

# The Reconstruction of the Muslim Mind: The Islamization of Knowledge

The Islamization of Knowledge may be understood as a cultural and intellectual project aspiring to correct the processes of thinking within the Muslim mind so that it can produce Islamic, social, and humanistic knowledge based on the two sources Muslims accept as the established sources for knowing the truth: *wahy* (Divine revelation) and *wujūd* (existence). In this endeavor, we shall use reason and the senses to help us acquire such knowledge. Therefore, we reject any approach or source of knowledge that cannot be established on revelation and existence.

The Islamization of Knowledge is an effort, a process, to restructure the Muslim mind so that it can once again engage in *ijtihād* and return to its own unique track. Once there, it can operate in all of its historically recognizable genius in order to clarify to itself, and then to humanity, the purpose and the aims of the Shari‘ah and revelation, and then ascertain how they may be projected forward and applied in current situations.

We do not regard this project as being relevant only to the Islamic Ummah. On the contrary, we view it as seeking the salvation of humanity – the way to show the world how to reestablish the relationship between knowledge and values. Indeed, ever since the moment the division between knowledge and values became pronounced, civilization has steadily declined.

The Islamization of Knowledge may also be understood as the attempt of Islamic culture and thought to open channels of meaningful communication and cultural exchange so that it can offer humanity the divine truths

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This keynote address first appeared in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (December 1990): 453–57, and was translated by Dr. Jamal Barzinji and Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo. It has been slightly edited.

for which it has thirsted so long. In the words of Roger Garaudy, the French Muslim philosopher, it is a means and an approach in the dialogue of civilization.

We have called this project the “Islamization of Knowledge” in order to address the seeds of faith residing in Muslim hearts, to awaken within Muslim minds a real appreciation of the Muslim world’s contemporary situation as well as its total absence as an influencing factor in present-day civilization. The emergence of a consciously felt need for an Islamization of Knowledge can be viewed as the opening gambit of a culture that is struggling to break out of and transcend the limiting bonds of its historical experience so that it may reconcile itself with a dominant culture that is completely alien in terms of its constitution, philosophy, belief, and objectives.

The Islamization of Knowledge may also be seen as a conscious attempt to provide humanity with a way to discover and then act on rational, workable, and realistic solutions to resolve its ills. Indeed, many of today’s pressing social, political, economic, and behavioral problems lend themselves to Islamic solutions. These solutions, which reflect the divine nature of their origin, also serve a second purpose: to spread Islam among Muslims and non-Muslims by showing them that it has something relevant to say about current problems and can offer solutions that work. We must further the cause of *da‘wah* (propagation of Islam) by providing concrete examples of Islamic teachings in action, not just in the abstract. When such solutions succeed, their source will be respected, admired, and appreciated. In this manner, people will gradually embrace Islam.

I should now like to explain the challenge confronting the educated Muslims of today. Essentially, Muslims find themselves in a peculiar and contradictory situation. On the one hand, there are Islam’s eternal truths, truths considered to be the source of all that is good. On the other hand, Muslims live in a world that has little or no use for those truths, a world that seems to be based on the very opposites of those truths. Due to the inherent difficulties of functioning within such an unnatural situation, there is an apparent, but temporary, weakening of the Islamic consciousness among some Muslims when they are confronted with the realities of the world around them. At other times, their resolve will seem to grow, and their vision will become clear enough so that they attempt to reconcile their situation with the truth of Islam. To do this successfully, however, a study of the systemic causes underlying the reasons for the Muslim Ummah’s decline is essential.

Contemporary Muslim thought has produced some good results in political science, economics, the social sciences, and culture. Moreover, it has contributed to international discussions of such issues as war and peace, justice, human rights, the right of peoples to self-determination, relations between societies, ethics, and many others. But still the question remains: When will Muslims come forward with a plan for a global civilization bearing the distinct imprint of its Islamic origin and nature, one that draws from the wellspring of its Islamic way of life, and for the Ummah of Islam? Will Muslims ever again be the bearers of guidance and light to humanity?

Today's Muslims, after nearly two centuries of repeated but ultimately futile attempts to overcome their backwardness and reinject their original vitality into the Ummah, find this goal as far as ever from realization. In fact, they remain enmeshed in social, political, and economic upheaval; blind acceptance of alien thought and transplanted values that were opposed by individual and Ummah-wide efforts; and controlled by military cliques, or by cultural, ethnic, factional, or creedal elites.

