
It is frequently stated that the post-9/11 world is a radically altered world. Muslims worldwide, in the East and the West, view Western policymakers with suspicion and apprehension. The feeling is mutual on the part of their non-Muslim counterparts. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, cofounder of the Cordoba Initiative, has attempted to bridge the chasm between the West and the Muslim world through his book *What Is Right With Islam*. The book comes up with pragmatic advice and suggestions to improve the relations between America and the Muslim world after the tragedy of 9/11. It also offers useful insights into a world that is not just post-9/11 but also post-USA.

Imam Feisal has taken the beaten and traditional path while engaging in dialogue with people of other faiths. He starts by defining the common ground of the three monotheistic religions Christianity, Judaism and Islam. All trace their roots to the patriarch Abraham and in order to correct the image of Islam in the Judeo-Christian perspective, Imam Feisal gives extensive coverage to Abraham as the founder of the *dīn al-fīṭrah*, the natural religion which is also synonymous with Islam. Whatever accords with rational thought will automatically reject polytheism and the notion of the Divine nature of kingship. Monotheism came not only as a theologically revolutionary idea at the time of Abraham but also as a sociological revolution because it broke down class and racial barriers since all are equal before One God. Hence fraternity, freedom of conscience and social justice as advocated by monotheism form the core values of the *dīn al-fīṭrah* or the Abrahamic ethic.

Imam Feisal attempts to show that Islam is a religious tradition which is not hostile to the other monotheistic faith traditions and in the chapter titled “What’s Right with America” advocates the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States as documents that are compliant with Islamic principles. This is because both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution embody the Abrahamic ethic since they draw from “Natural laws and Nature’s God” (p. 82). They promise to safeguard human life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are God given rights that Islam also recognizes and respects. Although the separation of Church and State is an integral part of the American system of governance, the Constitution of the USA actually stands for a creed and the ‘religion’ of an average American citizen because it outlines a way of life within prescribed limits of American law pretty much the same way that Islam does according to ‘Natural’ laws. So
there’s no separation of ‘religion’ and ‘state’ as such and it follows that Muslims need not bristle at the implied separation of church and state as it is simply the wrong term for what in actuality is a system based on the Abrahamic ethic. In the absence of state interference it even becomes much easier to freely practice one’s religion and if the independent judiciary of the United States makes room for a subsidiary entity that employs jurists from all religions extant in USA in order for the citizens to consult the American system would become a good model for all Muslim countries.

In defining Islam itself, Imam Feisal has taken a very post-modern and progressive stance and tries to strip the Islamic faith of all political connotations. According to him, Islam is not to be confused with a political ideology. Islam, he says, is a verb and a universal act of submission and should not be considered to be a religion as such. By universalizing Islam, multiple systems can be accommodated within its fold; hence it is a pluralistic system in itself. According to Imam Feisal, the problem arises when Islam, or any other religion for that matter, becomes a basis for identity and belonging to a group. This creates otherness, the ‘other’ being who we are not, and consequently encourages sectarianism and politically motivated militancy.

If by labelling non-Muslims are lead to stereotype and pass sweeping statements about Muslims, Muslims themselves are not immune from this tendency. For instance, the author believes that it is erroneous to think that it is un-Islamic to eat Jewish food, for a Muslim woman to keep her head uncovered or even to do business with a bank (p. 116). The spirit of the Qur’ān is such that it calls the followers of Jesus and Moses (peace be on them) and devout Jews and Christians ‘Muslim.’ So the conflicts that arise between ideologically defined groups are not even about beliefs; they are rather about power and economic assets. If power and economic assets are fairly and evenly distributed, conflict and violence can be avoided. Although Imam Feisal’s argument is pragmatic, one cannot help feel that the author himself is passing a sweeping statement about the Qur’ānic decree on what it means to be Muslim. If the author would stay true to the spirit of progressive/post-modern Islam, he would be careful about not de-contextualising the Qur’ānic verses that called the immediate followers of the previous Prophets ‘Muslim.’ A contextualised reading of the Qur’ān would ask how applicable are these āyahs in this day and age of American Imperialism?

