

## Foreword

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) takes great pleasure in presenting this collection of articles and essays originally published in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* and the London Office's Occasional Papers series by a prominent scholar well-versed in the issues under consideration, Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani. Collectively, they offer the author's valuable insights and observations gained from long experience in dealing with these issues and the process of regaining the civilizational and intellectual role of the Ummah.

Dr. al-Alwani, is a graduate of al-Azhar University and a leading figure in promoting a comprehensive approach to knowledge that combines the two readings of the Revelation and the real-existential, as well as a holistic and disciplined inquiry into contemporary issues challenging Islamic thought. The book will be of interest to scholars, researchers, and all those interested in understanding the intellectual crisis facing the Muslim world.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on the vision, values, and principles of Islam. Its programs of research, seminars, and conferences during the last twenty-four years have resulted in the publication of more than 250 titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into other languages.

We would like to express our thanks to Jay Willoughby for all of his efforts in producing this book for publication, and for working closely with the editorial team at the IIIT London Office in incorporating their comments and suggestions for completion of the work. May God reward them and the author for all their endeavors.

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## Introduction

In this book, we present the reader with a collection of studies, all of which deal with reform-oriented and goal-oriented Islamic intellectual issues and belong to the same intellectual approach: The Islamization of Knowledge, which has been active since the 1950s, promotes knowledge and thought, as well as their accompanying elements and philosophy, dedicated to achieving a culture that widens one's intellectual horizons and expands the opportunities for cultured and civilized interaction between cultures and civilizations.

First established in a Muslim environment, its engaged Muslim intellectuals and scholars focused on rethinking, critiquing, and analyzing the most pressing Islamic intellectual issues. Success in this endeavor will enable them to take an active role in laying the foundations for an Islamic revival that will empower all Muslims to engage with their times; share with all people their vision and efforts to solve global crises; achieve peace and security; strengthen the effort to protect human rights, the environment, and minorities; support freedom and resist the elements of terrorism and criminality; improve inter-faith relations through dialogue, cooperation, and joint efforts to rebuild the values that allow people to maintain their humanity; and gradually achieve cooperation among all members of humanity: "O people, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable among you is the most pious among you. Verily, God is All-Knowing and All-Wise" (49:13).

Indeed, both the "religion and path of Abraham" can convince all people of their common origin from one father and one mother, and that their external differences exist for a great reason, which is understood by those who possess knowledge. Earth is a vast abode for humanity, and differences in location do not change this fact. Rather, dispersal encourages people to cooperate and exchange benefits so that everyone will receive his or her share of the bounties and blessings of this collective house.

The Islamization of Knowledge has successfully raised educated Muslims' awareness of the need to review the many issues related to their heritage and to rebuilding Islamic education in order to produce a Muslim personality that can reform Muslim concepts, ideas, and practices. These reformed concepts, ideas, and practices can then fulfill the expectations of a community whose values and civilization enable it to play an important role in improving human relations and building shared foundations of scholarship among all people.

The reader will find a variety of articles dealing with the crises and intellectual problems that the Muslim Ummah must solve before it can move forward. One chapter analyzes *ijtihād*'s role and history, since our intellectual problems cannot be solved without the scholars' use of independent reasoning and creativity. Another chapter discusses imitation (*taqlīd*). Here, the author calls upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals to abandon imitation and to stop favoring the past over the present when trying to solve modern problems. There is also a chapter on human rights that focuses on cases in which the individual is weak and helpless, such as when he or she is accused of some crime in a court of law.

Another chapter addresses the testimony of women and points out that many of the issues concerning Muslim women must be removed from the habits and practices that arose during the development of Islamic jurisprudence. This chapter also provides a model for understanding the Qur'an, one that differs from the legalistic and *fiqhī* mentality that interprets everything in terms of what is permitted and what is prohibited, and what is subject to legislative rules and foundations. In addition to such legalities, the Qur'an actually encompasses social and individual advice and guidance, as well as a system of ethics that shows people how to interact with each other properly.

This chapter also raises the issue of how to interpret the controversial verse 2:282, which deals with the large difference between a woman's leadership (over the community) and her testimony (authority over a limited individual matter). The author considers her testimony within the context of all of the issues raised in the verse and reveals the lack of any evidence differentiating a woman's testimony from that of a man's. Her testimony is not a titular honor as much as it is an attempt to help the legal system understand events as they truly are. Any testimony that gives the judge a better understanding of the case being heard is valuable.

These chapters represent a vision that urges the Muslim Ummah to review its heritage and reformulate many of its aspects, as well as to establish

a critical and curious mindset among its members. When taken together, these chapters present a reformist project calling upon Muslim intellectuals and scholars everywhere to comprehend the vast breadth and depth of the crisis in Muslim thought today. In addition, they point out the necessity of solving this crisis so that the Ummah may experience a revival and fulfill its role among the nations of the world.

We pray that this rich set of studies will be useful and beneficial to the reader.