'an, which should be interpreted in a particular context. As he puts it:

...to be inspired with awe and wonder by the Qur'anic signs is one thing; to attempt to deduce or impose upon them scientific theories is another, and moreover, is contrary to the Qur'anic style. (p. 12)

He adds that it is the timeless meaning of the stories, and the morals behind them, that are important, therefore the descriptions should not be taken at their face value as statements of scientific or historical facts. He suggests the need for developing a completely non-material conception of God through one's mind, heart and the soul, rather than through physical imagery. The author raises thought-provoking questions like "why did not God create us with virtues only," and "can God experience sufferings like man does?" and provides answers from the Qur'an.

The third chapter starts with a sketch of some important converts to Islam starting from the second caliph, °Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, to Malcom X and more recently, Gary Miller, Steve Johnson, Murad Hoffman etc., and the common threads that run through their stories of conversion. He describes the hardships he himself faced, which others also do, upon accepting Islam in a society alien and often hostile to Islam and Muslims. His observations and evaluations of Muslim attitude toward converts are especially interesting and educative. He deals with many misconceptions which the mainstream America has of Islam and Muslims and criticizes Muslims for often reinforcing those images through their behaviour and practices.

Chapter four presents the challenges Islam offers a convert and describes the programme to fulfil the surrendering of man to God. From the call of faith to bearing witness (*shahādah*), Prayer (*ṣalāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*), alms-giving (*zakāh*), and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), are all dealt with moving personal experiences which are sure to stir the emotions of the reader. Of particular import is his contention, in chapters four and five, that unless a convert has embraced Islam due to the Qur'ān and its injunctions, he or she has little chance of staying in Islam, given the conditions of the present day Muslims.

The final chapter presents his analysis of Muslim communities in North America, which although pessimistic, urges them to prepare for the coming challenges. He recommends three things as necessary conditions for Islam to prevail in North America:

1. A substantial fraction of the present generation of American children of Muslim descent must emerge as adults who are strongly committed to Islam;
2. The American Muslim community must remain united and not disintegrate into sects;
3. It needs to produce its own religious scholars who can respond effectively to the unprecedented questions and problems that are bound to arise.

The book ends with a more positive note that Islam will not only survive but flourish in North America by the compelling force of the Qur'ān, a power that will attract those who are bereft of spirituality and desperately looking for it.

This book certainly has many strengths and many of the author's contentions and disagreements with traditional Muslims are

substantiated to by referring directly to the Qur'ān. Three observations, however, are in order.

Firstly, the term "convert" used in the book is inappropriate, at least from the Islamic perspective which says that all people are born Muslims. It is through their voluntary choice, or through the influence of their parents, that they subscribe to other religions. Therefore, when one accepts Islam he *returns* to it, which makes him a "revert," rather than a "convert."

Secondly, the criticism of women-abuse in Muslim societies is unfair, since the author's analysis is based upon quite limited observations and hunches rather than upon empirical data. Furthermore, abuse of women and children is a universal problem, and is prevalent in industrialised societies as well. For a balanced presentation, an analysis and report on women abuse in the West is sorely needed.

Finally, though the author in his preface mentions that this book is written primarily for Muslims, it contains insights on critical issues which may benefit the non-Muslims as well. Thus books like this must also be made available to non-Muslims. The *da'wah* effort in North America needs such writings and involvement of more indigenous Muslims, and their viewpoints are a critical need of the time. Writers must choose publishers who can market the book to the non-Muslim audience as well. Such books must also be researched in various Islamic organizations in order to study and incorporate recommendations from the "reverts," facilitating their assimilation in the Muslim society and make organized efforts toward better future planning in Islamic propagation.

The book is a positive contribution to the growing body of literature on Islam and Muslims in North America. It is all the more welcome as it sheds light on the process of "reversion" as well as how those who embrace Islam look at the Muslims in general.

***Political Science: An Islamic Perspective*, by Abdul Rashid Moten. Hampshire: Macmillan Press 1996. Pp. 224. ISBN 0-333-64311-9**

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This book is concerned with the basic issues of Islamic polity and