

Book Review

Abdessalam Yassine. (2000). *Winning the Modern World for Islam*. Translated from French by Martin Jenni. Iowa, USA: Justice and Spirituality Publishing, Inc. 172 pages. [ISBN 0-9675795-0-3]

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Abdessalam Yassine (1928–2012) wrote this book entirely in French at first, and it has been translated into English by Martin Jenni. The author is undoubtedly a well-known Moroccan Islamic writer, scholar, and political activist. He was born in Marrakesh, Morocco. His education started with traditional Islamic studies, which included learning Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence, and memorizing the Quran. Later on, he pursued his education in contemporary schools, which gave him a solid intellectual foundation. He began his career as an educational inspector and teacher. However, in the early 1970s, he started to publicly criticize the Moroccan monarchy, especially its secular policies and the concentration of power, which drastically changed the course of his educational career.

As a prolific writer, he authored numerous books and articles. But due to some of his early writings, he was imprisoned and was sentenced for house arrest for many years. Despite these restrictions, his writings and ideas continued to influence many Moroccans and Muslims in other countries. His works often critique Western secularism and materialism, while advocating for an Islamic alternative that incorporates spiritual and ethical values. Most of his writings have had a significant impact on the Islamic revivalist movement in Morocco and beyond. His vision for an Islamic society rooted in justice and spirituality continues to inspire many within the Muslim world. Abdessalam Yassine passed away in 2012, but his legacy endures through the continued activities of the Justice and Spirituality Movement. The movement remains a significant political and social force in Morocco, advocating for reform and the integration of Islamic values into public life.

A brief background of the author is essential to understand the important message and the reasoning behind the writings in this book. “*Winning The Modern World for Islam*” is one of Yassine’s books which explores the intersection of Islam and contemporary global dynamics. It was written originally in 1998 (as mentioned in his foreword), a period where Muslims were navigating the early stages of the internet revolution, grappling with the economic impacts of globalization, and dealing with post-colonial state-building challenges. There was a strong influence of Western models of development, which sometimes clashed with traditional Islamic values. Due to this, the author found that it is vital to explain the concept of modernity, and how it affects Muslim societies.

To fully grasp Yassine’s worldview, one must understand his ideological predecessors. Within the Islamic tradition, his thought diverges from the strict literalism of figures like Ibn Taymiyyah or neo-Wahhabism; instead, he draws profound inspiration from the spiritual resilience of Sufi-oriented figures and reformists like Emir Abdelkader and Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who combined spiritual purity with anti-colonial resistance. His ideological framework is deeply rooted in the Sufi concepts of *fitrah* (innate human nature) and *ihsan* (spiritual perfection), arguing that political change is impossible without first spiritually educating

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(*tarbiyah*) the individual through the mosque. Furthermore, Yassine's intellectual development is heavily shaped by his engagement with Western thinkers. He frequently utilizes the works of Western sociologists and philosophers, such as Alain Touraine, Edgar Morin, and Karl Popper, to dismantle the philosophical certainties of modernism and highlight the West's internal crisis of meaning. By drawing on the arguments of Western critics themselves, Yassine constructs a powerful intellectual basis for proposing an Islamic alternative.

In this English version, it opens with a translator's foreword, where Martin Jenni discusses the significance of Yassine's work and the challenges of translating his ideas into English. He also explains how the English title differs from the original title and the reason for this difference. Simultaneously, he believes that English version will reach for a broader audience to engage with Yassine's critical perspective on modernity and Islam. Following the translator's foreword, the author himself provides his own foreword by highlighting his motivations for writing the book and presenting an overview of his main arguments. He also emphasizes the need for Muslims to critically engage with the modern world while remaining true to their religious values.

In the introduction, the author provides a broad overview of the themes and issues explored in the book. He sets the context by discussing the historical and ongoing interactions between Islam and Western modernity. He also introduces the central argument: the need for an Islamic revival that brings faith and modern life into harmony.

Rather than completely rejecting the modern world, Yassine's main idea is the "Islamization of modernity." He argues that Muslims should move from being passive consumers or victims of modernity to becoming "watchful consumers." This means filtering modern developments through Islamic ethical goals, especially justice and spiritual care for others.

A key point in Yassine's analysis is that he separates democratic procedures from secular philosophy. He strongly criticizes what he calls Western "sacred secularism," arguing that in places like North Africa, secularism was not a tool of freedom but a colonial weapon used to weaken Islamic identity and law. Even so, Yassine pragmatically supports the use of democratic tools—such as voting, press freedom, and the separation of powers—because he believes these do not inherently conflict with Islam. He proposes a model where these modern institutional methods are guided by the Islamic principle of *Shura* (consultation). This would create a system that manages political power effectively without falling into the moral relativism or emptiness he associates with secularism.

The book has eight chapters, each addressing a different aspect of modernity and its effect on Muslim societies. The structure is clear and organized, and the main arguments can be summarized in three points. First, modernity is not neutral; it carries Western secular and materialist assumptions. Second, Muslims should engage with modernity selectively, not reject it entirely. Third, the ultimate goal is to revive an Islamic civilization based on justice and spirituality.

Yassine's criticism of Western modernity is persuasive, but it is often very opinion-based and lacks solid evidence. His view of modernity as deeply problematic tends to ignore its diversity and other possible forms. Also, while he proposes the Islamization of modernity, the practical steps for achieving this are not fully developed.

