

CHAPTER THREE



Resolving the Crisis Through the Reform of Islamic Thought and the Islamization of Knowledge

DISCOURSE FOR REFORMING ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND THE ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The lack of sufficient concern for the issue of reforming Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge has its roots in a battle being waged by ideologies which monopolize thought, its discourse and its call. However, in keeping with the divine law of opposing forces and the cosmic principle of truth's crushing falsehood, the discourse which aims to reform Islamic thought and to bring about the Islamization of knowledge has persevered in the face of numerous intellectual and cultural trends which have rejected it and others which have disregarded its existence altogether. In doing so, this discourse has sought out the assistance of that active sector within the Ummah which has understood its message and responded to its call.

Until recently, discourse which concerned itself with the reform of Islamic thought was being met with strong disapproval, a disapproval which escalated at times to the level of derision and outright condemnation.¹ At other times, it was met with complete disregard in the hope that it would simply be consigned to oblivion. This was either due to ignorance of its message, an inability to comprehend its contents, aims and objectives or disregard for its influence.

Many of those who have failed to comprehend the discourse calling for the reform of Islamic thought view the discussion of intellectual reform as the concern of affluent people and those who have neglected the important types of struggle, such as political struggle, armed struggle, and the like. However, the successive crises which have afflicted the Ummah's thought and culture, the repeated setbacks to its civilizational advance and the continuous failures

of its development plans have opened Muslims' minds to questions which in some cases border on protests against, or even utter rejection of, the current reality. In fact, such realities have prepared the Ummah for a comprehensive review of all of its hypotheses and types of discourse, so that every sound-minded Muslim can perceive the Ummah's ongoing struggle. The sacrifices of millions of martyrs and proponents of Islamic reform have yielded only a small fraction of what the Ummah has been striving to achieve. Hence, they have failed to right the Ummah's civilizational course or to prevent the worsening of the crisis on the intellectual level.

Whereas the discourse of Islamic intellectual reform and change was met with disapproval till only recently, the discourse which addresses the need for the Islamization of knowledge is still met with adamant rejection. No sooner has a lecture on the topic been delivered or an article published than scores of protests go up against incorporating knowledge into Islamization. In the view of those who voice such protests, knowledge is a single, unchanging entity no matter what its source happens to be. They claim it is part of a shared human legacy which is not only universal in nature, but capable of change and development. As such, it may be viewed as the property of humanity as a whole, with their various sects and religions. Viewed in light of this mistaken perspective, the sciences are in reality nothing more than human efforts in the empirical realm, the experiences of individuals and societies in relation to life's varied aspects based on specific, unchanging academic methods. Such methods, in this view, are not influenced in the least by the religion or school of thought embraced by the person who employs them. Those who view science in this way have generally responded to the notion of the Islamization of knowledge with a skeptical question about why Islam – an abstract religion which defines the individual's relationship with his Lord and refines human behavior – should be forced into contact with these sciences.

What prevents such individuals from perceiving the significance of the Islamization of knowledge is their inability to distinguish between science on one hand, and its premises, goals, values and wisdom on the other. This inability arises from the illusory belief in the universality of knowledge, a belief which has been instilled and passed down by virtue of the cultural dispossession of the Ummah.

However, those who advocate this perspective – both those who spread confusion and those who simply imitate – have withered. The IIT's pro-

grams on the issue of Islamization of knowledge, as well as the universities and institutes which cooperate with the IIIT have assisted in pacifying their objections. Opposition to the Islamization of knowledge was weakened even further when some Westerners themselves began drawing attention to the importance of values in regulating the course of the sciences. Such individuals want to reconnect science with values based on the tremendous loss which humankind has suffered as a result of the split between religion and science, or between science and wisdom.²

Despite the fact that the separation between science and faith, or between knowledge and values, finds its justification among Westerners in ecclesiastical tyranny over scientific researchers in the past, such a separation has remained distasteful and unacceptable in Islamic thought throughout the phases of its historical development. However, given the steady hold which has been maintained on power in Muslim countries by megalomaniacs and a strong disapproval of consultation, the split which took place between political leadership and scientists has prevented the sciences from developing in a sound manner, as has the isolation of scientists from taking part in society's political, academic and intellectual institutions.³ At the same time, such developments have afflicted Islamic discourse with an insularity and lack of clarity from which it continues to suffer.

As mentioned, the tyranny exercised by the church and its hierarchy in the West led to reactions which caused religion to be dropped from consideration, while knowledge came to be viewed as nothing but a set of abstract facts and presuppositions, such as those embodied in Darwinism, Marxism, Existentialism, etc. As a consequence, discussions of human nature on the levels of thought, culture, education, behavior and history came to be based on the view of human beings as the end of the line of animal evolution, the materialistic impulse, and instinctual gratification.

THE DOMINANCE OF WESTERN DISCOURSE (SEE FIGURE 3.1)

As a result of the split between science and faith, Western countries witnessed the emergence of theories pertaining to the humanities, the social sciences, the arts and literature which are based on a materialistic view of human beings

and their psychological makeup. Hence they evaluated human nature, conduct and tendencies in light of materialistic criteria and standards alone.

