Suweidan, Tariq al-

Dr. Tariq Muḥammad Śāliḥ al-Suweidan (b. November 15, 1953) is a Kuwaiti Muslim televangelist, author, Islamic reformer and leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait. After receiving a BS in Petroleum Engineering from Pennsylvania State University in 1975, he went on to study Petroleum Engineering at the University of Tulsa where he received an MSc in 1982 and PhD in 1990. Suweidan has advised or served on the executive boards of numerous organizations in the Arab World, the United States and Malaysia. His executive experience spans a diverse range of disciplines, including petroleum engineering, financial investment, personal development, management, education, journalism and public relations.

Suweidan is general manager of the Arabic satellite television station Al-Resala, which specializes in Islamic programming. He has produced and hosted dozens of television and audio programs principally catered to empowering the Arab Muslim youth. These programs include “Eternal women” (nisāʾ khālidāt), a show narrating the biographies of great women from Islamic history, “Leadership in the twenty-first century” (al-qiyādah fī al-qarn al-ḥādī wa al-‘ishrīn) and “Innovation in childhood education” (al-ḥidāʾ fī tarbiyat al-banīn). Suweidan has also authored over two dozen books in Arabic on Islamic history, including a four volume work called Constructing Culture (ṣināʿat al-thaqāfah).
Suweidan is known for his progressive views on gender equality and women’s rights in the Arab and Muslim societies. Suweidan explains that according to Islamic Law (sharī‘ah) women are equal to men in all spheres of life, including wages (ajr), social responsibilities (mas‘ūliyyah) and accountability before the law (taklīf). Thus, Islam encourages women to freely and fully participate in society. He cites as examples in this vein, the prophet Muhammad’s wife ‘Ā’ishah bt. Abī Bakr (d. A.H. 58/678 C.E.) and the female companion Umm Salamah (d. A.H. 61/680 C.E.). Suweidan believes that women’s freedom in western societies is accompanied by sexual exploitation. Islam, he contends, honors and protects women with modesty. The honor Islam grants women, he argues, is the result of their intelligence, hard work, and dignity. He adds that the treatment of women in Islam cannot be judged by the repression of their rights in Muslim societies today, but rather through careful study of Islam’s long history. In 2005 Suweidan argued on the Doha Debates that “Arab women should have full equality with men,” and called for the implementation of laws protecting their inheritance and their right to marry out of choice. In 2007 he debated the feminist Iqbāl Barakah concerning the importance of the Islamic headscarf (ḥijāb), arguing that it is not a custom (‘ādah) but rather an act of worship (‘ibādah).

Suweidan is also known for his advocacy on behalf of Islam and the Arab world, calling for dialogue between western and Muslim societies in the wake of the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005 and the Swiss ban on minarets in 2009. He has also been an
outspoken critic of dictatorships in the Arab world and a supporter of the popular revolutions that spread throughout the region in 2011.

Bibliography


Emran El-Badawi