

Islam in History

By Malek Bennabi (translated from French and annotated by Asma Rashid). Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute Press, 1988, 110 pp.

Malek Bennabi (1903-73) was an Algerian scholar who received his education in Algiers and Paris. An engineer by training, his concern about the ummah's decadence led him to analyze the causes of this decay and to provide solutions. The result of his analysis is this book. Originally written in French in 1943 under the title *Vocation de l'Islam*, it was not published until 1954, in order to coincide with the Algerian revolution.

At the outset, he defines history by saying that

history is a sociology, that is, the study of the conditions of development of a social group, defined not as much by its ethical or political factors as by the complex of ethical, aesthetical, and technical affinities corresponding to the air or space of this civilization. On the other hand this social group is not isolated, and its evolution is conditioned by certain connections with the human ensemble. From this point of view, history is a metaphysics, since its perspective, extending beyond the domain of historical causality, embraces the phenomena in their finality. (p. 6)

Using this framework, he develops a *cyclical* concept of civilization and attributes its origin to Ibn Khaldūn. He argues that the phenomenon of "civilization" and "decadence" should not be studied in isolation. This is especially true in the case of the Muslim world, which is in need of clear ideas for its renaissance and should not be isolating the two.

Using a sociological base, he focuses on the behavior of the individual in Muslim society. He believes that the decadence of the Muslim ummah is the result of combination of historical and psychological factors. The first turning point came when the democratic caliphate became a dynasty. The second, which was psychological, was the fall of the al Muwahhid dynasty in Spain to the forces of Christendom in the thirteenth century CE. This process gave birth to what Bennabi termed the "post-al Muwahhid man" who is the typical representative of the contemporary ummah's behavior, temperament, characteristics, and psychology.

While discussing the efforts to improve this situation, he focuses on the ummah's various reformist and modernist movements. In his view, the reformist movements did not try to give the post-al Muwahhid Mus-

lim the faith which he/she already had, but rather sought to restore its efficacy to the Muslim individual. The modernist approach, which replaced the *madrasah* with the school, was eagerly borrowing from Europe, and it is this angers Bennabi, who cannot resist saying: "This disposition for accumulating indiscriminate borrowings denounces the rudimentary aspect of the Modernist movement. Civilization is not an accumulation but a construction, an architecture" (p.33).

In his struggle to come to grips with Muslim inaction and impotence, he says that the post-al Muwahhid Muslim is the victim of a deadly syllogism: "We are Muslim, therefore we are perfect" (p. 44). This attitude, in his view, is a barrier to attaining perfection. Bennabi argues that such a view of the self implies the absence of a direct link between thought and action and engenders blind and incoherent action and results (p. 45).

His analysis of the ummah's decadence includes the role of external forces as well, as they have played a very dominant role through colonization. Bennabi's sharp eye clearly sees the post-al Muwahhid Muslim individual's degeneration under colonization through *colonisibilité*, which he defines as, "the typical visage of the colonial era, the clown whom the colonizer makes perform the role of *indigène* and who could accept all the roles, even that of the 'emperor,' if the situation so demands." (p. 14). But at the same time he discusses the chaos of the western world.

Addressing the question of the ummah's reconstruction in the chapter "New Paths," he focuses on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, where the movement had potential and opportunity, "where thought and action must surpass the tradition of a closed science, and where Islam is called upon to renovate and activate itself and to learn again to live" (p. 101).

Bennabi, though born in Algeria, is a twentieth century philosopher-visionary for the entire ummah. During his life, he remained mostly unknown because he preferred to write in French. Now as his works reach the Muslim masses through translations, his thoughts and ideals are being recognized and appreciated by the Muslim intelligentsia for what they are. His thought, analysis, philosophy, and vision remind us very much of the poet-philosopher Iqbal. It is no coincidence that in their search for the key to the ummah's renaissance, both men assign a pivotal role to the individual. Bennabi focuses on the post-al Muwahhid individual and attempts to improve his/her potential, while Iqbal searches for the strengths of a "mu'min" individual to energize the post-al Muwahhid Muslim.

The rise of the Muslim individual from a post-al Muwahhid status to the level of a dynamic personality capable of bringing about the long-awaited renaissance of the ummah calls for a process of transformation. Both Iqbal and Bennabi suggest that such a process would be generated when the individual Muslim's personality is equipped with modern knowledge and is guided by revealed truth.

This common recommendation of these two prominent Muslim philosophers is the key to our success in the next century. Today the efforts of the Islamization of knowledge are actually an attempt to generate the same process that will transform the post-al Muwahhid Muslim into the catalyst of change needed for the renaissance of the ummah.

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Book Review

Integrating Islamic History

The Islamic World: A History of the Muslim Community by Dr. Mustafa Kemal Cengiz, 1992, 1st edn.

The author of this book, Dr. Mustafa Kemal Cengiz, has written a comprehensive and detailed history of the Muslim community. He has done this in a way that is both scholarly and accessible. The book is divided into three main parts: the first part covers the early history of Islam, the second part covers the Middle Ages, and the third part covers the modern period. The author's approach is to provide a balanced and objective account of the history of the Muslim community. He does not shy away from discussing the challenges and problems that the community has faced, but he also highlights the achievements and contributions that have made the community what it is today.

The book is written in a clear and concise style, making it easy to read and understand. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of the Muslim community. The author's use of primary sources and his detailed analysis of the historical context of the events and figures discussed in the book are particularly noteworthy. The book is a well-structured and well-written history of the Muslim community, and it is a pleasure to read.

Dr. Mustafa Kemal Cengiz is a Turkish scholar and historian. He has written several books on the history of the Muslim community, and he is a well-known and respected authority in the field. His book, *The Islamic World: A History of the Muslim Community*, is a masterpiece of scholarship and a valuable contribution to the history of the Muslim community. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of the Muslim community.