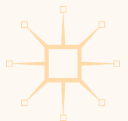




A Contemporary Perspective

QUR'ANIC GUIDANCE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Edited by Abdullah al-Ahsan and Stephen B. Young



Qur'anic Guidance for Good Governance

Abdullah al-Ahsan · Stephen B. Young
Editors

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Editors

Abdullah al-Ahsan
International Islamic University
Malaysia (IIUM)
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Stephen B. Young
Caux Round Table
St. Paul, MN, USA

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EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Abdullah al-Ahsan is Professor of comparative civilization at the Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Graduated from McGill University, Montreal, Canada, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, Ahsan has contributed many articles on the relationship between contemporary Islamic and Western civilizations. His works include: *The Organization of the Islamic Conference: Introduction to an Islamic Political Institution* (1988) and *Ummah or Nation: Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society* (1992). He has edited along with Stephen B. Young *Guidance For Good Governance: Explorations in Qur'anic, Scientific and Cross-cultural Approaches* (2008 and 2013). His books and articles have been translated into Arabic, Bengali, Bosnian, Turkish and Urdu.

Stephen B. Young is the Global Executive Director of the Caux Round Table (CRT) (www.cauxroundtable.org). He is the author of *Moral Capitalism* (2004), *The Road to Moral Capitalism* (2014), and *The Tradition of Human Rights in China and Vietnam* (1989). Young authored for the Caux Round Table a set of ethical principles for good government. Young has written for academic journals and in the public media on business ethics, corporate social responsibility, politics, jurisprudence, political culture, and Asian Studies. He received his baccalaureate degree from Harvard College and his doctor of jurisprudence

degree from Harvard University. He was an assistant dean at the Harvard Law School and Dean of the Hamline University School of Law. He has taught at the University of Minnesota School of Law, Minnesota State University, the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, and the SASIN Graduate Institute of Business Administration, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. Young was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the American Law Institute. He was a member of the Board of the non-partisan Citizens League in Minnesota and successfully promoted adoption of a Benefit Corporation law in Minnesota.

CONTRIBUTORS

N. Doran Hunter is Emeritus Professor of political science at Minnesota State University Mankato, and is a research fellow of the Caux Round Table. He received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1971 and completed post-doctoral study at Harvard University in 1973. His teaching and research interests have centered on political philosophy, public law, and administration of government programs. Hunter has extensive experience administering government programs, having been a program director at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (1975–76); a faculty fellow and associate director of Government Affairs Training, General Management Training Center, U.S. Civil Service Commission (1976–77); project director for the Justice System Improvement Study, Crime Control Planning Board, State of Minnesota (1980); Executive Director of Leadership VA, Office of Personnel and Labor Relations, U.S. Veterans Administration (1983–84); and, Co-Chair of the Minnesota Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution (1987–88). He has consulted widely in the area of strategic planning for and management of government agencies both in the United States and in East Asia. Hunter currently lives in Mankato, Minnesota with his wife Susan, and enjoys his large and extended family.

Syed Serajul Islam is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, Lakehead University, Canada and recipient of Lakehead University SSHRC Distinguished Researcher Award in 2008 and Distinguished Instructor Award in 2009. He received his Ph. D. from McGill University, M.A from Brock and Dhaka Universities and previously taught in a number of countries

including USA, Malaysia, Singapore, and Bangladesh (D.U.). He was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Iowa in 1988. He has published 9 books and nearly one hundred research articles in refereed journals and is a member of the editorial board of several international journals.

Zaleha Kamarudin is currently Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia. After obtaining LL.B (Hons) and Master's in Comparative Laws and Advanced Diploma in Shar'ia Law and Practice from the University of Malaya and International Islamic University Malaysia she received PhD degree in Comparative Laws at UCL from London University. She is a member of the Fatwa Committee for the State of Pahang and Selangor. As a model of excellence in research, she was awarded twice in 2004 and 2005 by IIUM the Excellent Researcher Award (Faculty Level) and subsequently her team won the Excellent Research Award (Faculty Level) in 2008 for their effort in documenting the development of Family Law and Succession Law in Malaysia for Kluwer Law International, an international publisher based in the Netherlands. She has published twenty books, and more than two hundred articles in areas related to family law, children's rights, and women's rights.

