

# MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Published Monthly by MASJID TUCSON

October 1987

Safar 1408

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## How Quran can be the guiding light for mankind

SOME concerned Malaysians, after 30 years of independence, may perhaps feel as despondent as Hamlet, and say with him:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!

Fortunately for us, unlike Hamlet, we are living in a democratic era and our problem is not wholly a personal family problem, like his. All concerned Malaysians must act together to set our disjointed time right.

This is not an indictment of our present government — it is of all the governments that we have had in the past 30 years. It is also an indictment of all our leaders, past and present, political, social and religious, past office-holders and current critics, as well as all of us. For what we reap today is the fruit of what we sowed yesterday. Sowers are we all.

All the scandals, costing billions of ringgit, that have surfaced or have been unearthed within the last three or four years; the fragmentation of parties and the expensive politicking and party electioneering; the tearing apart of society by ideological, political and party sectarian fanaticism; the multitude of amoral, unthinking, robotic new intelligentsia and bureaucrats; costly opportunistic politicians, the army of unemployed; the half-million youthful victims of drug abuse, and the unseen, neglected and forgotten poor minority of our community — these are the stuff of our Malaysian disjointed time.

It is time, after 30 years, that we look at the whole panorama from a perspective of jointed time and, like Hamlet, set it right, even if we have to kill our mother's lover in doing so.

### Liberal democracy

There are always two sides to any matter. The gloom that we have painted is only one-half of the picture. It may be the more noticeable and dramatic half. The other half is the brighter but perhaps less obvious side, that

is, the growth and development of all sectors of our economy, the growth of a Malaysian middle class, the growth of a Malay middle class, the development of a national education system based on the national language, the beginnings of a Malaysian national consciousness, the beginnings made to develop Malay as the language of learning and high culture in our country, the rapid spread of education, literacy, health care and public amenities, the beginnings of a critical consciousness, the almost uninterrupted peace and order prevailing in the country. These are no mean achievements. They should be consolidated, upgraded and perfected.

Like Brutus, we now pause. It is a very important pause. The indulgent reader will pardon me for quoting from a notorious poem of mine, improbably titled *Sidang Ruh*, that I wrote 27 years ago during one of my heretical moods:

Perlu satu-satu diperhitungkan kembali  
Hari ini kita dewasa  
Tanpa tuhan tanpa Implan  
Kerana besok mungkin ter-lalu lewat  
Bagi kiamat yang telah ditangguhkan

The mood seems to persist with me, with due respect to our theologians (who unfortunately have made it their solemn business to save souls, although souls are only saved by their Maker).

I still want to urge that we make a fundamental review of our situation. We have to re-examine our basic premises. This is a good time to do so, not only because a generation has now passed and we are beset with seemingly insoluble problems, but also because we now have the tools and the moral will to do so.

By tools, I refer to the world's intellectual developments within the last 60 years or so. Man's critical intellect has thoroughly criticised and refuted the basic premises of the major ideologies of our time. The scien-

### By KASSIM AHMAD

tists, writers and philosophers of each or no camp have refuted the other or all camps, thus negating all ideological camps.

In this way the ideological errors of liberal democracy, communism and religious theocracy have been thoroughly exposed.

### QUOTE

... the Muslims (in Iran) will soon be left looking for a new saviour. Their true saviour and that of the entire world now is the Quran.

This theoretical refutation, however, is not the only proof of their errors. Real-life experiences have condemned them long before this theoretical exposure. Nevertheless, the theoretical invalidation is an extremely important milestone in Man's intellectual journey to the realm of peace, freedom, truth and justice.

The most glaring error is the bifurcation of life into this-worldly and other-worldly, that is the legacy of Descartes' modern philosophical dualism which has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and render unto God the things that are God's" is the biblical channel through which this great fallacy has come down to us.

