

*Where do We Go from Here?
Muslim Contribution to
Civilization: The Harbinger of the
Third Renaissance*

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THE 1992 QUINCENTENARY celebrations of Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 was a turning point in the Muslim intellectual revival set in motion following the Second World War. Outside Spain, the first international conference on Islamic Spain in al-Hamra, of which I was the Chief Coordinator, was held in Lahore in 1991. Over 60 Muslim scholars, including 23 from outside the Subcontinent, presented papers on the glorious contribution of Islamic Spain to civilization.

From 1150 AC to the sixteenth century, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars from Western Europe and Spain translated books from Arabic into Latin in the Toledo Academy established by Alfonso, Sabio the Wise. The translations were then distributed to academic centers in Europe, where they became the basis of the Renaissance, the revival of knowledge in Europe.

Unfortunately, the proceedings of the Lahore Conference were not published. Included in the papers presented was a research article by Dr. Raisuddin Ahmed of Dacca University. He proved that Muslims first entered Spain during the time of 'Uthmān, the third Caliph, who commanded that they proceed to Istanbul overland. 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi', the ruler of Egypt, and his brother entered Spain but had to return, for the Berbers accompanying him did not continue the expedition and further reinforcements were cut off. This was narrated by Dr. Mohammad

Hamidullah in his *Wathīqah al-Siyasiyyah*. Masumī has also written a paper on the same subject.

The Lahore Declaration adopted at the conference called for the establishment of chairs, courses on Islamic Spain, the naming of streets after illustrious scholars of the period, conferences and seminars, on Islamic Spain, and the translation and publication of pertinent manuscripts extant in Spain and elsewhere. However, it was left to the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) to facilitate the accomplishment of some of these goals. They helped financially in organizing the first ever Regional Conference in Dallas on June 22–23, 2001, on Islamic Contributions to Civilization. Fourteen scholars from all over the United States, including the President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), presented well-researched works at the conference. Being well attended by scholars from all faiths communities, the event was a great success.

In the Dallas Declaration, it was agreed to establish a regional chapter of AMSS in the South-West of the United States, to hold a regional conference at least every two years, and to carry out other scholarly activities pertinent to the mission of the Association. A copy of the Press Release on the event was also issued.

The conference was publicized not only in the local media, but also in the regional, national, and international press. It was heartening to note that the message was echoed in California. Under the leadership of Imam Hamza Yusuf, a task force was created under Mr. Youssef Ismail to carry the message of Islamic contributions to civilization to US academia; and to establish mobile museums, subsequently leading to a fully-fledged museum on this theme. The Council of Humanities may also consider providing appropriate funds for the purpose. Detailed information material was supplied to the Coordinator. It was hoped that other AMSS chapters would also be established elsewhere, possibly in the West and the Mid-West, where Br Abdullah is keenly interested in this project.

Similar efforts are in the offing elsewhere in the United States and abroad. For instance, in Jacksonville, Mississippi, where a museum on Muslim Spain has been established, an exhibition on Muslim Spain was held from October 2001; and a documentary on Muslim Spain was prepared there. At Georgetown University, a Graduate Seminar was held in 1997 on the same theme. At South Methodist University, a museum

on Spain has been established, displaying artifacts on its Muslim period. With publicity, similar on-going and proposed activities may come to light both in the United States and across the world. In Lahore, Pakistan, the al-Khawarizmi Science Society has shown great interest and published information on its website on the AMSS-SW regional conference. In Spain, an Islamic University has been founded, of which Dr. Ali Kettani is the Rector. In the United States, Salma Khadra Jayusi published two volumes in 1992 on the Muslim legacy in Spain. In Madrid itself, seminars were held during the 1992 month-long Quincentenary celebrations of Columbus's Discovery of America.

THE MISSION

In adopting Islamic Contributions to Civilization as an important topic a vital tool is utilized to generate true awareness of Islam and Muslims among neighbors, co-workers, and fellow compatriots. The benefits of doing so can be:

1. Following the event, an institutional framework would be created to promote inter-faith dialog, the exchange of ideas, communication, and methodology for establishing a genuine civil society in the United States.
2. Given the common Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage, this endeavor would aim at making the United States a "Light unto Nations," as envisaged by William Jefferson, a moral superpower, based on the monotheistic concept of human rights, equality, justice, and mutual respect and peace both at home and in foreign relations.
3. On the model of the Toledo Academy, founded by Alfonso, the third king of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this institution-building would promote the Second Renaissance in the West, especially in the United States, on the foundations of common spirituality, family values, and shared knowledge and learning.
4. The broader Muslim community in the area would become aware of the contribution that their forebears made to human civilization.

5. The conference would project to teachers, corporations, and the political and social elite, the historical period of the flowering of knowledge in the Middle East (the so-called Dark Ages), heralding the Renaissance in Europe and the rise of the West to its present heights.
6. The publication of the proceedings would serve as a valuable source of research and instruction for students, and academic and non-academic scholars.
7. Following this event, the ground would be prepared for the establishment of a regional chapter of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) in the South and South Central Region, including Louisiana, which has a professional association of a substantial number of academicians as members.
8. A proposed quarterly journal, the *New Millennium Studies*, would be published by the AMSS-SW, which would be its regional vehicle, promoting research on the theme, apart from an electronic newsletter.
9. Following the tenth anniversary of the Conference on Islamic Spain, originally held in Lahore in 1991, this event would be repeated every two years, the first being an international conference in 2003.
10. Efforts would also be made to initiate courses on this topic in the universities of North Texas and elsewhere.
11. The event would also help in presenting a positive image, by removing the current unrealistic and negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims in the media.

