

Islam and contemporary civilization: evolving ideas, transforming relations, by Halim Rane, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2010, x + 288 pp., AU\$49.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-522-85728-3

Halim Rane, of Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, has prepared a lucid summary of current trends in Islamic thinking and utilizes the opportunity to advance a carefully nuanced methodology to resolve on-going issues in inter- and intra-communal relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The author is concerned that, intellectually, Muslims appear to be stuck between *taqlid* (blind following of religious authority) and *talfiq* (piecing together different legal opinions), and thus lack 'productive and original content' (p. 91) in formulating relevant answers pertinent to modern civilization. The book is divided into three major sections ('Foundations', 'Debates' and 'Dilemmas') of three to four chapters each.

The opening two chapters cover familiar ground in Islamic history, with an emphasis upon Muslim intellectual deliberations over the past 1,000 years. The author reminds the reader that, contrary to popular belief, there was in fact a great deal of 'rigorous debate' regarding Islam, predestination, the nature of God and the Qur'an, and various other issues, in the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad: 'Islamic sources are not self-evident and unambiguous as most modern-day Muslims assume' (p. 44). Rane relies a lot on the late Professor Fazlur Rahman's corpus, especially with respect to chapter 3. This provides a useful guide to the main contributors to modern Islamic thought: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida – leaders of the *Nahda* (Islamic Renaissance or Awakening) – are all here. Additionally, the contributions of Abul Ala Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Fazlur Rahman, Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, Tariq Ramadan and Yusuf Qaradawi are examined, albeit somewhat briefly. However, there are some curious oversights. For example, there is an excellent summary of Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikwan al-Muslimun*) but only a brief mention of the spread of branches to other Arab countries and to Somalia. Mention could well have been made of the profound impact of the Brotherhood on other Muslim groups elsewhere, outside the immediate Arab cultural orbit: Alija Izetbegovic and the 'Young Muslims' of Yugoslavia in the 1940s and 1950s were deeply influenced by *al-Ikwan al-Muslimun* for example.

Chapters 4–6 are the focal point of the entire book, demonstrating the author's insight at its best. He reiterates time and again the historical evidence that Shari'a developed over the centuries in response to very different but specific social issues and societal circumstances. Whilst the original and distant source material for 'Islamic law' may be considered divine, the rulings themselves are ultimately mere legal opinions and interpretations of human origin. Clearly Shari'a was intended to be an important component of the administrative law rather than a completely autonomous legal system on its own (hence the failures of modern day self-styled Islamic theological 'states'): 'There is insufficient support in the primary Islamic sources for the notion that shariah represents a legal code or was intended to be the defining element of an Islamic state or society' (p. 78). Again there appear to be some minor omissions. Chapter 5, on human rights, provides an interesting discussion on the subject in Islam and specifically tackles 'Gender equality', 'Minority rights' and 'Freedom of religion' in separate sub-sections. The author mentions, but fails really to explore, fascinating Muslim women thinkers such as Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed and Amina Wadud – skimming over their unique intellectual contribution with worrying haste and no differentiation.

In chapter 7, 'Mediated Islam', Rane demonstrates his interest in media studies with a brief discussion of the 'pejorative media coverage of Muslims' (p. 245), and a quick examination of Edwards

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1981). In chapters 8 and 9 ('Jihad and Muslim militancy' and 'The question of Palestine'), Rane lays much of the blame for contemporary political malaise in Muslim societies on the Israel–Palestine issue, which has effectively retarded democratic impulses and ideas across Islamic countries in the post-colonial period. In a succinct synopsis of conflicts in the Holy Land since 1948, he curiously omits any reference to the fighting of 1956 and 1973. In the following chapter ('Islam and the West') he states that much of what passes for Islamic religious hostility toward the West is in fact Muslim social (and societal) distrust of intransigent political, economic and cultural neo-colonialism. 'Just as many Westerners view the Muslim world through the lens of orientalism, so too do many Muslims view the West in terms of Occidentalism' (p. 102). He repeatedly calls for a peaceful and just strategy to resolve political and international conflicts.

Rane has qualifications in Sociology, Islamic Studies and Media Studies and a PhD in International Relations, and this is evident in his multi-faceted and erudite approach to his themes. Fundamental to his argument is his belief that 'a meaningful reconciliation between Islam and the major challenges of contemporary civilisation are a matter of how Islam is conceptualised and defined by Muslims' (p. 5). This boils down to how exactly the sacred texts are analysed by the scholars. Rane concludes by articulating his proposals for a critical and modern approach to resolving Muslim/non-Muslim issues through a syncretic contextual methodology called *maqasid* or 'higher objectives' in determining proper and informed Muslim interpretation, practice and application of the Qur'an and Shari'a. 'The *maqasid* approach offers a framework to guide the contextualist approach and to ensure consistency with the spirit of the Quran. It emphasises the goals, purposes, intent and objectives of the text rather than the specific words and verses' (p. 93).

This is a quite remarkable book, tackling many popular myths about Islamic law. Although the author tends to repeat some ideas – 'Islam has always been what Muslims made of it' (p. 49); 'Islamic law is what Muslims make it' (p. 110); 'Islam is what Muslims make it' (p. 243) – and despite the omissions mentioned above, it is an otherwise excellent book suitable for graduate students and scholars with a serious interest in contemporary Islamic thinking. It is simultaneously energetic, engaging, thought-provoking and eminently readable.