The situation grew more serious when, in the latter part of the 19th Century, the West tightened its grip on the world and began to marginalize the cultures of colonized peoples. It considered its own culture to be the center and measure of all thought and knowledge and, as a consequence, the foundation for all discourse. Given the fragility of these cultures, which had been distanced from their roots, as well as the victory achieved by the invading culture, there began a cultural invasion. As a result the intellectual and cultural bulwarks of other nations began to collapse before the Western onslaught.

The Ummah has not given in entirely to the invading culture. Opposition groups within the Ummah have sought refuge in their cultural and civilizational history, thereby protecting themselves from complete dissolution. However, such defensive measures have not been sufficient to enable them to put up effective resistance. Hence, given the tenuous understanding which exists of the legacy in which it seeks refuge, as well as its inability to deal with the incoming culture or to refute its challenging discourse, the Ummah has been unable to bring about renewal and build itself up on the civilizational level.

Nor has such resistance prevented some groups within the Ummah from falling prey to what we have termed cultural dispossession, including an infatuation with the foreign power, absorption of its culture and unthinking acquiescence to its intellectual and epistemological discourse in an attempt to imitate it in everything. In other words, such groups have been dazzled by the dominant culture to the point of transmuting themselves into mouthpieces which simply reiterate and endorse its content and message. This approach has been based on the belief that by conducting themselves in this manner, such groups might enable the Ummah to break out of its backwardness, keep pace with modern civilization and compensate for its inferiority complex. However, those who have pursued this path have harvested nothing but lost identity, distorted vision, and disintegration of the Islamic character.

THE NEED TO RENEW THE DISCOURSE OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT (SEE FIGURE 3.2)

There can be no doubt that the current Muslim persona has lost a good deal of its methodology and good sense. This may be seen in the decline of the Ummah's civilizational witness, that is to say, the fact that it has ceased to fulfill its mission as a witness and leader to the peoples of the world. As a result, the Ummah has placed itself outside of its historical context, current reality, and the desired future.

However, the civilizational absence or crisis which has prevented the expansion of Islamic discourse's sphere of influence and deprived it of its realism is not due to any deficiency in the values which God revealed in completeness and which He pledged to preserve over the ages. Rather, it is due to the inability to deal correctly with the system of Islamic values which exists. That is to say, the Ummah is unable to put Islamic values to use in a process of intellectual production which links them to their aims and applies them to actual human situations by means of a discourse which is fluent and open to the universe. Such a discourse finds resonance in the world of ideas, brings the Qur'anic vision to bear on reality, and possesses the capacity to contribute in an ongoing, flexible manner not restricted to time and place. As a result, it is able to map out human life and provide an authoritative point of reference and spiritual sustenance for the solution of humanity's problems.

In order for contemporary Islamic discourse to persevere in the face of the despotism of imported Western thought, we believe that it has no choice but to make the task of reforming Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge its most fundamental priority. The purpose behind such an approach is to achieve contemporary Islamic authenticity, thereby enabling the Ummah to present the civilizational witness which God intended it to. It would draw inspiration from its own roots even as it digests and assimilates modernity and its ways. This civilizational witness, moreover, needs to be presented in the form of a contemporary enterprise which is unified, integral and liberated and which rests upon sound thinking. It must be free of crises and have a clear method free of error and distortions along with a constructive, healthy culture, and a civilization which bears witness to the truth.

The reform of Islamic thought requires that we – without delay – examine ourselves and identify our areas of deficiency and vulnerability. We must

determine the nature of the crisis we face and the mechanisms which have served to generate it, and derive inspiration from the values we possess. In this manner, we will launch a process of contemporary intellectual production which will enable us to restore the civilizational witness which once was the hallmark of the Muslim nation and lay down the standards of justice and truth which are necessary in order to achieve this. The Islamization of knowledge is necessary for us to resume our intellectual contributions and release human potentials toward building up the intellectual and epistemological framework which generates civilization. It is likewise a necessary part of the process of reshaping the Muslim mind on the levels of culture, thought and behavior and rectifying the course of knowledge in such a way that it is once again regulated by Islamic premises and achieves its comprehensive, balanced aims.

It is inconceivable that reform and rectification of this nature would take place in one aspect of human life in isolation from all others. Consequently, we have chosen to station ourselves on this intellectual frontier, directing our energies toward the most important and difficult of causes, namely, the reform of mental processes, the building up of intellectual strength, and the selection and use of cultural resources in light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These processes constitute the womb which nurtures and gives birth to civilizations which are capable of resuming Islamic life and constructing a viable human civilization. However, the choice of this particular frontier is not an alternative to any of the various movements which aim for civilizational reform, awakening and renewal. Rather, it is an ongoing condition for the rectification of the courses being followed by any of such movements, for the renewal of our thought, for the honoring of our creed, and for fulfilment of the obligations which our religion lays upon us.