Editorial

This issue of *The Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* addresses the need for cross-cultural competency – a concept fully encapsulated within the Qur'anic term *ta'āruf*. This concept speaks to the practice of getting to know one another and even ourselves better through self-reflection and mutual interaction. The importance of *ta'āruf* is perfectly clear in the US, perhaps the world's most diverse country, where people of widely different and sometimes incompatible cultural and religious belief systems, worldviews and traditions, find themselves living side by side and working together in all sorts of personal and professional spheres with the other. As such, mutual understanding is necessary to ensure our society's ability to function smoothly.

The first article, Zainab Alwani's "*Kafāla*: The Quranic-Prophetic Model of Orphan Care," explores how Americans of all religions, or of no religion, can use the traditional Islamic foster care system (*kafāla*) to benefit orphaned or abandoned children. This is especially important for those children who happen to be Muslim, for there are not enough Muslim foster families to take all of them in.

Through a linguistic and thematic analysis of *kafāla* in the Quran, including the prophetic narratives, legal and social recommendations, and the Qur'an's humane portrayal of the orphans, Alwani illustrates the Islamic imperative to collectively support and take care of them. She further illustrates this imperative by exploring the way Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) implemented these concepts among his fellow Meccans. However, Alwani argues that Muslims needs to reacquaint themselves with the Islamic tradition's provisions of orphan *kafāla*, among the most important of which is that such children can never become the "children" of biologically unrelated adults. As Islam requires people to recognize the truth in all cases, such a false relationship would deprive these children of their dignity and honor and, in a sense, render them the property of biologically unrelated adults who seek to gain some benefit from them. Thus, as distinct from the American adoption system, their ties with their biological family and extended family members cannot be severed. In fact, *kafāla* stipulates specific roles for each family member so that a fostered child will grow up healthy in all aspects of its life – especially in terms of his/her spirituality.

In sum, this article argues that the goals of *kafāla* are to raise healthy, happy, and well-adjusted children who can succeed in society and benefit others. In doing so, she illustrates the parallel objectives of orphan sponsorship in Islamic law and American law, which is to secure the interests of all such children, irrespective of their religion.

Alwani ends with specific policy and community recommendations, encouraging more American Muslim families to become qualified foster families. She encourages Muslims to raise orphans communally, fully welcome them into the

community, and provide needed services (e.g., transportation, tutoring in academic and life skills, and socialization), thereby making things easier for everyone involved. She urges social workers, lawyers, and other qualified individuals and organizations to acquire an accurate understanding of both foster care systems so that these children can reap the benefits.

The second article, "Directive vs. Non-directive Clinical Approaches: Liberation Psychology and Muslim Mental Health," is by Sarah Mohr, Sabeen Shaiq, and Denise Ziya Berte. The authors contend that Liberation psychology (LP) emphasizes social justice as a key component of mental health.

This paper questions the use of directive approaches on the grounds that they can potentially re-create a model of hierarchy and dominance that is connected to Muslims' mental health challenges, particularly those of Muslim sub-populations. The authors suggest and discuss several LP-based alternatives, especially the use of group therapy as a more appropriate and culturally responsive model, from both directive and non-directive clinical orientations.

In her "Standing in the Chaos: Cross-cultural Competency in Curriculum Materials," Tamara Gray emphasizes that the what, how, and who of instruction is critical to developing a successful curriculum. She points out how mainstream learning materials and teachers can negatively impact the minority-identity students' educational achievement.

The author recounts how Muslim teaching and learning were rooted in inclusion and culturally competent interactions. Dialectic *tawḥīd*, as described by complexity theory and standpoint curriculum theory, come together to help us identify historical practices that can counteract the lack of cultural competence in curriculum today. Using Jean Anyon's steps to change and considering Nana Asma'u's creative measures, it is time to both revamp Islamic studies material and to contribute to mainstream classrooms. Muslims need to ensure that the learning environment is rooted in *tawḥīd* and inclusion, as opposed to one that continues to "otherize" our very selves.

Rania Awaad, Aneeqa Abid, and Soraya Fereydooni's "The Power of Prejudice: Cross Cultural Competency and Muslim Populations" discuss the case of Renda (pseudonym), a 45-year-old Palestinian-American Muslim patient born in the US. A married woman with four children, she wears hijab, strives to "represent Islam in a good light," and seeks to change the perceptions she believes many Americans have of Muslims. She is currently dealing with poor mental health (i.e., symptoms of irritability, difficulty in sleeping, depression, and children-related stress [i.e., acting out in school and religious-based bullying]) and the negative impact of Islamophobia.

All of these discrimination-based stressors, interrelated with prejudice, bias, racism, and xenophobia, significantly impact Renda's mental and physical health. The authors then explain the psychology of outgroup hate by analyzing the litera-

ture produced on the interrelated topics of stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice, and xenophobia, and conclude with tools available for cross-cultural competency in a clinical setting. A key way to respond to this hate is to support victims within the clinical setting by urging clinicians to acquire the skills needed to enable culturally sensitive care and support for patients like Renda.

The final article's abstract, Imam John Ederer's "The Role of the Imam in Leading American Mosques," opens with a rather disturbing statement: "Across the country, American mosques are struggling with dwindling attendance and/or stagnancy." This negative reality, especially as regards women and youth. reflects a serious problem: The mosque's leadership and congregation's mutual alienation.

The author states that the imam's job is to actively inspire, motivate, and mobilize his congregation to implement their faith. But to achieve this goal, he first must go through a holistic educational training regimen and be able to relate to his congregation and the surrounding community's diversity. At the same time, the mosque' leadership and its members must integrate with its neighbors by living among them – not assimilating into them – in an active, positive way while maintaining their unique identity.

He urges Muslim Americans to revive the Prophet's example of community leadership and relate it to the American context by overcoming specific failings: a lack of governing principles, the politics of control by personalities, little focus on social integration, and a scarcity of properly trained and empowered imams.

This issue also contains one book review and four reflection articles related to the topics addressed in this issue.

Please read the "Call for Papers" and spread it among your colleagues and students.

Zainab Alwani
Editor, *The Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*