Prophet Muhammad came to redress the fallacy with Islam's divine concept of *tauhid* or unity of God, unity of universal existence and unity of life. However, as is mankind's wont, even his followers later reverted to this dualism for all practical purposes, even though their theologians never admitted it in theory.

So, even in our case, Islam became a religion in the sense of a mystical religious life separated from the social and practical,

just as other religions in the past had become. We are Muslims because we fulfil certain set ritual obligations like the affirmation of the *syahadah* ("I affirm that there is no God but Allah and I affirm that Muhammad is His messenger"), and the performance of daily prayers, fasting, charity and the haj, if we have the means. In other sectors of life, in short, in the socio-political sphere, we take our guidance from the Western secular philosophies of liberalism or Marxism or some diluted forms of the one or the other.

Benefiting from humanity's intellectual achievements during the last 60 years, we must now admit the basic errors of liberalism and Marxism. Of course, it is not easy to make the mental transition from an old outmoded materialism to a new spiritual rationalism.

This is the strongest argument for preparing the ground carefully. For one thing, there is the Iranian-type religious elite who, exploiting the religious sentiment of the masses, are keenly desirous of establishing a religious dictatorship that is equally repugnant to Islam.

For another, there are still secular groups of the Right and the Left who continue to live in their cocoon of blissful sectarianism and who are completely blind to the current demolition of their idols and collapse of their ideological utopias.

The current resurgence of Islam is due to many factors, both of a permanent and deep-rooted nature as well as of a temporary and fashionable one. The Quran describes Islam as a divine religion of truth, progressively taught by all God's prophet-messengers from Adam down to Muhammad, including Moses and Jesus, to all national groups, culminating in Muhammad whose teaching in the Quran, containing the essence and the best, is applicable universally.

Seen from this universalistic perspective, the Islamic resurgence will persist into the far future and will save and remould the world according to the lofty teachings of the Quran in the

1st and 22nd centuries.

But seen from the chauvinistic dictatorial Iranian-type theory, it is merely the replay of an outworn theme: the religiousocracy of the ancient Pharaohs and of the medieval Christian Church. It was the revolt of Europe against such a Europeanocracy that was responsible for the modern European swing to secularism.

Perhaps for the Muslims the lesson of a religious dictatorship has not been clarified enough and this is the reason for the still powerful emotional pull of Iran under Khomeini for them. Yet Iran is a passing phase and the Muslims will soon be left looking for a new saviour.

Their true saviour and that of the entire world now is the Quran. The proof of this is contained in the Quran itself, in the example of the Prophet's 23-year victorious struggle in Arabia and in the early history of Islam. Even non-Muslim historians have testified to the almost miraculous rise and rapid victory of Islam in the then world. It has also created the first spiritual-scientific civilisation in the history of the world. It was a modern social experiment that did not fail.

Unfortunately, this very important fact has been covered up, not only by early Judeo-Christian propaganda (that we must say is now being corrected by Western scholars themselves, God be praised!) but also by the historical propaganda of the Muslims when they diluted the Prophet's rational, infallible, divine teachings (the Quran) with those of the fallible human (the so-called prophetic *Hadith*). In this way, they have turned the potency and practicality of Islam as a way of life into an impractical and impotent mysticism that it has now become. This is what we may call the Muslim dilemma.

Thus we can see that the world, within the last 1,500 years, has seen two failed and one successful social experiments. The failures are the secular and religious experiments; the successful is Muhammad's Islamic experiment. I am fully convinced that Muhammad's Islamic spiritual-social-scientific experiment is the general model for the future, bearing in mind that the term "Islamic" is interpreted in a universal rationalistic sense anchored in the essential teachings of all God's honoured prophets as preserved and perfected in the divine infallible Quran.

