

Book Review

Applications of Wasatiyyah in the Contemporary Muslim World. Edited by Ahmad F. Yousif. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Press, 2015. Pp. XV+137. ISBN: 978-967-418-346-2.

Reviewer: Foyasal Khan, Doctoral Candidate, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail:foyasal.khan@gmail.com

As a non-partisan institute, the International Institute of Wasatiyyah (IIW) was established at the International Islamic University Malaysia, in November 2012. The Institute engages in research, training, workshops, forums, seminars, conferences, publications, and dialogue, to foster and enhance moderation among members of the Muslim *Ummah*. *Applications of Wasatiyyah in the Contemporary Muslim World* is one of the significant contributions by IIW within this short period of existence. The book contains five chapters spanning 115 pages, including an eleven-page index. Furthermore, an extensive ten-page list of selected references on *wasatiyyah* consisting of Arabic and non-Arabic sources (Malay and English) may serve as a guide for researchers.

In her foreword, Prof. Dr. Zaleha Kamaruddin, the then Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), remarks that Islam is a religion of peace and moderation. Malaysian history bears the testimony of how *wasatiyyah* was and is still being utilized as an ideological instrument to disseminate the teachings of Islam among its inhabitants. She argues that *Wasatiyyah* teaches to maintain a peaceful coexistence with peoples of other faiths. However, the glory of Islam as a moderate religion has been tainted by groups that have drifted from the mainstream. She raises five important questions on *wasatiyyah*. She emphasizes the need for public institutions to study and understand Islamic deviationist movements and how to interact peacefully with these movements. She advises educational institutions in the Muslim world to engage in serious, scientific research to explore the applications of *wasatiyyah* academically, and from a multidimensional perspective.

The first chapter “The Concept of *Wasatiyyah* and the Place of Islamic Moderation” is by Mohd. Kamal bin Hassan, the third Rector of IIUM. This 43 page-long paper contains only nine

references, of which four are from Syeikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. This indicates that Prof. Kamal Hasan has been influenced greatly by Syeikh al-Qaradawi in his conceptualization of *wasatiyyah*. Application of *wasatiyyah*, he argues, can show the world the true nature of Islam by correcting the misconceptions and misinterpretations surrounding Islam, and educating and enlightening the Muslim community. He highlights some Qur'anic principles in the context of moderation (p. 9-12). These are justice (*al-'adl*), excellence, best and goodness (*al-khairiyyah*), balance (*al-Tawasut, al-Tawazun, al-'Itidal*), straightness (*al-istiqaamah*), and strength (*al-Quwwah*). In Section four, he describes *wasatiyyah* as in 'Religious Practice'. He also highlights the eight recommendations and thirty milestones described by Al-Qaradawi. These are important towards realizing the goals of comprehensive *wasatiyyah* (p.16-18). In the next two sections, Prof. Kamal discusses Islamic moderation in Southeast Asia and how to counter extremist or militant tendencies among Muslim groups (p.21-30). Kamal Hassan also examines the misunderstanding of the concept of jihad, i.e., changing reprehensible things (*Tagir al-Munkar*) by force, and revolting against the rulers. To Kamal Hassan, moderation (*wasatiyyah*) should stand for comprehensive and holistic excellence of the Muslim community to actualize justice, excellence, and balance. However, it is surprising to see Prof. Kamal praising an autocrat like General Pervez Musharraf for championing 'Enlightened moderation' and he has expressed the fall of Musharraf as an unfortunate event to end this nationwide campaign (p.5). To the understanding of this reviewer, an autocrat cannot be a model of moderate voice and if he promotes 'moderation', it is bound to be superficial. Musharraf seized power in a bloodless military coup in 1999. He is accused of imposing the state of emergency in Pakistan and revitalizing Islamic extremists (see, the Washington post, editorials, November 20, 2007).

The second chapter, *Applications of Wasatiyyah in the Contemporary Muslim World*, by Abdul Hamid Ahmad AbuSulayman, the second Rector of IIUM. It is an important chapter but contains no headings or sub-headings, and no references. According to AbuSulayman, love and compassion really capture the concept of *wasatiyyah*. Moderation can be achieved by realizing the role of human being as a *Khalifah* (vicegerent) of Allah in terms of controlling and developing the earth in accordance with the guidelines of Allah. To express compassion, love and helping each other, Islamic concepts of *mawaddah, rahmah* are essential. Muslims should not feel superior or inferior to other races and ethnicities just because of majority or minority in a

particular country. He points out that the differences in colors and languages in the world are part of the beauty of creation. The essence of *Wasatiyyah* demands not hurting or being unjust to anyone, being good with neighbors, behaving in the best ways with relatives, parents with love, compassion and moderation. He discusses *wasatiyyah* from the perspective of international relations. He criticizes agnosticism which only emphasizes the present life. According to him, economics is agnostic which does not take into consideration afterlife. AbdulHamid explains *wasatiyyah* by drawing from his experience as the Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia.

Chapter three entitled *Understanding Islamic economics based on Wasatiyyah* by Mohamed Aslam Haneef consists of seven sections. Most of the sections could be treated as the summarized version of some of his works published, for instance, in *IIUM Journal of Economics & Management* in 1997, *Post-Autistic Economics Review* in 2005, and *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting* in 2011. Ardent readers of Islamic thoughts especially in economics can surely benefit from reading these materials. In Section six, Aslam Haneef argues for the replacement of moderation rather than profit maximization as the former presents a better ethical basis for economics. In Islamic economics, he argues, a consumer can choose to maximize *maslahah* instead of utility maximization which is philosophically different than the concept of utility. In this *maslahah* framework, an Islamic man is aware of his *huquq* (his rights) as well as other's *huquq* (other's rights and obligations towards him).

In the fourth chapter, Ariff Osman of the Kulliyyah of Medicine, IIUM applies the process of *wasatiyyah* to the field of medicine and particularly for the benefit of terminally ill patients. He argues that the Islamic ethical system, which provides consistent guidelines for critical issues in medicine, is more comprehensive and practical for practitioners in exercising their duties. Consequently, Islamic medical ethics provides a practical framework to solve ethical issues faced by healthcare professionals, patients and society.

The final chapter highlights the application of *wasatiyyah* within the foundational aspects of worship (*'ibadah*) in Islam, and is contributed by Ahmad F. Yousif, the editor of the book. He emphasizes the importance of the application of *wasatiyyah* in Islamic rituals rather than going to

the extremes. Muslims are instructed to do good deeds within their capacity in accordance with the Prophetic saying: “Do good deeds that are within your capacity”.

In sum, this book makes a fine effort to explain how the Islamic concept of wasatiyyah (moderation) is applicable to current issues in the contemporary Muslim world. However, the chapters are at conceptual and theoretical level. These lack a serious, rigorous empirical approach to test or critically examine the issue of Islamic moderation. No detailed case studies are used to explore the extent to which Islamic moderation is actually practiced in the Muslim world. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the book may be considered a valuable source for scholars and students of Islam in Muslim societies.