Abdul Rashid Moten is Professor of Political Science at the International Islamic University Malaysia. He earned his BA (Hons) and MA from Dhaka University, Bangladesh; MA from Villanova University, Pennsylvania, USA; and Ph.D. from the University of Alberta, Canada. He specializes in Comparative Politics, Methodology, Islamization of knowledge, and Electoral Studies. He has authored and edited 28 books and monographs. He has also contributed over 150 articles in internationally refereed journals and encyclopedias. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics carries eight entries dealing with topics in Political Science and Malaysian Politics. He served as the editor, and after ten years, as the editor-in-chief of Intellectual Discourse, the flag-ship journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia. He is currently the editor of the International Journal of Islamic Thoughts.

Muhammad Arif Zakaullah has retired from the International Islamic University Malaysia where he was Professor of Economics. During his tenure he served as the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences and later as the Head of the Master of Management Program, Graduate School of Management. He received

Best Teacher Award at the Central New England College of Technology, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA and the International Islamic University Malaysia. His works have been translated into the Arabic and Bosnian, Indonesian and Urdu languages.

Introduction

Abdullah al-Ahsan and Stephen B. Young

Good governance is a fundamental prerequisite to human civilization and society. Yet interestingly the concept of good governance as a subject of debate in international relations, particularly in the area of public administration, has emerged only recently. In recent times international donor organizations and agencies such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and numerous other international and national, governmental and non-governmental, institutions have raised the issue of good governance in international politics. Why has the question been raised now? This is perhaps because the sharp rise of communication facilities and technological innovations has turned the world into a global village where nobody can ignore accomplishments and undertakings of anybody in any part of the world. With the rise of extremism around the world, insistence on good governance seems to have gained further momentum.

The present and worrisome deficit in good governance can be seen in individuals, corporations, political parties, leaders, families and especially in state structures of repression and exclusion. There can be no time in

A. al-Ahsan (✉)

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

S.B. Young

Caux Round Table, St. Paul, MN, USA

our lives when good governance is not relevant. The best of humanity cannot flourish unless there is good governance of the person, the family and the community. As Qur'an enjoins "let there be among you a Community which shall call for righteousness, insist upon justice, and forbid evil," (3: 104) this book seeks to fulfill this Qur'anic teaching.

This book has been designed keeping the need for addressing the question of good governance in the present context. However, one must note that throughout history philosophers and theologians and in modern times humanists and social scientists have debated this issue. In this work, we shall examine some aspects of this historical debate into consideration.

DEFINING GOOD GOVERNANCE

The concept of good governance may be understood as some fundamental administrative principles aimed at gaining trust and cooperation amongst people. These principles are usually value-based and are necessary for organizing institutions, organizations and societies. However, conflict arises when these values are narrowly defined on the basis of securing specific interests and denying universal human dignity. We shall clarify the concept by addressing some of its fundamental characteristics.

Accountability: Institutions of governance must be accountable for all decisions they make and their consequences. A government's primary obligation is to be accountable to the community it represents, but it is also answerable to the wider public for the sake of clarity and transparency. This is necessary for the sake of harmony, sociability and good neighborliness in today's globalized world.

Transparency: People should be able to follow and understand the decision-making process of all governments be the government local, regional or global. In other words, people should know who, why and how a decision is made and it is implemented. Decision makers must take responsibility for their actions and their consequences. Also, the decision-makers must ensure that the decisions have been made on the basis of proper information and in consultation with all stakeholders.

Rule of Law: Good governance also means that people responsible for running the administration follow stated laws in a transparent manner. Justice and equality should be fundamental pillars of rule of law. Law must ensure that no discrimination is made on the basis of caste, color, gender, race or religion.

Participatory: The decision-making process must be participatory. Decisions made at the top and then pass it to lower echelon for

implementation can't be good for any institution. Good governance demands participation of all stakeholders which could be ensured through democratic means. However, good governance also demands that the democratic process is fair and transparent and is not corrupted by the rich and powerful.

