

Muslim Civilization: The Causes of Decline and the Need for Reform
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Dr. M. Umer Chapra
Advisor, Islamic Research & Training Institute
Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

The vision that the Qur'an gives to Muslims is to be a "blessing for mankind" (21:107). The Muslim world does not, however, reflect this vision at present. After witnessing a long period of prosperity and development for several centuries, it has been experiencing persistent decline over the last few centuries. This raises a number of questions about what factors led to its earlier rise and what factors are responsible for its later decline to the extent that it has lost its élan vital and did not only become largely colonized but is also unable to successfully respond to the challenges that it faces. Is it Islam which has led to the present weak position or are there some other factors which came into play. Another related question is about what can be done to help reverse the cycle of decline and realize the vision that the Qur'an has set before Muslims. Dr. Chapra, who received the King Faysal International Award in 1990 and also the COMCEC 30th Anniversary Award in November 2014 for his valuable contributions to Islamic Economics and Finance, has tried to answer these questions in his book, *Muslim Civilization: The Causes of Decline and the Need for Reform*.

Dr. Chapra has used the explanatory model of the great 15th century Muslim philosopher of history, Ibn Khaldun (d.1406), who used the scientific cause and effect analysis to explain the rise and fall of nations or civilizations. Instead of relying on a single variable, Ibn Khaldun used a multidimensional analysis incorporating a number of variables including the moral, the social, the political, the economic, the demographic and the historical. This makes it a powerful model capable of answering the questions raised above. Since Ibn Khaldun's model is 600 years old, Dr. Chapra has introduced a number of changes in it to take account of the changed realities around the world.

The most important factor in the rise or fall of a civilization is the human being himself. The Qur'an clearly states that "God does not change the condition of a people until they change their own innerselves" (13:11). Human beings are themselves the architects of their fate. They are not only the end but also the means of their development. Unless they possess the right kind of moral and mental qualities, it

will be difficult for any country to accelerate development. Toynbee has reflected the same idea when he says that “civilizations die from suicide, not by murder”.

Human beings do not, however, operate in a vacuum. There are a number of factors that influence them and affect their performance. The most important of these is their own motivation and ability. It is justice which affects their motivation while it is their moral strength along with their proper upbringing, education, need fulfillment, health, vocational training, socio-economic and political environment, and access to finance which affect their ability and their performance. Islam has, therefore, laid maximum stress on these requisites to bring about a revolutionary change in the motivation and ability of the human factor.

According to the Qur’an, justice is the most important of these requirements and the primary purpose for which God sent His Messengers to this world was to establish justice (57:25). Without justice, it may not be possible to develop. Justice demands that all individuals be treated with dignity and respect in keeping with their status as *khalifahs* or vicegerents of God. This, in turn, demands that all their basic needs be adequately satisfied and that there be equitable distribution of income and wealth. Any society which does not create an enabling environment for the realization of justice is bound to experience socio-political tensions, anomie and decline in keeping with the Qur’anic warning that whoever commits injustice gets ultimately destroyed (20:111).

This leads Dr. Chapra to a discussion of the factors that help ensure justice and development. Some of these include the worldview and values of the society concerned, proper upbringing of children, moral uplift, high quality of education, family and social solidarity, freedom of thought and expression, development of the society’s knowledge and technological base, incentives for hard work, enterprise and innovation, opportunities for earning an honest and decent living, and, above all, good governance. One of the factors which hurt the Muslim world most has been the lack of good governance. Illegitimate rulers taxed the productive sectors of the society heavily and, instead of using the resources thus collected for the well-being of the people and the development of the economy, they used them for enriching themselves as well as a large group of unproductive sycophants and hangers on.

In a brief span of a little over 200 pages, he has discussed all the factors that led to Muslim decline. However, the trigger mechanism in this decline, in step with Ibn Khaldun's model, has been bad governance resulting from lack of accountability of the rulers before the people and the inability of the people to remove them peacefully through the electoral process. Dr. Chapra has, however, not stopped at this. After having discussed the causes of decline he has addressed the need for reform. He has discussed a comprehensive reform program for the Muslim world – a program that will help create not only all the requisites for development but also greater internal solidarity and better harmony with non-Muslim countries and communities which constitute around fourth-fifths of the world population.

Consequently the book gives valuable insights into the kind of reform that the Muslim world needs to reverse the cycle of decline and to ultimately fulfill the Qur'anic vision of making the Muslims a blessing for mankind. No wonder two of the prepublication reviews of the book state:

"This humane book is very well conceived and makes real progress towards achieving the laudable goals it advocates.... each chapter plays an effective role in explaining the decline and, therefore, conceiving of ways to achieve reform."

Prof Robert Whaples
Director
EH. NET (Economic History.Net)
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, NC (USA)

"Dr Chapra's endeavour is outstanding, no less for its extremely ambitious goal (to explain the great historical mystery of why and how Muslims declined) than for its admirable actual achievement He has provided a coherent framework for analysis and reform for all those concerned with the Ummah revival and development."

Prof Anas Zarqa
Ex-Professor, King Abdulaziz University
Adviser
The International Investor
Kuwait