

From The Editors' Desk

We are pleased to introduce you to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society*.

An important step in the journey toward creating the *Journal* began over a year ago when we hosted a Symposium on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. Together with generous support from the New Frontiers in Research grant (from Indiana University's Office of Research), Dr. David King, Director of the School of Philanthropy's Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, and the Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis University Library, we were able to collaborate with Dr. Gregory Witkowski in convening a group of internationally prominent figures in the study of and engagement in Muslim philanthropy and civil society. The symposium was what we intend to be the first of many opportunities the *Journal* will offer scholars and practitioners who work in the area of Muslim philanthropy and civil society to share with one another and broader audiences their rich contributions to this emerging field.

Before introducing you to the contents of this issue, allow us to say a few words about the way in which we are attempting to employ the categories of "Muslim philanthropy" and, by implication, "civil society."

By "Muslim" philanthropy, we mean philanthropic activity of any kind which involves *self-identifying Muslim individuals, institutions, communities, and societies as key agents* in shaping the context and content of this activity. This includes any and all activity in which Muslims themselves either give or receive, as well as any activity in which there is an identifiable and significant connection to Muslims and/or Islam. Given the extent to which any construction of Muslim identity necessarily entails the influence of other faiths as well as various

expressions of secular culture, the *Journal's* scope is intentionally broad as it assiduously seeks to avoid re-inscribing any and all false binaries between things "Muslim" and "non-Muslim." For example: for us, the frequently referenced concept of the "Muslim world" has little basis in either critical scholarship or Qur'anic discourse. Thus, in terms of geographic regions, there is no area of the world beyond the parameters of our interest.

Our definition of "philanthropy" is similarly broad and extends beyond an examination of the activity of wealthy individuals or philanthropic institutions. In essence, we define philanthropy as encompassing *any intentional act of generosity*. As such, "philanthropy" includes practices of generosity ranging from the activity of discrete individuals of all socio-economic backgrounds to that of not-for-profit organizations, social movements, and a variety of other forms of civic engagement. Such a broad definition is not only in keeping with current theory in philanthropic studies, but also with traditional Islamic definitions of philanthropy that require us to challenge longstanding Western Protestant concepts of philanthropy as "voluntary action for the public good" (Payton & Moody, 2008). Although it is a good starting point, this definition ultimately fails to encompass some of the deepest meanings and structures of philanthropy, especially within the framework of Islamic theology.

According to a well-known saying of the Prophet Muhammad (s), for example, even a smile is considered an act of "righteousness" or charitable giving (Ar. *sadaqa*). According to another story from the life of Muhammad (s.), he once declared that, "Every Muslim has to engage in acts of righteousness/charitable giving." In reply, his Companions asked, "O Prophet of God, how about those who have nothing to give?" The Prophet responded: "They should work with their hands for their own benefit and also give in charity." His Companions then asked: "And if they cannot do even that?" He replied: "They should help one who is eager to have help."

To which they further asked: “And if they cannot do even that?” He answered: “Then they should do good and abstain from evil; this is charity for them.” Thus, all Muslims are called to participate in philanthropic activity. Those who can afford to do so must give of their wealth, while those who have few material resources can act charitably by *refraining* from doing evil deeds. Therefore, Muslim philanthropy includes voluntary *inaction* for the public good as well. Beyond the action and inaction question are also questions about whether philanthropy can entail giving out of a profound sense of divinely imposed *obligation*. There is no sense in which Islamic philanthropy can exclude imposed obligation as a motivating and transformative factor for the giver and receiver alike.

This inaugural issue contains revised and enhanced versions of four of the excellent papers exchanged at last year's symposium. The regional focus of three is the United States; one examines giving in Turkey. In his article, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri demonstrates the ways in which a critical examination of Muslim philanthropic activity in a post-9/11 context helps to deconstruct the securitization dynamic which informs so much public and policy discourse regarding Muslim philanthropy in the U.S. By doing so, he also underscores the ways in which the study of Muslim philanthropy in the U.S. is key to the important larger academic and civic project of de-pathologizing Islam and Muslims. The article by Brad Fulton argues that faith-based community organizing is becoming a viable pathway for Muslim communities to strengthen themselves internally by developing civic leaders and mobilizing everyday Muslims to address issues affecting their community, as well as to strengthen their external ties by bridging religious and social differences and by promoting policies that also benefit non-Muslims. David Campbell's essay explores the determinants of giving in Turkey. Among other things, what David and his co-researchers found is that both the formal and informal giving that

we see in Tukey is not included in philanthropic studies done by most Western observers.

Finally, Ihsan Bagby looks at the giving practices of U.S. mosques. His study reveals that, unlike the case of many Christian churches, a high income and education does not correlate with higher levels of giving. He argues that there are several reasons why this is the case, some of which are theological, some of which are more broadly cultural, but all of which have important implications for the study of Muslim philanthropy in the U.S.

Our inaugural issue also contains Rafia Khader's review of an important book by Amelia Fauzia on the intersection of public policy and Muslim philanthropy in Indonesia.

This inaugural issue would not have been possible without the hard work of people too numerous to name. We are especially grateful to the work of the Editorial Board. Their guidance and selfless response to our requests for peer reviewers and reviews continue to be critical to the work of the *Journal*. In addition, this issue would never have seen the light of day without the dedication to excellence and unparalleled efficiency of our two Managing Editors over the past nine months: Sabith Khan and Rafia Khader. Of course, above all, our thanks is to God for the gift of life and the privilege of being given the opportunity to attempt to live it in service to Him and to one another.

Sincerely,

Scott C. Alexander, PhD and Shariq A. Siddiqui, PhD, Co-Editors-in Chief

References

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