Responsive, Equitable, Inclusive, Efficient and Effective: Good governance should always try to serve the needs of the entire community by balancing competing interests in an open manner. All members must feel a sense of belonging where even most vulnerable would have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

In this book, we shall try to relate these principles of good governance in our daily lives. We shall examine governance in political institutions, economic and financial institutions, family governance and other forms of societal associations in the following chapters.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND RELIGIONS

Many noted historians have held the view that religious ideas have played a key role in the formation and expansion of human civilizations in the past. It is commonly believed that civilizations demand good governance and history bears the witness that civilizations have been born, flourished, transformed and declined because of good governance or the lack of it. That is why in our discussions we take religious ideas on the subject seriously. But unfortunately in contemporary discourses on the subject, religious ideas rarely find any space in a positive sense. In our view, both civilization and religion are important components for any discussion on good governance. One must not underestimate the power of religious ideas only because in history the poor and weak have often been exploited in the name of religion. In fact, history has witnessed distortions and exploitations by guardians of religions. But should one ignore ideas that have had remarkable influence in history? Shouldn't one explore possibilities of relevance of those ideas in our so-called modern times?

These are important questions particularly at this juncture of history when international relations are fraught with tensions associated with the clash of civilizations thesis. It seems a great deal of confusion arises in this context not only because of misuse of religious ideas by extremists and guardians of religions alike, but also because these ideas are not accurately understood in humanities and social science literature. For this reason, we feel the need for some clarification of our position on the question. Interestingly we have found a good partner in our venture: A

few years back we came in touch with Caux Round Table (CRT) which stands for “an international network of experienced business leaders, who work with business and political leaders to design the intellectual strategies, management tools and practices to strengthen private enterprise and public governance to improve our global community.”¹ This partnership between academics of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and realistic and successful business leaders of CRT has been very productive and valuable one. We at IIUM found a group of ethically and morally committed business leaders, mainly from the Western world, interested in innovative ideas for good governance and progressive growth. And the CRT found fascinating ideas for good governance in the Qur’an through us. We held a number of workshops at IIUM and at Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA and formulated ideas of common ground. We developed a research cluster and made presentations at Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC and at the House of Lords, Westminster, UK and jointly published *Guidance For Good Governance: Explorations in Qur’anic, Scientific and Cross – cultural Approaches* in 2008 which was reprinted in 2013.

Over the past few years, we have held discussions and workshops, conferences and seminars in various parts of the world about universal religious teachings, their implications in our daily lives and their relations with science and the human nature. We have tried to relate those ideas with contemporary crisis of good governance. This current work is an outcome of these discussions. In humanities and social science disciplines the debate about religious ideas invariably demands considerations on rationalism and science. Are religions irrational and unscientific? Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), two intellectual giants of modern Europe who have made considerable impact on contemporary perception of religion, have branded religion as illusion. How could one take illusion seriously for positive societal developments then? Can one even perceive illusion at all? If one is confused about an idea, how can one even contemplate on learning from a mystifying phenomenon? The question of seeking guidance for solution to any problem becomes absolutely redundant. This question becomes complex when one wants to know about early civilizations. Why should one learn from early civilizations? In our view, one has to learn from early civilizations because we know that civilizations demand human cooperation, and if we are interested in saving the humanity of today from clashes and conflicts, we need to understand how the earlier human communities ensured

that cooperation. We also know from our knowledge of history that religious ideas played pivotal role in organizing early human societies. As Christopher Dowson puts it, “the great religions are the foundations on which great civilizations rest.”²

The issue becomes even more complex when the question of human evolution appears. This brings natural sciences into the picture. Did human beings on their own naturally learned by confronting challenges of the nature? Or there has been any extraordinary power from which they have acquired certain knowledge? How do human beings acquire knowledge? Are our brains programmed to pick up new knowledge from the nature? If so who programmed our brains? These questions have given rise to studies such as cognitive neuroscience and other related subjects. Some scientists believe that human brains have been hard-wired with certain capabilities so that they are able to grasp natural phenomena and enrich themselves with new knowledge. On the other hand, the theory of evolution has given birth to philosophical and scientific studies such as methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism. Some others have developed the concept of intelligent design. While all these are important themes for an understanding of the human nature, and develop a perceptive view about how early human beings came to cooperate with one another to organize and govern the first civilization, our main problem is that we have little credible evidence and information from early civilizations to formulate a universally acceptable insight about their form of government. Yet interestingly all historians agree that religious ideas permeated all early civilizations. But we are also aware of the fact that although religions have guided mankind with values for good governance in history, guardians of religions have manipulated ideas to serve their selfish motives. Are some business and political leaders today doing the same? In our work, we attempt to undertake the task of differentiating between religiosity and pseudo-religiosity and identify positive religious/Qur’anic teachings for good governance in today’s context.