## True teachings

We must try to apply this third alternative to Malaysia. At one conference on the Malaysian Constitution recently, I suggested that the Quran be made a "guide" to our law. Although dogmatic traditionalists would look askance at this suggestion, they should remember that I am only repeating what the Quran actually said about itself, that it is

a "guide", a "light" and "the straight path" for mankind. The dogmatic secularists would be doing the same, for different reasons. Objectively, therefore, both the die-hard traditionalist and secularists are performing the same function of hindering the people from returning to the Quran.

They have been doing this for a thousand years. This sufficiently explains the deplorable ignorance of the masses of the true teachings of the Quran. Our young are taught to "recite" and chant the Quran thrice-finished, capping the "education" with a feast, not knowing the meaning of one word of it at the end!

I remember that not one of my religious teachers, including my honoured father, taught me to read the Quran in translation. I bought my first *tafsir* more than 30 years ago out of my own deep (and long-lasting) interest in Islam.

Therefore we have to begin by asking the people, especially the young generation, to read and study the Quran, and to follow its teachings. For our immediate purpose, we must start now to implement, step by step, the very rich, dynamic and rewarding socio-political ideas to be found in the Quran. Just take the habit of reading and learning from reading, for example. As all Muslims know, that is the very first divine commandment revealed to the Prophet, yet today the Muslims are perhaps its worst violators!

Our leaders and intellectuals must spend the next five to 10 years examining and studying the extremely rich philosophical-social ideas contained in the Quran and formulate them into coherent philosophical essays which we can apply to solve our problems.

Although some work of this theoretical nature has been attempted during the last 15 years or so, much of it is eclectic and hotch-potch. Many Muslim writers and thinkers suffer either from an irrational anti-Western or pro-Western bias and cannot critically and properly assimilate Western science and knowledge of the last three centuries. This is a very serious weakness which they must quickly overcome.

Let us demonstrate in the political sphere. Western political philosophy starts from the Hobbesian notion of the sovereignty of the people that is handed over to a political authority according to the theory of social contract. The sovereignty of the people is assumed without any authority except a so-called self-evident truth.

Islam's actual position is to assert the sovereignty of God without undermining the sovereignty of the people to whom God has entrusted that authority. Thus we may say that Islam calls for a government based on the sovereignty of the people under the sovereignty of God. This position is contrary to both the secular

position of "people's absolute sovereignty" and the ecclesiastical position of "God's absolute sovereignty" and "no sovereignty to

## QUOTE

**God in His unbounded mercy has provided us with a comprehensive philosophical framework in the Quran.**

the people".

In practical terms, our Parliament is sovereign in so far as it operates under God's sovereignty, i.e. that its laws and decisions do not contravene His commandments in the Quran.

Proceeding from this fundamental legal position, we may enumerate the major social ideas found in the Quran:

*"The belief and worship of one God only while guaranteeing absolute freedom of religion and worship, the sanctity of human life, absolute freedom of thought, righteous living, the unity and equality of Man before the law, the equality of man and woman.*

*"Freedom of speech within the law, promotion of learning, knowledge and science, national and international co-operation to promote good and prevent evil.*

*"Prohibition against aggression, the rule of just law, prohibition against slavery and child-killing, government by consultation; social leadership and responsibility to be given to those who are capable and morally upright.*

*"Individual and collective responsibility and accountability for every action, prohibition against injustice, slander and unjust rebellion.*

*"Obedience to God and due obedience to legally constituted authority, punishment for crimes, administration of justice tempered with mercy, individual and collective struggle to promote good and prevent evil.*

*"Socio-economic justice, wealth as a divine trust to mankind, individual rights to the fruits of his labour, social charity, prohibition against corruption, prohibition against hoarding and usury, prohibition against extravagance and wastage.*

*"Sound healthy family life, monogamy as the ideal married state but allowing for conditional polygamy, due obedience of the young to parents, and care of orphans.*

*"The development of a spiritually sound, morally and socially responsible, mentally alert, persevering and disciplined individual and society, condemnation of pride and egoism, good healthy food habits, and a comprehensive scientific methodology to develop knowledge, science and civilisation."*

What a fantastic wealth of ideas! Anyone who has some knowledge of world social theories and systems can see at once the towering superiority of the above Quranic social teachings over those of other systems. Yet many of us must endeavour hard to distinguish the teachings of the Quran from the practice of present-day

Many a thoughtful Muslim has been disillusioned by the vast disparity between the two. Is true Islam impracticable? It cannot be, and the Prophet and his early followers had abundantly proved otherwise. The first Arab-Muslim civilisation is a standing confirmation.