Knowledge is a continuum and the Muslim contribution to civilization is no exception. This contribution continued even after Islamic civilization had reached its pinnacle. Even during the period of its decline, Muslim scholars were busy writing books on various aspects of learning, both secular and religious.

How can another Renaissance be created? As is commonly understood, the European Renaissance took place from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Bearing in mind that it means the rebirth or revival of the humanistic flowering of knowledge in the arts and sciences, such a Renaissance first took place in the Middle Ages from the tenth to the fourteenth century, the era of glory for the Muslim civilization, mistakenly called the Dark Ages. As such, this will be the Third Renaissance, ushering in a Utopia and an era of peace, plenty, and prosperity. Let us hope that it will be achieved by the common endeavor of the Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Conceptually, the ground for revival has already been prepared with the principles laid down in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the last Messenger. He is reported to have foretold that after the regime of dictatorship and authoritarian rule, *khilāfah* will follow. After thirty years of *khilāfah rāshidah*, monarchy and authoritarian rule were established in Muslim lands, which have continued to this day. Whether that system of government was sanctioned by the Qur'an and the Sunnah is another debate, on which 'alims (religious scholars) hold differing views. Al-Māwardī considers that Muslim rulers may establish the Shari'ah but may be unjust. Ghazālī favors tolerance of an oppressive ruler to avoid total anarchy. Ibn Taymiyyah opines that a "*kāfir* [unbelieving] government which establishes justice is better than an oppressive Muslim regime." Ibn Ḥazm and some other scholars allow rebellion against an unjust and oppressive ruler. The essential point in this public discourse, whether relating to the political or any other field, is the fundamental question: What is the guiding principle of the Shari'ah?

Since the passing away of the Messenger, there was agreement among scholars that the Qur'an and the Sunnah and *ijtihād* and *Qiyās* (analogical reasoning or innovative thinking within the Islamic framework) formed the fundamental constitutive principles of the Shari'ah. The Messenger is reported to have asked Mu'adh ibn Jabal, who was about to be dispatched to govern Yemen, how he would decide matters. He expressed his satisfaction with Mu'adh's response that he would rely on the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and *ijtihād*. Later, *Ijma'* or the consensus of the early Companions was added as the fourth principle of the Shari'ah.

However, Ibn Ḥazm, a great Shari'ah scholar of al-Andalus (d. 1064) firmly rejected *Qiyās* and *Ijma'* as *bid'ah* (prohibited innovation), thus

confining the Shari‘ah constitutive principles strictly to the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and ijtihad. He was opposed to ‘*Taqīd*’ (blind adherence). However, his advocacy of a ‘*Taqīd*’, which harmonizes faith and reason was an idea later pronounced by Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Both Ibn Rushd and Ibn Ḥazm disavowed ‘*Qiyās*’ (analogical reasoning), ‘*Ta‘wīl*’ (allegorical interpretation) for arriving at legal decisions. However, they all including Ghazālī agreed on reaching the truth, and were committed to the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and they disapproved of any overemphasis on natural phenomena to the neglect of Divine Revelation. They equally ridiculed the religious scholars for frowning upon natural sciences, and used logic as a tool for establishing proof. In addition, they agreed on the concept of knowledge.

Ibn Ḥazm’s influence lasted for centuries. Despite adherence to the Hanbalite school, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) was opposed to *Taqīd* (imitation), relying on the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and favoring ijtihad (individual inquiry). Ibn Khaldūn followed Ibn Ḥazm on historiography, environmental determinism, and the conception of sciences in respect of vision, dream, alchemy, astrology, and music.

The ideas of Ibn Ḥazm influenced Europe in regard to the validity of the intellect for establishing proofs, arriving at the truth, advocacy of the harmony of faith and philosophy, and advocacy of a liberal arts education and interdependence and harmony of religious and secular sciences. His works were translated into Latin and other European languages, thus contributing to the flowering of European Renaissance.

How will the topic of Muslim contribution to civilization herald a new Renaissance? It can be achieved in the same way as was the Renaissance in Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, by the translation of works from the Eastern languages into the Western languages and wider dissemination, utilizing modern means including the Internet. Like the Toledo Academy (1150–1550 AC), many such academies, universities, and other educational institutions could be persuaded to allocate special research grants to Islam and its contribution to civilization with a view to holding conferences, publishing manuscripts, and conducting research into this topic.

To this end, the message of AMSS in the next thirty years has to be broad-based in building a consensus on a new research paradigm for arriving at the truth. The goal is to bridge the philosophical hiatus that

currently divides the East and the West. This strategy of AMSS can and ought to be pursued as a movement, not merely relying on academic research in an ivory tower. A program of expansion of the AMSS mission by establishing its chapters as well as various discipline fora in various parts of the United States and abroad. In view of the current debate on the clash/dialog of civilizations, a special panel on the contributions of various cultures to world civilization, including those of Muslims, ought to be allocated to all AMSS national conventions to explore cultural interactions. Linkages ought to be established between AMSS and other professional organizations for collaborative projects on the theme.