Historians have had difficulties in relating scriptural stories with those of the conventional works of history. The Babylonian king Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC), who many modern historians consider as the first law-giver in history, claimed that his laws originated from divine sources. This claim is based on writings and paintings found in archeological discoveries. But critics have pointed out weaknesses and authenticity of those sources: were those materials produced during the lifetime of Hammurabi? Who produced those tablets? Did Hammurabi personally

verify them? But interestingly many of Hammurabi's codes resembled Biblical and Qur'anic teachings. Could Hammurabi be considered one of the early prophets as indicated in the scriptures? It would be hard to suggest this mainly because archeologists and historians are not able to verify when the clay tablets were produced and how long after the event the story was written.

Similarly, both the Bible and the Qur'an mention about a huge flood during the time of Prophet Noah, a flood that inundated the whole known world. Interestingly this story is also mentioned in the world's first known epic account known as Gilgamesh. Does this mean that the story of the flood could be authenticated by the story of Gilgamesh? Amazingly this story of the flood could also be verified by fossil evidences in ancient Mesopotamia and yet it would be difficult to ascertain the details of the story. When exactly it happened? Who were the main actors in the event? In other words, it is very difficult to scientifically relate stories of divine guidance to real history. Yet one may safely suggest that in history historical personalities existed who claimed to have divine connection and who have contributed to establishing peace in society and thus in the rise and growth of civilizations.

ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE

Islam is first and foremost an ethical, practical and spiritual understanding of the world and the cosmos mediated by the concept of the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*). By subscribing to unity of God one undertakes a covenant with himself, his Creator and his surroundings. His belief in unity of the Creator calls him to be responsible not only to himself and fellow human beings, but to everything in the plant and the animal world and the overall environment, as everything in the universe is created by the same God, and there is a purpose of the whole thing. In order for man to understand this purpose, the Qur'an repeatedly asks mankind to observe, ponder, and use reason. (Consider, for example, 4: 82; 23: 68; 38: 29; 47: 24).³ The emphasis on the role of reason in determining man's relationship with everything in the universe is central to man's ability to utilize it for the benefit of humanity. By highlighting rights and obligations of God over man, and man over man, the Qur'an establishes the point that man serves God mainly by serving humanity.

In this journey of life, one is happy and successful when one enjoys one's life in an orderly and civilized manner. It gives spiritual satisfaction

when one fulfills one's responsibilities to God and the society. In this process the individual will not only satisfy his material and spiritual needs, but also contribute positively to human civilization. Naturally for the realization of this vision of human life, good governance becomes a pre-requisite. Therefore an individual may seek happiness and success in his personal life by obtaining guidance from the Most Merciful—the Creator of the universe—to fulfill his obligations toward the society. The Islamic worldview integrates the role of the individual in absolute terms with the overarching concern for peace and general human well-being.

The human beings are a special creation of God. God has created man as His representative (*khalifah*). God has created everything else in the universe subservient to man, and if he utilizes them positively, he participates in God's continuous process of creation. This participation is neither by chance nor optional, but a responsibility—the purpose of one's very life and existence. God has not left man empty-handed to fulfill his responsibilities in this life. He has endowed man with reason, physical and intellectual capabilities, knowledge and resources. These potentialities and resources—including one's very own life—are given to man as a trust (*amanah*). Hence he is not the absolute owner of any one of them. Even his own body and life has been given to him on trust; hence, he is not allowed to abuse them or harm himself. That is why drug abuse and suicide are forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. Potentially there is an enormous prospect for innovative creativity and growth in this process of creation. But this cannot occur without a direct and active role of man. Since human beings have been endowed with the ability to think, rationalize and understand, they must strive to cultivate their potentials in order to qualify to be contributors to this process of creation and growth initiated and spearheaded by God. Thus the underlying principle guiding man's life and relationships with all the other creations is that everything in the universe is a trust (*amanah*) from God to man, and as representative of God on earth, mankind has been assigned to establish a peaceful society and civilization.