This is followed by a discussion of the problem of ‘fundamentalism.’ It is quite disheartening to see that instead of a polemic against the use of such orientalist terminology as ‘fundamentalism,’ the reader comes face to face with an apologetic explanation of ‘fundamentalism’ as a militant tendency in all politically motivated groups. He gives few examples from Islamic and
American history and a lengthy discussion on a similar tendency in bees, thus further empirically validating ‘fundamentalism’ as a biological defence mechanism, not a political phenomenon.

For Imam Feisal, the root of all evil in the Muslim World was the creation of the Nation States. The installation of regimes with vested interests all over the ex-colonised world was initiated by Western powers early in the 20th century when the world was divided into Nation States. The author believes that this was an unnatural division of peoples along geographical lines instead of an ethnic basis. Nation States in the Muslim world had to be coercively and militantly secularized because these countries were deeply rooted in their religion. The most notable example is that of Turkey which was secularized by Ataturk and Iran which was secularized by the Shah. This sort of geographical division has been disastrous for the Muslim world, more so for ethnic groups like the Hazara, Uzbek and Pashtun populations which were divided into separate countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, etc. This has caused ethnic and sectarian tensions in their countries because a Shiah ethnic group, Hazaras, for instance, is torn between its loyalties to its community elsewhere and its new country. So this has produced a lot of friction in the Muslim world along sectarian and ethnic lines. I personally fail to understand why the sectarian conflicts within a Muslim country have been instigated by the creation of the Nation State because they had existed previously as well and have only become more pronounced after the use of political divisions of the Muslim world. And ideally, if Islam is a pluralistic religion, these conflicts should not exist in the first place in a Muslim country comprising a variety of ethnicities all of which are Muslim. Even if they do, Muslims themselves are to blame for not living up to the spirit of pluralism in Islam rather than Western domination. So to say that the creation of a country like Pakistan was a mistake which caused ethnic and sectarian problems amongst its indigenous groups like the Pashtuns and Hazaras is unfair, and totally against the Islamic spirit of pluralism which the author himself endorses (see pp. 167–168). For its part in treating the malaise of the world, Imam Feisal suggests other the American government would do well to globalize the American Declaration of Independence and stick to its principles. It is a matter of practicing what you preach and if America had not supported the Wahhabi style militants in Afghanistan in collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to fight its cold war with the Russians, fanaticism and militancy would not have mushroomed in Afghanistan which has sadly become a hot bed of violence and strife (p. 241).

In the section “The End of History: Life in the Global Good Society,” Imam Feisal quotes Francis Fukuyama’s famous book The End of History and
equates the “good society” with that of Prophet Muhammad’s time in Medina because for a Muslim that would be the ideal political state in which all human longings and aspirations would have been satisfied. In America, the economic aspect of the ideal state has been achieved through a free market economy, so what American Muslims can do is to contribute to the spiritual needs of the American society to make it a complete whole, a kingdom of heaven on earth. At this point, one has to pause to absorb the fact that the author is actually drawing upon capitalism for inspiration, the highest form of imperialism.

Imam Feisel outlines the steps that the American government can take to help Muslim nations achieve their own good society. This can only come to pass with economic freedom, the rule of law for all Muslims through an independent judiciary, broader public participation in governance in Muslim countries and finally an Islamically articulated separation of powers doctrine which would mean an economy, military, press and religious expression free from state interference. And most importantly, interfaith dialogue can not only help build bridges but also enable Muslims, Jews and Christians alike to broaden their horizons and perceive the image of God in all faiths in a humane way. Imam Feisal praises the American dream and its sanctifying of the pursuit of happiness which allows all, irrespective of race or religion, to achieve happiness which is after all the ultimate universal goal. But in an effort to merge together the Democratic Capitalism of the USA with Islamic spirituality, with a view to naturalize the Islamic faith, Imam Feisal’s progressive vision seems to be slightly askew as nothing could be further away from the *din al-fitrah* than the capitalistic corporation that the author himself says the United States is, and consequently that does not do anything to combat American Imperialism.

_Uzma Abid Ansari_

 önemli noktaları almak gerekir.


In this work, Paul Walker has compiled the texts of sermons or *khutbahs* delivered by the Fatimid caliphs who ruled parts of North Africa and Egypt as