The book ends with an epilogue, where Yassine repeats his call for an Islamic revival. He reflects on what Muslim societies might become if they succeed in combining their faith with the demands of the modern world. The epilogue offers a hopeful vision of a balanced

coexistence between Islam and modernity. Overall, this book provides a thoughtful and critical look at how contemporary global forces interact with Islamic beliefs and practices.

As an expression, the author said, “We are consumers of modernity, modernity’s consenting or coerced objects, cheap dumping grounds for modernity’s polluting trash, guineapigs for use in modernity’s experimenting” (p. 8). It shows that modernity is something that cannot be avoided yet its transformation brought various complex issues for Muslim society. Most of the criticism in this book actually directed towards Western secularism and materialism. The author argues that these ideologies conflict with Islamic values and principles, so that Muslims need extra preparation to enter to the modern world by highlighting the importance of justice, social equity, and ethical governance in Islam. The author also emphasizes the need for an Islamic renaissance that integrates spiritual and ethical dimensions into modern life. He advocates for a revival of Islamic teachings to address the moral and social challenges posed by modernity. This involves reinterpreting Islamic texts in a way that remains true to their essence while being relevant to contemporary issues.

According to Abdessalam Yassine's vision, confronting modernity occurs through phases of its Islamization. He has been using the phrase “Islamization of modernity” since 1978. Changing from being consumers of modernity to being watchful consumers who hold modernity responsible for its history is the first step towards Islamizing modernity. Having the scientific and technical means to adapt it to our social objective—justice and charity—is the second step. These actions changed the attitude that Western culture had toward its colonies, which was one of scorn and contempt, to one of respect imposed by countries that were able to maintain their cultural identity and benefit greatly from modernity in terms of organizational, scientific, and technological advancement. Additionally, the author also gave the example of Malaysia in his book. Hence, it is necessary for Muslims to recover the experimental scientific mind that was in the hands of our ancestors and with which they built the edifice of science, and to invest this mentality in benefiting humanity and supporting the bonds of human brotherhood.

The facts of modernity are represented in a number of competing and overlapping claims: globalization as a general theory, or cosmos as a process aimed at achieving specific goals, democratic pluralism, the unity of religions, the philosophy of interpretation and text open to infinite meanings, open market economics, and other current issues are some of the competing and overlapping claims that represent the facts of modernity. It is proved, according to historical evidence, that if religious thought acknowledges and adapts the values of modernity and its philosophical premises about truth, its nature, and the means of realizing it, it will have lost its own legitimacy, contradicted its primary postulates, and abrogated the effectiveness of the religious experience. There is no doubt that when the author is presented the toxins of modernity, he placed in the hands of the wise reader the solid foundations that have preserved the religion’s structure and created for it the position from which it is able to confront, challenge, overcome and dominate foreign cultures and philosophies.

Overall, “*Winning the Modern World for Islam*” is a call for Muslims to engage critically with modernity, preserving their religious identity while contributing positively to global civilization. Although not all of the authors’ idea is accepted by everyone, it is vital to highlight that most of his writings have had a significant impact on the Islamic revivalist movement in Morocco and beyond. His vision for an Islamic society rooted in justice and spirituality continues to inspire many within the Muslim world. The book serves as both a critique of Western modernity and a roadmap for an Islamic alternative that harmonizes faith with the demands of the contemporary world. The author calls for the need for an Islamic renaissance that integrates spiritual and ethical dimensions into modern life. It is important for Muslims to engage critically with modernity, preserving their religious identity while contributing positively to global civilization.

The most distinctive feature of Yassine's thought, which makes the book significant for contemporary society, is his complete rejection of violent revolution. Writing during the violent conflicts in Algeria in the 1990s, Yassine clearly condemns both state-sponsored terrorism and the violent extremism of radical Islamic groups. Instead, he supports the Prophetic principle of *rifq* (gentleness, non-violence, and compassion) as the only legitimate method for achieving political and social change. In a modern world where Islamic political movements are often linked with violence, Yassine offers a vital "third way." This book remains a highly useful guide today because it shows that Muslims can accept scientific progress, global cooperation, and democratic processes while maintaining a distinct, spiritually grounded Islamic identity that prioritizes human dignity, justice, and non-violence.

This book is not intended as an academic research book, as its purpose was intentionally to critique systematically, explain the effects and influence of various factors, and engage with modernity thoughtfully rather than rejecting it entirely. The author also employs structured and systematic writing, enabling readers to grasp the depth of his critique and the comprehensive nature of his proposed solutions. Each note provided by the author includes important additional references for readers to consult if needed. Despite its limitations in analytical depth and practical application, the book remains relevant to current discussions on ethics, identity, and the role of religion in modern life.

In addition, this book is highly recommended to a wide range of readers, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, academic or non-academic. It is suitable for all genders as it includes topics that specifically address women's issues. For those unfamiliar with the author, this book serves as an excellent introduction. It is particularly valuable for anyone interested in understanding Islam's stance on modernity and modernization, and for those who wish to learn about Islam as a comprehensive and holistic religion. The author comes with hope that this book is worthwhile if even one person finds truth within its pages, enabling them to silence doubts and uncertainties, and helping them find resolve to undertake a journey towards God with certainty and determination.

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