As a result, Muslims are forced to adopt any means that seem to protect their identity, beliefs, and the fundamentals of the Islamic character. If, however, the means fail and Muslims cannot extract themselves from the resulting enveloping crisis, the usual reaction is to blame either one's self or others and then adopt another course of action. This is the background against which an explanation of the multiplicity and division seen throughout the Muslim world may come into clearer focus.

In our estimation, the Islamization of Knowledge, in its wider perspective, provides Muslims with the intellectual underpinnings for a complete civilizational transformation. Essentially, this may be effected by reforming thought and removing traditional and historical obstacles that hobble the Muslim mind, such as the question of the relationship between the imam and *shūrā*, the issue of human choice and accountability in the light of *qaḍā'* (a juridical decision or court ruling) and *qadr* (fate, destiny) the difference between theory and application, the question of a Muslim's relationship to worldly life and the individual's role within it, as well as issues of reason and revelation, *taqlīd* (imitation) and *ijtihād*, mutual understanding, and many others.

Regardless of whatever misgivings others may have about our attempt to restore the Muslim Ummah to its former position of global centrality and its status as a witness and exemplar for humanity (mispgivings based on the perception that these could only be attained at the expense of others), the fact is

that this revival is in the interest of the entire world community. Recent international developments and the frightening destructive capabilities of the major technological powers should be enough to make this assertion apparent to all. Doubtless, dialogue between nations, as well as their exchange of ideas and appreciation for one another's cultures, promote the kind of understanding presently required. The Islamization of Knowledge will contribute positively to this dialogue.

The Islamization of Knowledge is a project for the entire Ummah. Unless all of the Ummah's resources are tapped, its success will remain in doubt. This project is not a *fard kifāyah*, for it does not relieve the Ummah of its responsibility by allowing a small group to undertake it on its behalf. On the contrary, this project is a *fard 'ayn*, for each individual is responsible for doing his or her part. Thus, such organizations as the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), and the Association of Muslim Scientists and Engineers (AMSE) need to play pioneering roles.

Certainly, such a project requires resources far greater than those at the disposal of any single organization. Each has its own part to play. In order for an organization to fulfill its responsibility in a befitting manner, two things are necessary:

- It must receive our individual and collective support, so that its course of action is well-planned and its programs are advocated and sustained.
- All studies and research undertaken by scholars must be directed toward this end. In the case of applied science and technology, efforts should be concentrated on redressing underdevelopment. This priority must guide professors, professional researchers, and even graduate students, so that no opportunity to harness the available human resources is lost. In the case of the social sciences, all efforts must be directed toward dealing with issues of Islamic thought, knowledge, culture, and civilization.

In the world today, many of the poorest, least-developed, and most disadvantaged nations belong to the Muslim Ummah, from Mali and Chad to Bangladesh. On the lists of such countries, we read the names of dozens of Muslim countries before coming to a single non-Muslim country. It is regrettable that nearly all Muslim countries suffer from poverty, ignorance, and disease. Thus, the challenge is clear. Answers must be found to such problems as the encroachment of deserts on arable land, drought, the lack of

modern agricultural expertise, the absence of heavy industry and modern management techniques, and so on.

Furthermore, we must solve the problems that stand in the way of allowing these countries to become self-sufficient in the production of indigenous Muslim scholars and experts so that they no longer need to rely on experts imposed from the outside, so that they no longer need to risk losing their best students by sending them abroad for higher education.

Certainly, our Muslim social scientists can direct their attention toward solving the problems of contemporary Muslim and Muslim-minority societies – problems such as sectarianism, the unequal distribution of wealth, drugs, the wasting of natural resources, and so on. Under such circumstances, responsible Muslim scholars should only undertake research that has immediate relevance for the Ummah.

Yet, by way of example and despite the efforts expended by Muslim scholars in economics, we are still unable to produce an integrated and methodologically sound textbook on the subject. Nor, for that matter, has any of our economics experts produced a coherent theory of Islamic economics. And, this is in spite of the impressive growth of literature on all aspects of economics! Quite simply, the reason for this inability is that such matters require not hundreds, but thousands of research efforts on the part of specialists in the field, each building on the work of both contemporaries and predecessors. This same situation is found in education, psychology, sociology, and so many other disciplines, with the result that we are faced with gaping lacunae in our Islamically oriented scholarship.

Thus, the challenges before contemporary Muslim scholars are legion. More than ever before, Muslim thinkers need to meet those challenges with all of the acumen at their command. These are the circumstances under which this organization, and organizations like IIIT and others, have raised the banner of Islamization aloft and proclaimed the beginning of a new direction. We await the results of both our efforts and yours. May Allah guide all of us to that which earns us His pleasure.