God has fashioned the nature—*fitrah*—of every human being in such a way that no one can survive alone.⁴ In other words social organization is vital for mankind, and no human organization can be established without some form of universal principles accommodating interests of all or most members of a given group. Therefore it may be safely suggested that some form of political organization existed from the very beginning of human history. But unfortunately very little information is available

about the early formation of ancient civilizations. The Qur'an tells that, originally mankind belonged to one community (*ummah*), and God has guided them by sending prophets with glad tidings and warnings, but they disagreed among themselves for selfish motives and about their way of life (*din* or religion); this led to division in the society (2: 213). These divisions occurred because some "holders of religion" sold the sacred message "at a cheap price" (2: 102–103) for their personal worldly gains. Every individual is free to choose between an ethical life and a life motivated by selfishness, greed, and evil desires.

The challenge for mankind is to overcome this negative power and if he succeeds in this, it contributes to the growth of civilization. Good governance is indispensable for the peace and prosperity of human civilization. We believe that with the passage of time human beings have grown more mature and they have acquired greater enlightenment to understand proper purpose of life. They are also supposed to have acquired better judgment and self-control to understand Divine guidance. Primarily the essence of Qur'anic guidance on good governance is the understanding of the concept of *amanah* (trust) and *'adalah* (justice) within the framework of the Islamic worldview. These two concepts provide a framework for the main practical concepts (i.e., *shari'ah* and *shura*) of good governance in the Qur'an. The principles of *shari'ah* and *shura* are open to human understanding based on reason. In fact, the concepts of *amanah* and *'adalah* provide the ontological basis of *shari'ah* and *shura*, and furnish the practical mechanism for Islamic polity.

This development in history has been referred as Islamic humanism by some scholars. Islamic humanism manifests itself in a significant way in the formulation of principles central to the establishment of Islamic political institutions. An understanding of Islamic humanism necessitates both a deep look into Islamic history and development of an Islamic theory of knowledge. The *maqasid* (objectives) of *shari'ah* are meant to preserve religion, life, reason, progeny and wealth, an overarching principle of all policy making (political, legal, economic, social, environmental etc.) that emerges from these objectives is *maslaha* (public interest). Public interest is defined (in simple words) as promoting and preserving the things that are beneficial to society and preventing the things that are harmful to it. This book has been designed to highlight Qur'anic guidance in various aspects of life.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book contains ten chapters. The chap. 1 explains the contents of the book and explains how Qur'anic guidance helps us understand change in history. The next chapter compares the Qur'anic approach with “rational and scientific” approaches to historical changes elucidated in Darwinian and Freudian methods of studying history and civilizational transformations. It validates the Kantian believers' approach as pure rational and scientific and adopts of fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun's method in interpreting and understanding historical changes.

In so many ways the anxieties and confrontations in our contemporary world order reflect the tensions between a nineteenth-century social construction of a secular, rational enlightenment sponsoring scientism in all fields of human thought, industrialization and capitalism, and rational/legal modes of bureaucratic sovereignty and more timeless intuitions about permanent transcendental truths, which we most often refer to as religious insights. In particular, a compelling form of anthropocentric scientism was launched in 1851 by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) in his book *Social Statics*. Spencer's centralizing moral and ethical teachings in the human person's drive for individual mastery in a struggle for survival came to be called Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism along with Marxism and other social and cultural norms derived from the Continental Enlightenment tried hard to push religious conviction off the center stage of human striving for justice and dignity. But by so elevating the personal and the individual, such scientism through its presumed anthropocentric hegemony in sourcing norms and beliefs, did not adequately constrain the human tendency towards selfishness and deviation from the common good, from what in the Christian tradition is called “original sin”.

In Qur'anic terms, such scientism and anthropocentric thinking constitutes *shirk*, or the hubristic arrogance of placing ourselves as the equal of God, or even as superior to the Divine itself. Thus Qur'anic guidance which restrains us from *shirk* is most contemporary, very relevant to the crises of our times and helpful to all humanity in its search for more dignity and better justice for us all.

In the subsequent chapter, Doran Hunter identifies scientific foundations of some Islamic teachings. He sketches out some of the conclusions being reached by social anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists

with regard universal human culture, values and virtues, and how these investigations are changing our views about human nature. He then takes a look at how Qur'anic concepts of *fitrah*, *amanah* and '*adalah*' play roles in good governance and how the application of these principles is compatible with the findings of contemporary science regarding the essence of human nature. He then elucidates how contemporary biological and social sciences are auguring for a new frame of mind when looking at differences between civilizations.