The great simple ideas we list above, all taken from various places in the Quran, cannot be more reasonable and practical. They also have a universal appeal. It is here that Islam's social philosophy is very much relevant to the needs of our society. Only Islam, as preached in the Quran, can unite our multi-racial and multi-religious people and take us out of the present gloom and put us on the road to greater and ever greater success.

There is a general fear among liberals and Marxists to mixing religion with politics. "Keep religion out of politics" is their prescription. This is old discredited stuff from the age of European Renaissance. Present and future politics needs an ethical base rooted in a sound spiritual transcendence. This can only be supplied by a true universal religion which is Islam. (See Quran, 3:18; 30:30).

## National ideology

To go forward from this historic 30-year milestone, we need a national philosophy, that is comprehensive, spiritually sound, universal, modern, flexible and practical. Obviously, our national ideology, the Rukunegara (that has some semblance of a philosophical framework) is grossly inadequate in comparison to the Islamic philosophical framework that we have outlined above.

Some of its ideas are not exactly in line with the Quran (e.g. "Loyalty to King and Country" should be reworded as "Loyalty to God, King and Country"), some imperfectly formulated, and overall it is too bare and sketchy to provide a sufficient guide.

God in His unbounded mercy has provided us with a comprehensive philosophical framework in the Quran. The framework only gives us the general ideas and leaves us a very wide berth to work out the mechanics of their application according to our situation. Herein lies the unmatched superiority of the Quranic guide over others.

It is the turn of our leaders and thinkers now to apply their minds seriously and creatively to solve our many problems with the help of these great ideas. It is fervently to be hoped that our leaders, inside and outside government, will have the humility, the wisdom and the will, putting aside narrow party sectarianism and personal egoism, to awaken and pool the nation's creative potential and resources in this great common national endeavour so that together we can set right our own disjointed time.

Reprinted from:

NEW STRAITS TIMES,

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1987

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The good news is that Satan works very hard to distract every Muslim who prays the five daily contact prayers, but it does not really detract from our contact with God. Don't let Satan's distraction bother you or make you think that your prayer is ruined because you "did not concentrate enough." It is the numerical combination of sounds given to us by God that causes the blessed contact. Rejoice, and don't let Satan succeed in discouraging you.

TRUE ISLAM [QUR'AN ALONE] SPREADING AMONG BRITAIN'S ONE MILLION MUSLIMS

Under the title "AT THE CROSSROADS OF BELIEF," Clifford Longley reported that the young Muslims of Britain are abandoning their inherited traditions in favor of following the Qur'an, the whole Qur'an and nothing but the Qur'an (New Straits Times, September 16, 1987, Page 6).

The article is prefixed with the following statement: "The extremist image of Islam conveyed from the Gulf is markedly different from its realities and complexities in Britain, where more than one million Muslims live in what has amounted to a hidden society. That is changing as Clifford Longley reports in a series on the religion emerging from the shadows."

Here are some relevant quotations from the article:

"Of all the major influences competing and conflicting to mould the slowly-emerging shape of British Islam, the most dramatic is the rise of Quranic fundamentalism, or more accurately Quranic puritanical revivalism. But already the British version of this world-wide phenomenon is beginning to look rather different (from traditional Islam)".

... "Nielsen finds that some younger Muslims, inspired by the Quran, are beginning to try to separate the essentials of the faith from its cultural and historical accretions."