Qur'anic Foundations of the Rights of Muslim Women in the Twenty-First Century

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QUR'ANIC FOUNDATIONS
OF THE RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Azizah Y. al-Hibri

Introduction

The crisis of modernity in Islamic societies, generally, and of Muslim women’s rights, specifically, has led some individuals to wonder whether Islam has become outdated. After all, the Qur’an
was revealed over fourteen hundred years ago to an illiterate man in the Arabian peninsula. How relevant could that revelation be today in a highly technological global village at the dawn of the twenty-first century?

This article addresses this issue by starting from the premise that the Qur'an was revealed for all people, for all times and for all places. Consequently, it is as relevant today to the United States and Indonesia as it was relevant to the Arabian tribes of the past. The article will argue that not only is the Qur'an not outdated, but in fact it is extremely well-suited to the needs of the twenty-first century. In our new global village, human beings can achieve a better approximation of basic Qur'anic principles than at any other time in prior history.

In modern Indonesia, moreover, these principles are reinforced by Pancasila, the five principles constituting the state philosophy on which the government is based. These principles are articulated in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution where they are expressed as “belief in the One, Supreme God, just and civilized Humanity, the unity of Indonesia, and democracy which is guided by the inner wisdom in the community arising out of deliberation amongst representatives... creating a condition of social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia.” For Muslims though, it is clear that Pancasila has already been addressed in the Qur’an, and thus constitutes an important part of their beliefs. For example, the Qur’an repeatedly asserts the principle that there is only one supreme God, i.e., Tawḥīd, the most fundamental of all Islamic beliefs. The Qur’an also emphasizes such values as justice and consultative democracy. Rediscovering these values can only serve human interest.