In Chap. 4 Abdul Rashid Moten describes the development of idea of good governance in history and explains how Islamic teachings and values ensured human cooperation and helped the growth and expansion of Islamic civilization from the seventh to the eleventh centuries. It analyzes the Islamic foundation principles and values underpinning the field of governance and elucidates a "good governance" framework through a value-shaped dynamic model as found in *Al-sisyasah al-shar'iyah*. This is followed by an analysis of the attempts made in Malaysia and Turkey to construct societies ordered by religious based moral precepts.

Stephen B. Young in Chap. 5 examines performance of American financial enterprises Enron, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers and Wells Fargo and argues how applications of Qur'anic guidance by the boards and chief executives of the relevant American corporate enterprises could have minimized the likelihood of what became notorious failures of free market capitalism. He takes into consideration the Qur'anic principles of *Khalifah*, *amanah*, and *shura* and argues how these concepts through the application of Islamic legal source *ijtihad* prudential management of capitalist enterprise could be established.

In Chap. 6, Muhammad Arif Zalaullah examines economic governance and the political economy of the 2008 US financial crisis and highlights the severe conflict of interest between the selfishness of private business and the security and well-being of the society. After analyzing various actors in corporate and state governance he describes how and why the regulatory architecture failed to keep greed in check and the market failed. The author prescribes socially responsible regulations and supervision of the US financial sector to ensure economic stability and protection of long-term interests of society. And guidance for such regulations might be found in religious teachings.

Zaleha Kamaruddin in Chap. 7 examines implications of Qur'anic guidance in family governance. The family as an institution, she argues, has undergone radical transformations in response to the changing

socio-economic environment, albeit with little consideration from the perspective of good governance. She analyzes state intervention in Malaysia for developing mechanisms for protecting family institution and highlights the role of Qur'anic guidance in this respect.

In the Chap. 8, Syed Serajul Islam outlines Qur'anic guidance on environmental issues. He first defines the meaning of sustainable in the context of current developments in international affairs on the issue and then highlights Islamic teachings on the subject in the search for ethical guidance sustainable development. He then conducts a comparative analysis between Islamic teachings on the subject and principles of international law demonstrating their compatibility and points out how the international community could benefit from Qur'anic guidance on sustainable development.

In the last chapter, Abdullah al-Ahsan examines the role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in conflict resolution. He discusses the role of the institution in conflict resolution since its inception in the beginning of 1970s and analyzes its role in handling various internal conflicts including Iran–Iraq war of 1980s. He identifies OIC's failure in resolving the conflict in its baffled method. Instead of following Qur'anic guidance, the institution seemed to have been motivated by national interests of powerful member states, he demonstrates.

NOTES

1. "Caux round Table", accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.cauxroundtable.org/>.
2. Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History* (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 128. Also see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996), chapter 2, 40–55.
3. There has been a lively debate on the conflict between reason and revelation in early Islam. The Qur'an places priority to reason in accepting the divine message. With the passage of time it became clear that Islamic rationality would never accept a conflict between reason and revelation. If any such conflict occurred, it must be due to an incorrect interpretation of revelation or because of a misunderstanding of reason. Therefore, pure reason would never contradict authentic revelation. The debate reached its climax with the contributions of Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazzali. Then Ibn Taymiyyah gave the most moderate and rational explanation of the issue. For detailed discussion, see Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar Ta'arud*

al-‘Aql wa al-Naql (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa’ud University Press, 1979); and George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

4. This is a key concept both in Islamic ethics and theology. For a detailed discussion, see Muhammad Al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Maqasid al-Shari‘ah al-Islamiyyah* (Amman: Dar al-Nufais, 1999), 189–195.

Guidance for Good Governance and Civilizational Transformation: Lessons from History, Religion and Science

Abdullah al-Ahsan

INTRODUCTION

Changes with the passage of time and civilizational transformations are facts of history. Since man (human being) is the only evident actor in all these phenomena, any explanation for changes in history must incorporate a fair understanding about the human nature. The idea of human nature has been heavily debated by ancient philosophers as well as modern humanists and social scientists. In our view it is necessary for us to develop a fair understanding of this phenomenon for a fair perception of civilizational transformation. Numerous rational philosophers and performing scientists in history have participated in discussions related to this broad subject. In their discourses some have raised questions about the role of religious beliefs; others have tried to underscore the human nature scientifically. Do we really know how the earliest human civilization in history was established? Unfortunately we simply do not know

A. al-Ahsan (✉)

Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University
Malaysia (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia