

TAHA JABIR AL-ALWANI

Islamic Thought

An Approach to
Reform

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

ISLAMIC THOUGHT:
AN APPROACH TO REFORM

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*An Introduction to the Structures of
Discourse in Islamic Thought*



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Translated from the Arabic by
NANCY ROBERTS



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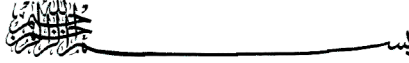
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FOREWORD



Of knowledge, we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has great pleasure in presenting this treatise on: *Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform*, a passionate call to reemploy knowledge within a systematic epistemological framework based on divine Revelation. The IIIT's school of thought stresses the importance of presenting all subjects and disciplines currently taught in curricula from an additional Islamic perspective. It has encouraged and inspired a number of researchers and scholars particularly in the field of the social sciences to participate in this ongoing project and the author, Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani, a well-known scholar, writer and specialist, is a firm believer in its principles and an important contributor to its development.

The original Arabic edition of the work, *Iṣlāḥ al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, was published by the IIIT in 1995, and generated a positive response as well as at times spirited remarks from scholars. We hope that this English edition, with its ground-breaking paradigm and ideas, will not only make an important contribution to the field, but also attract wider attention and generate greater interest among readers, students, and specialists alike to challenge the huge impact of positivism which has, in a manner, severed the relationship between the Creator, the created universe and man, driving a wedge between knowledge and Revelation. However, it needs to be emphasized that this is not a book waging war against knowledge and science per se but an attempt to strive and to bring (in addition to what has been said) the Islamic approach towards study, knowledge and disciplines with a view to renew and re-discover the long-forgotten, neglected heritage of Islamic thought.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate

sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last twenty five years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to the translator, Nancy Roberts, who, throughout the various stages of the book's production, co-operated closely with the editorial group at the London Office.

We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the London Office and those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book including: Fouzia Butt, Shiraz Khan and Saddiq Ali. May God reward them, the author, and the translator for all their efforts.

Rabi^c II
May 2006

ANAS S. AL-SHAIKH-ALI
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London, UK

FOREWORD TO THE ARABIC EDITION

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and peace and blessings upon our master Muhammad (ṢAAS)*, seal of the prophets, and upon his descendants, his Companions, and all those who follow his guidance, from now until the Day of Judgment.

In the difficult circumstances through which the Muslim nation is passing, words become a sacred trust and a ponderous responsibility which must be understood, discerned, and given its proper due. Indeed, many a word whose hearer has failed to heed it will cast him “seventy autumns” into perdition,¹ while many a word carelessly uttered has broken loved ones’ hearts, separated families, and shattered concepts. They have distorted our perception of constants, treated variables as though they were unchanging facts, and brought untold harm which can only be perceived by those who comprehend the value, importance, and influence of words. This being the case, a discussion of the structures of intellectual discourse and theses becomes a multifaceted exchange of great significance and seriousness.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) is pleased to present this important study on the reform of Islamic thought as a contribution to greater understanding of the written and spoken word, awareness of the responsibility which it entails, and the realization of its importance in the circumstances faced by our Muslim nation. This study will contribute to the second part of the continuing series entitled, “Missing Dimensions of Contemporary Islamic Discourse” and “The Reform of Islamic Thought: An Introduction to the Structures of Islamic Discourse.” Taha was instrumental in compiling these series.

The reader will note many points of agreement between the present work and the book entitled, *Iṣlāh al-Fikr al-Islāmī Bayn al-Qudūrāt wa*

*ṢAAS: *Ṣalla Allahu ‘alayhi wa Sallam*: May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. This prayer is said by Muslims whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, or whenever he is referred to as the Prophet of Allah.

al 'Aqabāt: Waraqat ʿAmal, which was published by the Institute as a working paper in its Islamization of Knowledge series.² The present book includes the most important points contained in the original working paper together with numerous additions and modifications, the most important of which are the illustrative diagrams prepared by Muhammad Buraysh³, IIIT's part-time advisor in the area of cultural studies.

Although the revisions made in the original working paper called for some modification in the title, the Institute was nevertheless keen to keep the Preface by Umar Ubaydah Hasanah in its original form. However, the majority of this unique group of thinkers viewed the difficult financial conditions faced by the Institute as part of the pressures being brought to bear on the Muslim nation. Consequently they saw them as an obstacle to overcome, and chose to persevere in their tasks in solidarity with the Institute. We can view their stance as evidence of their appreciation of and faith in the Institute and its mission, and as a testimony to the promise and success of our cause, God willing.

We would like our readers to be aware that although this message in its most recent formulation contains the features of general discourse, it nevertheless retains a significant degree of intellectual and cultural specificity. We trust that the ideas presented here are of importance to everyone who has a share in the concerns raised by the current intellectual and cultural crisis. Nevertheless, its reading will require patience and objectivity, as well as a sense of the importance of thought and culture in the building of the new Islamic civilization.

The trying times being experienced by the Muslims may cause people to be less attentive to thought-related issues since, rather than addressing immediate concerns, the discussion of such issues is the means of implementing the long-term treatment for which we are calling. However, the Ummah's ongoing frustration, failure and resultant sense of humiliation and disorientation serve to highlight an inescapable question, namely: If the Ummah had retained sound doctrine and correct ways of thinking, if its will had been liberated and if its people had been properly brought up and prepared, deriving strength and protection from their full autonomy, would what has happened to them ever have been possible? If this intellectual crisis had not taken root, and were it not for the absence of cultural identity and unity, would it have been possible for external forces to

take over the Ummah, destroying the potential it had amassed and sending it “back to the drawing board”?

The Ummah’s need for intellectual reform, cultural presence and civilizational witness is greater than its need for food and air, and we hope that the message communicated in this book can serve as a reminder of this fact. Given that it addresses itself first and foremost to Muslim youth, who stand to benefit most significantly from its message, the Institute welcomes their comments, criticisms and opinions in response to any part of this series.

May God grant success to us all in doing what He loves and approves, and may He help our Muslim nation pass through this ordeal, treat its wounds, and experience complete healing and recovery. He is the One who Hears and Responds.

PREFACE TO THE ARABIC EDITION

Praise be to God the Most Bountiful, Who taught human beings what they did not know, entrusted them with accountability before His law, and commissioned them to serve as His vicegerents on earth by building civilization and directing humanity toward their Maker in accordance with the guidance provided by Divine Revelation and human reason. Praise be to God, who has declared dialogue, discussion and deliberation in a spirit of kindness and respect the ideal way to achieve intellectual conviction which is formed inwardly and generates faith, and which is the proper guide of human behavior.

May blessings and peace be upon the best teacher human beings have ever known, who declared striving and the building up of intellectual strength through the Qur'an to be the highest, most noblest form of jihad, and who declared the intellectual arena to be the realm of exchange among civilizations and between Islam and its opponents. As God declares, "and do not defer to [the likes and dislikes of] those who deny the truth, but strive hard against them [by means of this divine writ] with utmost striving."¹ The entire jihad waged by those who were bent on denying the Truth was aimed at preventing the word of Truth and correct knowledge from reaching people's minds. They conspired against it, stirred up controversy over it and placed it under siege, since the word of Truth alone is the means by which to reform human beings and reshape them culturally: "Now those who are bent on denying the truth say [unto one another], 'Do not listen to this Qur'an, but rather talk frivolously about it, that you might gain the upper hand.'"²

There can be no doubt that the Muslim persona is in crisis today, having forfeited much of its methodology and good sense. Its civilizational witness has suffered a retreat, as a result of which it has become unable to evaluate, review, and discern the causes behind its failure and ineffectiveness or to identify areas of malfunction and neglect. It has ceased carrying

out its mission as a leader and witness to others. Consequently, it has come to be situated outside of the historical context, the reality being witnessed at present, and the hoped-for future.

The civilizational absence, or crisis, being suffered by the Muslim nation today is not due to a paucity of values. On the contrary, God has provided a complete set of values for the Muslim community and pledged Himself to preserve them in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Otherwise, the Islamic message would not be characterized by both permanence and finality. In other words, the problem or crisis being suffered by the Muslim mind is not one of values. Rather, the problem in its entirety lies in the inability to deal with values, and with the intellectual production which serves to bridge the gap between these values, with their premises and aims, and the age in which we live. Such intellectual production helps to bring the Islamic vision to bear on contemporary life. In this way, it highlights the finality of the Islamic message and its ability to contribute to the solutions of human problems in a progressive, evolutionary manner unconstrained by the limits of time and place. This is the function of thought, or the world of thoughts, in relation to which we are in a state of crisis. Consequently, there is a confusion between what we term the intellectual crisis being suffered by the Muslim mind (which has rendered it unable either to deal with values or to apply them to human reality) and the illusion that the crisis lies in the values themselves. And it is this confusion which lies at the root of a large number of fallacies, weaknesses and psychological barriers which continue to perpetuate backwardness in the name of piety. Hence, we believe that one of the fundamental requirements for the development of Islamic knowledge at the present time is the elimination of the confusion between, on one hand, the inherited principles and programs or intellectual conduits necessary for life's dynamism and, on the other, the unchanging values and ideas which convey ultimate aims and purposes.

The decline from which we are suffering is due, first and foremost, to a crisis of thought. The reason for this is that the intellectual paradigm of Islamic civilization and of the Islamization of knowledge has stopped at the limits of the minds of the past, as though God had created our minds simply in order for us to put them out of commission and cease utilizing them. It is as though we consider what was produced by the minds of our forebears to be the end of the road, as it were, the outer limit of the time-space

dimension with respect to the permanence of the Islamic message, the result being the civilizational deficit from which we now suffer. Faced as we are with this, we have no choice but to examine ourselves in order to discover the causes underlying the crisis, understand its effects, identify the areas of failure and success, and draw inspiration from our existing values in order to arrive at a modern intellectual formulation capable of recovering the civilizational witness on which we once prided ourselves. In doing so we can reclaim sound criteria and rebuild the Muslim nation which bears witness to the world: "so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you."³

The desired process of cultural transformation will take a lifetime or more, and requires numerous and varied approaches. After all it is, in reality, an attempt to re-shape human beings, which is one of the most difficult, complex and intricate of all tasks. This is particularly the case given the complex factors which influence the human personality, not to mention the fact that in such a process, human beings are both the object of treatment and the ones implementing it. This multidimensional process is one which must involve education, the media, and parenting, and is influenced by both intellectual and cultural resources. Hence, the process of reforming people's ways of thinking, reshaping culture, and rectifying knowledge's course in such a way that it is regulated by its founding premises and achieves its Islamic aims, calls for a balanced and comprehensive vision. At the same time, it requires that we specify the roles played by the various relevant factors, since it is inconceivable that reform and rectification of this nature could take place in one aspect of human life in isolation from all others.

It is on this basis that we have chosen to station ourselves on this intellectual frontier, if you will, 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 of cultural resources in light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. All of this is based on our belief that these processes constitute the womb which nurtures and gives birth to civilizations which are capable of resuming Islamic life and constructing viable human cultures. 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 and all of such movements.

Therefore, given the enormity, complexity and intricacy of the task, it is necessary to exert all of our effort in the direction of correcting our points of departure, defining our aim, verifying the possibility of accomplishing what we have set out to do, studying precisely the steps to be taken, and discerning priorities. Then we must clarify the idea, present it well, redress its deficiencies, acquire the elements needed to communicate it to others, study the conditions of its recipients, and undertake an accurate reading of the reality in which we live. Yet, however much we accomplish of the foregoing, it remains imperative that we rely fully upon God and derive inspiration from the prophets, their message and their example. We must absorb and apply the lessons contained in previous theses while avoiding their errors and benefiting from their positive content. And clearly, it will be necessary to arm ourselves with patient endurance. For the difficulty inherent in the cause of reforming Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge is that the wall of backwardness has grown thick, while the spirit of civilizational dispossession has taken such firm root that it may well be said that many aspects of the sciences and other areas of knowledge in the present day have abandoned their Islamic underpinnings and discarded their original aims, thereby placing themselves outside an Islamic framework.

Moreover, if we are aware that many of the Prophet's Companions took a decade or two to fully embrace Islam – and this despite the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, the Prophet's eloquence, and his eminent ability to declare and communicate the Islamic message – we will likewise be aware of the tremendous distance and the magnitude of the task before us.

Another point to which attention must be drawn in this connection is that it is natural for methodological theses and studies, or those which attempt to identify the features of this or that method, to require a good deal of dialogue, discussion and mutual exchanges of ideas and points of view. Only in this way can the idea being proposed be tested and clearly formulated, and its foundations firmly established. It is characteristic of such studies to remain open-ended in order for the soundness of standards to be verified, methods to be clarified, and results to be tested for reliability. Consequently, there is nothing wrong with repetition in relation to issues

of method provided that there be variety in the means by which such issues are raised and dealt with, thereby allowing everyone the opportunity to understand the varied dimensions of the question at hand.

The problem may be that most movements striving for cultural rectification, awakening and renewal have occupied themselves to a significant degree with treating what might be literally termed 'intellectual defeats' and restoring images, as though their primary concern was with the repair of objects rather than with reforming the ideas which give rise to them. In doing so, they have not given fundamental criteria and norms the attention they deserve and as a result, the rent in the fabric widens even as they labor to patch it. And so long as the method remains defective, the same defect is bound to persist in its resulting outcomes.

Consequently, as we see it, no choice remains but to revisit the issue of reforming the method itself and correcting the standards upon which it rests in order, thereby, to rebuild the normative Muslim nation, the nation of the middle way which is capable of being a witness to others in emulation of the witness borne to them by the Prophet: "And thus We have willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you."⁴

There are many who possess the mistaken belief that objects and material products have nothing to do with ideas. However, this belief represents an unfortunate state of infantile thinking. For in fact, objects are a concrete embodiment of ideas, and it is ideas which call forth objects. Similarly, objects carry within them the climate and culture of their underlying ideas; they do not come into being in a vacuum but, rather, are the fruit of an intellectual system or framework. Consequently it may be said that every product represents, in reality, a corresponding ideational value. This is true, for example, of the basis of an object's production, its aim and its purpose, as well as the culture which is spread through dealing with given objects. Hence, the use of certain objects embodies a given culture, and it is through this culture that their use spreads. We may also say that the civilizational dispossession which has afflicted us is a result of ideas. Indeed, ideas are more dangerous than objects, which simply constitute an ideational symbol.

It is the Muslim nation's intellectual framework and cultural identity which define its features and sketch out its course, and which give it

confidence in the validity of its religious and philosophical underpinnings, to the soundness of its aims, the authenticity of its foundations, and the consistency of its ideas with its objects. The problem which we face is that the Muslim nation has, to a large degree, come to be situated outside the Islamic context in both its ideas and its objects. Hence, the transformation proposed and indeed required, is that human beings once again become conscious servants of their Maker, as a result of which their prayer, acts of worship, living and dying all become devoted to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds. And with this renewed devotion, they can experience deliverance from their dogmatic, intellectual, economic and social idolatry. As things stand now, today's Muslims no longer suffer a guilt complex if they limit themselves to nothing more than the required rites of worship, that is, even if their lives are being lived in a context entirely at odds with what such rites embody. After all, science has been divorced from wisdom, knowledge from creation, and religion from life.

In this attempt to shed light on the concepts basic to the reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge, the Institute does not claim that it has introduced some sort of innovation, or that it has been able to offer a unilateral solution to the problem of thought and deliver the Muslim nation from its cultural crisis. Rather, it is simply an attempt based on our faith in the importance of each single brick in the larger edifice. This is the principle to which the Prophet referred to when he declared,

My position with respect to the other prophets might be likened to a man who, having completed the construction of a house and added the final esthetic touches, left an empty space where one of the bricks would have gone. Afterwards, people began walking around the house and saying in bewilderment, "If only he hadn't left that one brick out." I am to the other prophets as that brick is to the house this man built. I am the seal of the prophets.⁵

Similarly, the present attempt neither rejects nor denies previous attempts. On the contrary, it strives to lend each the attention it deserves, considering all of them to be bricks in the larger edifice, and experiences from which it needs to learn.

Hence, this paper does not claim to offer a definitive solution and

redress existing defects single-handedly, thereby bringing an end to the crisis of the Muslim mind by virtue of some magic potion. Rather, it seeks simply to spark interest in the subject at hand and call upon others to engage with it, while shedding more light on some aspects thereof. In doing so, it strives to sound a cultural wake-up call as it were, and to serve as a catalyst to constructive action, honing the intellectual effectiveness of the Muslim nation in relation to what we see as the issue most central to the Ummah's present crisis.

This being the case, we do not wish to refer to this study as a book, or even as a book in the making with the specifications required by such a designation; rather, we have referred to it simply as a working paper presented as a subject for discussion and a file which remains open to any and all serious contributions. Should we disregard the theme of this study, we are bound to pay a heavy price out of our civilizational presence and, indeed, our very beings.

May God grant us sincerity in our intentions and wisdom in our actions, and may He inspire us with right guidance. Indeed, He is the Most Blessed of all masters.

UMAR UBAYDAH HASANAH

Qatar, 1991

INTRODUCTION



Why the Call for the Islamization of Knowledge

One of the most important conditions for the effectiveness and influence of any Islamic activity is that the Muslim audience have a precise understanding of the nature and content of the discourse being addressed to them. In other words, the recipients need to have a clear understanding of the idea being conveyed by the discourse, as well as its premises, its goals, and its practicality. When the spirit of the discourse, as it were, permeates its audience and when they perceive the glaring inconsistency between the reality in which they are living and their hope for an Islamic civilization, they are also made aware of the challenges which must be met and the obstacles which must be overcome in order to realize this hope. Consequently this should inspire a sense of responsibility before God and others.

Similarly, a true understanding and appreciation of a given discourse requires the fulfilment of a number of fundamental conditions. For example: Those seeking to convey the message need to understand the nature of those being addressed and the psychological, social and historical structures which serve to shape the climate in which their audience lives. They need to study the various dimensions and entry points to the recipient's personality and character and identify the type of discourse which is most likely to influence him or her. In addition, the discourse should be free of unnecessary complexity and avoid both excessive brevity and excessive generalization. As such, it should be intelligible, fluently expressed, well-constructed, simply presented, and easy to relate to. Similarly, the message's recipients need to be fully aware of their practical role in the action to which the discourse is calling them. They must be aware of the details and aims of this role, the means by which it can be fulfilled, the obstacles and challenges it entails, and their own position in the action program, as well as the place occupied by their role in the overall scale of priorities.

Such conditions need to be fulfilled for the successful communication of any discourse which aims to motivate its audience to some sort of action. However, they become all the more vital when the intention behind the discourse is to communicate the content of the Islamic message with its various dimensions: as revelation, as thought, and as a call to the general populace with their many and varied languages, customs and perceptions. Moreover, the fulfilment of such conditions becomes even more urgent when the discourse concerned is not limited to a single individual or even generation but, rather, extends its concern, care and guidance to all nations, including both the present and future generations.

The reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge constitute the central issue for which the IIIT has taken responsibility and awareness of which it seeks to spread based on its belief that it is a matter of particular urgency at the present time. The IIIT likewise believes that the dual issue of intellectual reform and the Islamization of knowledge are among the most important foundations of the contemporary, integrated Islamic civilizational enterprise being proposed as an alternative to the Western civilizational enterprise. In relating to this latter enterprise in virtually all of its aspects, the Islamic nation has suffered severe hardship given the West's antipathy to the Islamic nation's creed, its disregard for our nation's psychological and social makeup, and the way in which it has bypassed our nation's civilizational and historical character.

As we see it, the issue of reforming Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge has not received the attention it merits; despite its critical significance, it has not become a matter of concern to Muslims in their daily lives. It is also our belief that the causes which underlie the failure to lend this vital issue the required attention have not been carefully studied with the intent of identifying areas of inadequacy and correcting the practical steps being taken. There have, from time to time, been serious attempts in this direction. However, they have not gone beyond individual efforts to the institutional realm. Hence, although they have contributed somewhat to perpetuating ongoing endeavors to bring about cultural reform, they have fallen short of the mark.

In order to formulate the desired Islamic civilizational scheme, contemporary Islamic discourse needs to give the reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge a place of highest priority. For in our view, it is the issue which holds the key to many aspects of our present crisis and it is the

torch needed to banish the darkness of the intellectual and scientific turmoil in which the Muslim nation has continued to wander for more than a century now.

There can be no doubt that in the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century, the Islamic reform movement exerted tremendous efforts and made monumental sacrifices, as a result of which it made a number of achievements. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the achievements realized are incommensurate with the sacrifices made. Despite all these efforts, the qualitative leap which has to be made in order for Muslims to transcend their current state has yet to be achieved, a fact which calls for a painstaking review of all that has been done thus far. In doing so, it is hoped that we can help any future reform attempts to avoid the failures of the past and to adopt the appropriate content and direction.

As we see it, the most important cause underlying the fact that the achievements realized thus far (in the realm of reform) fall so short of the sacrifices made, is that the attempts which the Muslim nation made to bring about reform, renewal, and change during the aforementioned period of time dealt with some issues while failing to deal with others. Consequently, renewal and reform did not encompass all of the varied causes behind the present crisis or prepare the Ummah to resolve it. Rather, most reform movements have been preoccupied with responding to the outward manifestations of the crisis and its direct effects on people's daily lives. As for its roots and causes, they have not been sufficiently researched, studied and treated. In saying this, our intention is not to fault such efforts or to belittle the services and gains they have provided, foremost among which is the preservation of the Ummah's identity and a sense of belonging thereto.¹ However, it does serve to highlight the clear need for a reform effort which is epistemological and methodological in nature and which is able to outline not only the effects and implications of the current crisis, but its causes as well. Such an attempt would seek to offer the Ummah a sound method for rebuilding on the same foundations which undergirded Islamic civilization in its initial phase. These foundations include, first of all, restoration of people's fundamental humanity without regard for accidental accretions and characteristics, and a call for all people to take part in building a society whose members are united by the bonds of an open social contract free of racism, classicism and regionalism. As such, early Muslims were able to find their way to agreement amongst themselves where other

nations had been divided. Another foundation for the original Islamic civilization was the sense, first of all, that every human being is the equal of every other and, secondly, that all facts relating to the physical and metaphysical realms are within human beings' grasp. They believed that they were capable of discovering these facts through means of perception which are varied, graded, interdependent and harmonious. For beyond instinctual means of perception lie sensory means of perception, followed by rational means of perception. These rational means of perception lead to premises which in turn lead to the awareness of metaphysical realities via Divine Revelation, acceptance thereof and surrender thereto. Hence, addressing this call in the manner in which it was addressed to human beings in their unqualified humanity was sufficient to engage the human potential in the most perfect state of readiness and to enable them to dispose of their powers in an unlimited way.

The foundation of perception upon which the original Islamic civilization was founded was the defense of every pathway of perception even if it entailed incongruity and ambiguity. Based on this foundation, all paths were restored in the advance toward the ultimate end; otherwise, they may have become ossified or faltered on their way to the goal. In this manner, human beings experienced an inward security and stability which gave them confidence in their full humanity. That is to say, their reason, their creed, their material perceptions and their intuitive sentiments were brought into a state of harmony and cooperation, with none of them blocking, or alienating from, any of the others. However, such a process does not come about through human planning or relative human thought. Rather, it emerges from a creed inspired by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, who Hears all and Sees all. In this way then, there emerge human beings who are effective in carrying out the tasks entailed by their role as God's vicegerents on earth and as those who, by virtue of this role, are put to the test by their Maker.

It follows, then, that in order to recover their effectiveness, Muslims do not need to reconstruct or even renew the religion itself. Rather, what they need is the epistemological and methodological awareness which will enable them to generate the will, ability, determination and efficiency needed to renew their modes of understanding and of perceiving personal piety. In addition, they need the ability to rectify the course of their practical lives and behavior by means of ideas rooted in the Islamic creed and Islamic sources of personal piety.

Hence, the point at which reform should begin is the realization of human

beings' humanity and the building up of a sense of security within the consciences of individual Muslims in order for all of their human perceptions to be in harmony. In this way, people will be able to overcome the woes of confusion, turmoil and conflicts among ideas, beliefs and emotions. Instead, peace will reign among doctrines, truths arrived at through reason, and those passed down through oral and written tradition. In this way there comes to be a conscious harmony between spiritual and material realities while human beings' powers of discernment are released to travel about the earth, as it were, and read the cosmos with unrestricted liberty. Then, if they experience uncertainty concerning the true purpose of things or the nature of the path, Divine Revelation will be there to provide correction and guidance. We have been called to read the cosmos in order to be guided thereby and in order to thrive and grow in righteousness. When this takes place, we ourselves bring together the two readings, the reading of Divine Revelation and the reading of the cosmos. The Divine Revelation is that which grants human beings assistance and stability, providing them with reliable guidance in their reading of the cosmos and enabling them to regain their strength and effectiveness and to make a new beginning. In this process, they find themselves able to fulfill the conditions of civilizational achievement, yet without being dominated by a sense that their own civilization should supplant all others.

The attempts at renewal which occurred during the aforementioned period of time were based for the most part on premises which should have been closely examined. Some renewal and reform movements were based on the belief that our Islamic legacy on the level of thought, method, creed, law and knowledge is complete as it stands, and that there is no need to re-examine any part of it. They believed it would be sufficient for them to place the Ummah's hands on its tradition and make it aware of its treasures, and that the Ummah would find in this tradition everything it needed. After all, the Muslim nation in the periods during which this tradition came into being was not in the sorrowful state in which it finds itself today. Therefore, or so the argument went, all Muslims need to do is to take the industries and material technologies which they need from the West, while clinging to their heritage in order to achieve the required civilizational leap. Some of these movements, on the other hand, believed that what they needed to do in order for the desired goal to be achieved was to undertake certain revisions of the

Islamic heritage while reviving and reproducing some aspects of it. Then it had to create awareness of it by teaching it in the language of the modern age. Others, by contrast, considered that the task of renewal and reform would be facilitated if it became possible to elucidate or re-explain many of the theses of the Islamic legacy in such a way that parallels and comparisons could be drawn between it and contemporary thought. If this could be done, they believed, the wheel of change would begin to turn in the desired direction.

Everyone reiterates the famous words spoken by Imam Mālik, “Those who live in the latter days of this Ummah will only achieve righteousness and well-being by means of those things through which their earliest predecessors achieved them.” Moreover, we have become increasingly aware of what served to reform early Muslims. Nevertheless, a return to the methodology of rebuilding human means of perception through a reading of both Divine Revelation and the cosmos has not been given its due by renewal and reform movements. At the same time, those who have drawn attention to the need for renewal movements to begin with a re-reading of the Qur’an have been faced with a number of problems. Such problems include, for example, the question of the relationship between the Qur’an and the environment associated with the original Islamic discourse and the descent of revelation, and the relationship between the Qur’an and the disciplines now known as the Qur’anic sciences which were formulated around its various texts (including, for example, the science of *al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*,² the science of *al-muḥkam wa al-mutashābih*,³ the occasions of Revelation, hermeneutics, etc). For a certain understanding, historical mode of thought and cultural complex have projected themselves onto the texts of the Qur’an, thereby rendering any alternative understanding suspect and subject to the accusation of being either unnecessarily allegorical, or merely a personal point of view with no authoritative claim.

This being the case, renewal movements have failed to see that from the beginning, they must arrive at a method for reading the Qur’an as though it had only been revealed to them themselves, and in their own generation. If they could do this, they would be able to deal with the qualitative, radical changes which have taken place in thought, method, knowledge and life in a manner which is based on the Qur’an itself and which appeals directly to its authority. For most of the questions and challenges posed by the current world civilization cannot be answered by means of independent human interpretations based on the drawing of analogies with the sayings of those who went

before us or on extrapolation from their schools of thought. Rather, in order to answer these questions, we must appeal to the Qur'an itself, for it is the Qur'an, and the Qur'an alone, which is capable of offering this type of cosmic answer and authoritative, unique solutions.

Nor do we need a new reading of the Qur'an which relies on approximations, comparisons or allegorical interpretation. Rather, there must be a reading which causes the Qur'an itself to yield its definitive answers and solutions to the challenges and questions of every age and generation. For this divinely inspired book contains the elucidation of all things until the end of time, while its preservation, its resistance to change or alteration, its perfection, completeness and comprehensiveness are among the most important justifications for belief in the Prophet Muhammad as the seal of the prophets and in the discontinuation of prophethood subsequent to his advent.

Therefore, renewal of the religion cannot be equated simply with revival of the heritage of our forefathers, which represents a summation of their thought concerning the religion and their understanding thereof. Nor can modernization be equated with imitation of the West and following in its footsteps. Rather, true renewal derives its substance from the reconstruction or reformation of the Muslim mind, and restoration of its connection with the Book of God in its capacity as the sole creative source – together with the cosmos – of thought, knowledge, creed, law and method. Similarly, genuine renewal entails repairing what has been broken in the connection between the Muslim mind and the Sunnah as well as all other aspects of the age of revelation and prophethood. For the Sunnah and the facts of the Prophet's life are the sole binding sources of explanation and clarification of the Qur'an.

This being the case, the Islamization of knowledge is one of the most important foundations of Islamic religious renewal, the process of rebuilding the Ummah as a 'pole' of the nations, and the contemporary Islamic civilizational enterprise. The Islamization of knowledge constitutes the missing dimension of plans for renewal and reform or, at the very least, the dimension which such plans have failed to give the attention and care it deserves. Hence, if the IIT devotes itself to standing at this frontier and strives to highlight this dimension, this in no way implies a disparagement of any individual, group or movement. On the contrary, it is a stationing of ourselves on a frontier whose protection is necessary for the well-being and safety of all other frontiers as well. Hence, if other movements, institutions, and parallel Islamic trends have

been preoccupied with their daily concerns and challenges, of which there are many, then one might hope that they would be grateful to God for having assigned someone else to fulfill this particular duty. Indeed, they ought to assist, support, bless, and guide our efforts in order to benefit from them and make use of their anticipated benefits, if not immediately, then at some point in the future.

The modernization enterprise failed within the framework of subordination to the West, and it nearly undertook of its own accord to turn the initiative over to factions of the “Islamic awakening” – as it was referred to in Western circles in the early 1980’s. However, in most regions, the Islamic awakening movement continued to occupy itself with expansion, relying in some places on the renewal heritage of reformers [the likes of Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Rida, al-Afghani and al-Kawakibi] until it had exhausted it. And before long, it was discovered that the hindrances found within the legacy were no less perilous than those associated with modernism. Thus it was that the Islamic awakening began to grow lethargic in most places, while entering a phase of outright retreat in others. In doing so, it acted contrary to God’s ways as related in the messages of His apostles, which do not retreat after their initial advance but, instead, continue their march forward until they have achieved their aims. In light of this retreat, moreover, there were some who began a process of dusting off and polishing up previous modernization projects, particularly the secularist ones. Finding itself allied suddenly with the followers of Marxism, Leninism and others of their ilk, the West began to breathe new life into them so that through them, it could confront the awakening, or the Islamic tide. This was followed by the appearance of successive studies on the modernization project and the reasons for its failure, a phenomenon which prepared the way for its abandonment by the Ummah once more, if only due to its preoccupation with other concerns, and the destruction of whatever happened to remain of its effectiveness and realism.

Attempts were thus being made to persuade a defeated, helpless Muslim nation that the modernist Westernization enterprise had failed due to causes which ought to be eradicated. One of the most important of these proposed causes was the nature of the Muslim mentality itself. It was claimed that this mentality, with its makeup and structure, bears primary responsibility for the failure of the Western civilizational enterprise in the Islamic world. The Islamic mindset, by virtue of its heritage-bound makeup, had simply not

understood the Western civilizational enterprise. Rather, it had misunderstood it and therefore, had rejected it and failed to give it a proper reception. It [the Islamic mindset] had not interacted with modernism in the way that Westerners had. Otherwise – or so claimed the proponents of this argument – it could be said without a doubt that this enterprise is, by nature, a successful one and that its success in virtually all times and places is a scientific inevitability. After all, it is a scientific, global enterprise: a fact which is confirmed by its success in places like Japan, Korea, India and other countries of the world.

As for the crime of thwarting this enterprise, responsibility for it rests squarely with the Muslim mind and the history-bound Islamic culture! For the intellectual constitution of the Muslim individual, his psychological makeup, his Islamic legacy, and the history- and language-bound nature of his thinking, have all assisted in the crime of thwarting the success of the Westernization enterprise. Consequently – or so it was said – the Muslim mind would have to be placed on the Western dissecting table so that it could be determined where the malfunction lay and so that some of its parts could be removed. The first step to be taken in this process would be to reshape the Muslim mind, which requires a reading of everything related thereto by way of culture, knowledge, sources, systems, heritage, history and language. The next step would be to select the entry points through which Western ways of thinking could be proposed and win acceptance, by dropping those parts of the Muslim mind which stand in the way of an acceptance of the Westernization enterprise and frustrate its effectiveness and influence. After all, in the Islamic East, this enterprise has not yielded the fruits it has yielded in the Christian West. Hence, it was thought that if a further attempt were made, the Westernization project might enter a successful phase in the Islamic world. Consequently, many Western scholars and researchers, and with them a number of culturally like-minded Arabs, devoted themselves to a search for the entry points through which it might be possible to infiltrate Islamic thought, citing evidence from Islamic thought itself – particularly in the areas of literature, history, and the humanities in general – in favor of the correctness and soundness of Western thought.

Such people believed that the Orientalists had not achieved the desired success in what they themselves were attempting to accomplish. In their view, Orientalists and the leaders of the initial Westernization campaigns had failed to do a proper reading of the Islamic legacy, while their mechanisms and methods were not sufficiently advanced to enable them to

undertake a structural analysis of the Muslim mind. Consequently, the bookshops were inundated with writings on the Islamic legacy and modernity, the makeup, structure and assassination of the Arab mind, the makeup and historically bound nature of Islamic thought, and various other related topics. As we see it, the Orientalists succeeded to a significant extent in creating modes of thought and a cultural milieu in universities, institutes and schools which led to the emergence of this trend and its pioneers, who now carry on the same quest from within the Islamic world.

As for the second proposed cause for the failure of the Westernization enterprise in the Islamic world, and which may be seen as a complement to the first, it was the Orientalists' failure to make appropriate use of traditional Islamic terminology and failure to create the required entry points for communicating the concepts associated with Westernization. Thus, for example, if socialism was presented to a Muslim as the theories of Marx, Engels and others of their ilk, the Muslim mind would hesitate to accept it by virtue of its makeup, structure and cultural heritage. However, when the same theory, with all of its implications, was presented to Muslims as something consistent with the thought of Abū Dharr al-Ghiffārī,⁴ 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Ibn Khaldūn, the same Muslims would be anxious to adopt it.

Similarly, when the idea of joining the international socialist movement is presented as a struggle on behalf of the poor and deprived against exploiters and colonizers, the Muslim will accept it, especially if those proposing the idea stress to him or her that the roots of this invitation emerged in Islam, and that other movements have made use of the same message. In this way it becomes possible to reinterpret the Rafidite⁵ and Kharijite⁶ movements, as well as movements of a similar nature such as those of the Karmatians⁷ and the Zunj (a certain nation) in order to give an intentional dimension to Islamic history and to increase the chances of the idea's acceptance. The same thing applies to the presentation of democracy as the equivalent of mutual consultation (*al-shūrā*), the republic as equivalent to the caliphate, etc.

When the Ummah becomes lost in this way, removing itself from its Islamic cultural context and allowing others to lead it culturally and present Western thought with all of its Greek, pagan, Crusader-like roots and its Darwinist, Freudian, Marxist, Sartrian, Socialist and liberal schools as the thought of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Khaldūn, it succumbs to a sort of intellectual deception. Such notions are bound to find acceptance in the

Muslim mind. In fact, there are individuals who have undertaken specialized studies of Islamic history and its associated heritage in an attempt to trace many modern intellectual propositions – some of which may be no more than a century old – back to Islamic sources. As a consequence, the Islamic arena has been flooded with concocted terminology such as ‘the Islamic left’ and ‘the Islamic right’. Some have even begun to classify the Companions of the Prophet and their successors as liberals, democrats, socialists, and the like.⁸ At the same time, concepts from the Islamic legacy are projected onto some modern Western theories and notions in order to invest these ideas with the same legitimacy as that borne by the original concepts and their associated terms. Such concoction is seen as *ijtihad*⁹ and the deviation from or rejection of Islamic concepts is presented as renewal. Banality may disguise itself as art.

In sum, the issue of concepts and ideas should be viewed with the utmost seriousness, and as one which merits a great deal of research and study.

WHAT HAS THE ISLAMIC ENTERPRISE DONE?

In the form in which it has been presented, the Islamic enterprise has not given the intellectual dimension the attention it deserves. This fact helps to explain the Islamic enterprise’s inability to reach the goals it has set itself and the Ummah’s ongoing affliction with deadly maladies of thought, such as the mindset of collective imitation, heedlessness of the laws of the universe, and disregard for or misunderstanding of the universal nature of Islam. In addition, the encounters with the non-Islamic world required of those responsible for carrying out the Islamic enterprise have left them no opportunity to give the intellectual issue the importance it merits, and this despite the fact that such encounters have yielded an important store of field jurisprudence, thereby revealing the critical nature of this very issue.

An examination of the causes underlying the failure of the theories associated with the Westernization enterprise reveals the urgent importance of the reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge. For in undertaking these tasks, the Islamic enterprise may be able to redress the causes underlying its weakness and reinforce the factors underlying its intellectual strength. The intellectual-cultural enterprise is thus an attempt to deal with the subjective causes which contributed to the failure of previous enterprises

and prevented them from recognising all the needed dimensions. The reason for this is that the intellectual-cultural enterprise is based on fundamental Islamic premises and a comprehensive perspective; at the same time, it acknowledges the need to achieve balance and moderation and to regulate the relative proportions represented by its various dimensions. Such considerations, while being a distinguishing feature of the proposed intellectual and cultural project, are likewise a tremendous responsibility. We maintain that it is this 'enterprise of the middle way' which will determine the fate of our Ummah's attempts at renewal and the extent to which it will be able to overcome the backwardness which characterizes its thinking at the present time. If such backwardness can indeed be overcome, the Ummah can hope to reclaim its role as a civilization which is not content simply to rescue and rebuild the Muslim Ummah itself, but one which goes beyond this to rescue a suffering humanity threatened with annihilation. Such a revived Islamic civilization is one by virtue of which the Ummah will once again occupy the position of a civilizational witness to all of humanity, which is the essence of its mission. This in no way implies that we can dispense with or bypass the contributions made by earlier reform projects. However, there is a need to correct them in order to benefit from their positive aspects and the practical lessons they offer.

WHAT DOES THE ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE HAVE TO OFFER ISLAMIC RENEWAL, THE UMMAH, AND THE WORLD?

This is a legitimate, indeed, important question which deserves an answer. What the Islamization of knowledge attempts to offer Islamic renewal, the Muslim nation and the world at large is the Qur'an in its capacity as the only book which possesses the ability to rescue all of humanity today.

It is the Qur'an alone which possesses an alternative methodological and epistemological vision on a cosmic level. However, bearers of the Qur'an have not yet begun to suffer from this methodological and epistemological dilemma, and have not yet realized its critical importance. The reason for this is that the economic, social and intellectual reality – that is to say, the overall civilizational reality – in the region of the world bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the West and the Pacific Ocean to the East is still dominated by its

primary intellectual heritage and by the mindset of contrasting dualities. Hence, its intellectual and epistemological backwardness prevents it from experiencing 'cognitive dissonance', angst or a sense of the need for a new methodology or epistemology. Rather, the numerous media through which its heritage is passed down and preserved, including Qur'anic commentaries, the Qur'anic sciences and others, constitute readily available references which do not allow people to sense the need for an epistemological methodology for understanding or dealing with the Qur'an.

As for those who deal with matters of the intellect and contemporary culture, the nature of Western thought and culture has taught them that it is Western culture and thought alone which are able to resolve humanity's crises and to create its alternatives. As a result, they do not allow for the possibility of importing anything from outside the Western intellectual and cultural framework.

At this juncture, attention is drawn to another reason which underlies the failure of some who have called for modernism based on current civilizational trends, even when this call has been issued from within the framework of Islamic renewal itself, namely, the fact that the structure of our Islamic reality has not developed or changed on the qualitative level. Consequently, the manifestations of modernity in our Islamic world have continued to be nothing more than imported forms which, as in the case of ideas, do not arise out of these countries' own historical and civilizational experience. The prevailing intellectual, Islamic and social discourse is not without a certain contemporary quality, even when it invokes tradition or takes it as its starting point. However, such discourse is contemporary in its structure and form only, while remaining traditional in content. This fact calls upon us to recognize that the mind which formulated this discourse is still enveloped within tradition; as a consequence, it is separated from the intellectual, epistemological and methodological level of the present age, to which it belongs on the material level alone.

Moreover, given the fact that the formulators of this discourse have not suffered what was suffered by others in producing the current world civilization, they suppose that it is possible to separate ideas from the tools by means of which they are conveyed. After all, they did not witness the arduous birth of the metropolis during the periods when its producers endured the transition from the steam engine to the Industrial Revolution to modern technology

and the age of communications. The formulators of this pseudo-modern discourse do not perceive how people's minds and ideas were reshaped during each successive phase, resulting in a kind of intellectual development taking place side by side with civilizational evolution. However, when contemporary civilization reaches its epistemological zenith, those who have suffered for the sake of producing this civilization will understand easily the meaning and necessity of methodology and epistemology. They will also realize the degree to which they are capable of influencing the processes of intellectual and epistemological renewal.

To demonstrate the truth of this claim, we need only look at the history and philosophy of the contemporary sciences, be they natural sciences, the humanities or the social sciences, and focus particularly on the philosophy of the natural sciences. Such an examination will make clear how the processes of intellectual and epistemological reshaping have taken place along with civilizational and cultural formation. Indeed, it will enable us to see the mutual influence between these two processes up to the time when contemporary civilization reached its most recent impasse. It might even appear to someone observing the progression of events that contemporary civilization and its intellectual and epistemological zenith entered the impasse together. In consequence, cries for help announcing the failure of modernist thought and the disintegration to which it has led are widespread, as well as the inability of post-modernist thought to put things back together. In fact, post-modernist thought has joined the ranks of the deconstructionists. For while modernism and its mode of thought have deconstructed religion, the cosmos and nature, post-modernist thought has deconstructed man himself. And the process of deconstruction is still ongoing. It is here, then, that the depth of the crisis becomes apparent, as well as the depth of the awareness of the crisis and the search for a methodological, cosmic alternative to help human beings put back together what they have taken apart.

The Islamization of knowledge school realize that the crisis is of world-wide proportions. They also realize that nothing can deliver us from this crisis but the eternal, absolute Book of God, to which "no falsehood can attain... openly, and neither in a stealthy manner."¹⁰ For within its chapters and verses, this book alone contains the cosmic methodology capable of accomplishing the philosophical reformulation of our modern civilization. At the same time, however, we realize that the Qur'an is in the possession of an

Ummah which, unfortunately, did not keep up with the world as it produced contemporary civilization. Consequently, it suffers from a crisis of double backwardness – that is to say, both intellectual–epistemological and civilizational backwardness. For this reason, the Ummah is unable to perceive the Qur’an’s great significance for our age, nor is it able to see the latent potential therein or present it skillfully to today’s world on the level of its epistemological and civilizational zenith. Instead, it seeks refuge in its traditional understanding of the Qur’an.

As for Westerners who are aware of the crisis and who are in search of a solution, they are unable to discover the cosmic methodology contained in the Qur’an. The reason for this is that when they approach the Qur’an, they approach it as a religious book; however, they deconstructed religion long ago, forbidding any interaction between religion, science, knowledge and method. Hence, when they go in search of an alternative epistemological, cosmic methodology, they tread all of the philosophical paths known to them and delve into all aspects of the human heritage with the exception of Islam. After all, they only approach it as they would an old opponent, foe or rival.

The situation is reminiscent of the natural treasures once concealed under our lands. Thanks to our backwardness, it was not we ourselves who discovered the minerals which our lands had concealed beneath their sands. Rather, they lay hidden until they were discovered by others after they had achieved progress and realized their importance for their own civilization. And indeed, our fates are still in their hands. We have yet to transcend our civilizational crises or transform ourselves – by virtue of what has been discovered on our own territory – into a civilizational partner on an equal footing with others. On the contrary, we have become increasingly subordinate, while our withdrawal and backwardness have grown more severe. The Qur’an’s cosmic, epistemological methodology lies dormant, while our epistemological and civilizational ‘blindness’ prevent us from unearthing it. Meanwhile, whatever we do discover of it is quickly commandeered by vast, centuries-long accumulation of exegesis and traditional Qur’anic sciences. As a result, it is reproduced as a part of our traditional heritage which the thirsty imagine to be water, only to find upon closer inspection that it is a mere mirage which produces no civilizational impetus and achieves no sort of effectiveness or activity. At the same time, others are prevented from making contact with the Qur’an by a varied historical legacy which includes folkloric myths of the present and

past, and a store of historical memories which are antithetical to everything that bears any connection with Islam. In addition, the periods of colonization and arrogance born of Euro-centrism, Western-centrism and racial prejudice have left a tremendous number of problems in their wake. These problems have revived all manner of conflict, hostility and struggle between Westerners in general and the Muslims: a phenomenon which has drawn even thicker veils between the crisis-ridden West and the Qur'an with its healing powers.

Today the world has reached a point of such widespread intractability and judgement that it currently and with confidence views Islam and Muslims everywhere as a threat to contemporary human civilization. Similarly, the Qur'an (which runs a close second in this respect to Islam and Muslims) has come to be associated with terrorism and extremism and is viewed as a threat. In fact, there are those who hold that normalization of relations in the Middle Eastern context can only take place after certain verses of the Qur'an have been removed from circulation. Those who have grown accustomed to the practice of distorting "the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context"¹¹ are masters at choosing and setting aside such passages in order to empty the Qur'an of its power and effectiveness and force Muslims to read it as disparate, truncated parts. Consequently, the Qur'anic methodology, the laws of its organization and the principles underlying its style remain undiscovered, and Muslims remain in their backwardness while the Qur'an remains a book for the dead rather than the living, and for the life to come rather than for this earthly existence.

If such people perceived the enormity of the crime they are committing against humanity as they go about depriving them of the true understanding of it, they would be overcome with guilt.

The Islamization of knowledge seeks to accomplish a two-fold task of great weight and complexity. It works to counter Muslims' abandonment of the Qur'an and to create an awareness on the part of the Ummah of the Qur'an's distinguishing methodological and epistemological features. In this way, the Ummah can learn how to read the Qur'an in light of the age in which it lives, as well as how to combine the reading of the Qur'an and the reading of the cosmos in order to protect itself from being assimilated by Western-centricity as it attempts to rebuild the world in conformity with its own vision and within its orbit of power. The Islamization of knowledge movement realizes, of course, that it is impossible to preserve the future of the Ummah by applying static,

outmoded logic in the face of attempts at mastery by the West. The West sees the Islamic epistemological paradigm, or what remains thereof, as the antithesis of the paradigm of positivistic civilizational development. Positivistic civilizational development as epitomized in the spirit of capitalism and capital accumulation is based on the idea of the concentration of surplus value in the hands of the dominant classes, and which works to secure control over others' work forces and resources in order to exploit them for the benefit of the center. Given these aims, dominant powers are doing everything in their power to besiege and assimilate Islam. Hence, any attempt to apply Islamic law represents, in its view, an act of aggression against contemporary human civilization which must be prevented by all available means, including military coups and armed revolutions. Similarly, all support for Islamic action is considered to be support for terrorism and extremism! Consequently, according to this view, all sources of Islamic action must be dried up, and any outlets through which Islam might find room to breathe must be blocked.

As a result of this unjust assault, many people are no longer able to distinguish between extremists and mainstream Muslims, between upright Muslims and those who have deviated from the path. For the battle is being fought even on the level of names, appearances and images. Everything that has anything remotely to do with Islam must be exterminated and destroyed. They may target someone who has been referred to as an extremist; then, if someone whom they themselves have described as a moderate should come to his defense or object to what has happened to him, the moderate is likewise branded an extremist and is seen as meriting the same treatment as that meted out to the extremist. After all, the long-term goal seems to be the annihilation of Islam. Moreover, while the Islamization of knowledge works among Muslims themselves to try to achieve the goals mentioned thus far, it seeks at the same time to formulate the Islamic discourse to be addressed to the world at large. In doing so, it attempts to help the crisis-ridden world to discover the solution to its crises and the remedy for its ills in the Qur'an and its epistemological methodology. It strives to dissociate human scientific and civilizational accomplishments from their positivistic philosophical premises so that humanity will be able to restore the connection among the sciences, knowledge, and values. Thus humanity will be able to make use of the sciences it has developed and the knowledge

it has acquired within the context of an Islamic epistemological methodology. This, in turn, can lead to the Islamization of the philosophical foundations of scientific theories by negating their positivistic dimensions and reformulating them within a cosmic framework that encompasses the divine purposefulness in the universe and life. Based on the foregoing, one may clearly see the importance and necessity of the Islamization of knowledge, not only for the Islamic world, but for the world at large. This methodological-epistemological issue rests upon the following six foundations:

- 1) Building up a contemporary Islamic epistemological system.
- 2) Reconstituting the Qur'anic epistemological methodology.
- 3) Developing methods of dealing with the Qur'an as a source of thought, knowledge and civilization.
- 4) Developing methods of dealing with the Sunnah as a source of thought, knowledge and civilization.
- 5) Developing methods of dealing with the Islamic legacy in such a way as to transcend the periods of imitation and discontinuity through which the Ummah has passed.
- 6) Formulating methods of dealing with the contemporary human heritage in such a way as to link it to human thought and civilization as a whole and to overcome their inadequacies and crises.

The importance, or rather the necessity of dealing with this issue brings professors, scientists, thinkers and graduate students face to face with their God-given duties and the critical role that they are called upon to undertake. It renders scientific and epistemological research a sacred mission, and turns universities, institutes and scientific research centers into launching pads for a genuine Qur'anic awakening with the capacity to bring today's world "out of deep darkness into the light."¹² In doing so, such an awakening can place humanity once again on the path of God, the One worthy of all praise,

Unto Whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs. But woe unto those who deny the truth, for suffering severe awaits those who choose the life of this world as the sole object of their love, preferring it to the life to come, and who turn others away from the path of God and try to make it appear crooked. Such as these have indeed gone far astray.¹³

CHAPTER FOUR



Major Features of the Reform of Islamic Thought and the Islamization of Knowledge

FORMULATION OF THE ISLAMIC ENTERPRISE

Given the Westernization enterprise's failure to bring about the hoped-for renaissance and the noticeable faltering of the movement-based Islamic enterprise in the process of seeking to achieve its aims, there is a clear and urgent need for review and reflection in a renewed attempt to ascertain where the difficulty lies. Reflection upon the overall Islamic vision leads to the conclusion that this vision itself is where the difficulty is most likely to be located and that, as a consequence, it is the place where reform needs to begin.

This being the case, it is essential that we formulate an integrated Islamic project to deal with the crisis, one which focuses its energies on reforming Islamic thought and reinforces efforts to crystallize the Islamization of knowledge. In this way, it is hoped that such a project will be a link in the chain of successive reform endeavors whose aim is to fill in the gaps which have contributed to the growing seriousness and complexity of the crisis. Similarly, it is hoped that its discourse will be capable of persuading its audience that the intellectual crisis is of such seriousness and magnitude that it calls for a group of Muslims to take on the task. Specifically, an academic institution needs to be set up for the sole purpose of working to reform Islamic thought, implement the Islamization of knowledge, and elucidate and study all aspects and dimensions thereof.

We are dedicated to presenting this project to the Ummah as it is a sacred trust which must be fulfilled. It is the task of preparing and presenting the intellectual and methodological foundations needed for the Ummah's forward movement. We have no choice but to do our utmost to follow up on

what has been done thus far, to amend, revise and correct, and to construct an alternative intellectual framework. As a consequence of this we can then refashion the Muslim mind, shaping its structure in accordance with a sound Islamic conceptualization of the cosmos, life and human beings. This reliable monotheistic conceptualization is derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, reflection on the laws of the universe, a perception of the unity of truth and creation, the rules which govern good stewardship of the earth and its resources, and the conditions required for fulfillment of our role as God's vicegerents on earth. Moreover, it is by means of such a conceptualization that we can nourish the Ummah's movement with the intellectual sustenance which it lacks at present.

At the same time, we need to undertake a thorough, analytical investigation of the movement of Islamic thought from the moment at which the word, "Recite!" was revealed to the Prophet till the present day. Such an investigation will enable us to become familiar with Islamic thought and its components and the various factors which have been raised for discussion. At the same time, it will enable us to observe its positive and negative aspects and the ways in which it was formed and shaped, then to criticize it in a solid manner. We hope to link our movement with this history of thought on one hand and on the other, help the Ummah to transcend the effects of partial, partisan, sectarian, or Orientalist readings of such thought. After all, such readings are insufficient or biased. Their aim is to reveal something which they already assume to be there, or to cite as evidence or documentary proof something which they themselves have put forward as true. Such readings rob them of their claim to objectivity and academic integrity and thereby cancel out most of their potential benefits.

For the Muslim community to emerge from its crisis, it must support the discourse and action of this specialized movement, which has taken the Ummah's intellectual crisis as the focus of its activities and as the starting point for its aims. As Muslims who look forward to a better future, we cannot overlook this collective task, the task of providing the Ummah's movement with the intellectual fuel it needs, and of working to build the movement of thought in the Islamic and world arenas.

A RESUMPTION OF EARLIER EFFORTS

The starting point for the intellectual crisis in Islamic history might be identified as the question of the caliphate, or leadership of the Ummah, given the confusion in people's understanding of the caliphate's role and nature. This was transformed into a heated debate between reason and revelation. In fact it brought about a split between intellectual and political leaderships which was followed by a series of deviations and divisions. Alternatively, we might see its starting point in the confusion of roles between the worlds of the seen and the unseen. This caused a confusion between fate (as a pillar of faith) and man's will and responsibility for his actions. Yet, wherever we locate the starting point for the crisis and its impact on the Ummah, the fact remains that history has recorded both efforts to confront these confusions, and the Ummah's responses.

Indeed, the present discussion can provide us with a better understanding of the underlying reasons for the efforts which were made to compile and record the Sunnah and establish criteria to protect it from forgery, manipulation and exploitation. It also sheds light on the attempts made by the pious ancestors to lay down rules for understanding and interpretation on both the literal and metaphorical levels in order to define the systematic roles to be played by both authoritative texts and human reason; the compilation and recording of the fundamentals of jurisprudence; rational interpretations of ambiguous, allegorical or seemingly contradictory passages from the Qur'an and the hadith with the aim of refuting alleged contradictions between revelation and reason or among authoritative texts themselves; as well as discussions of human will, human action and the means of rectifying it, and human freedom and choice.

- Imam al-Shāfi'ī, Imam Aḥmad, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī and others of their generation confronted the difficulty posed by method.
- Al-Ashʿarī sought to compile, survey and analyze the sayings of Muslim thinkers and trace each of them back to its source. He also sought to direct the Ummah's energies in the realm of scholastic theology outward toward the non-Muslim world and to present a synopsis of Islamic fundamentals of doctrine which everyone could agree upon.
- Al-Juwaynī attempted to deal with the issue of Islamic political leadership

in a manner which would cause it to cease being a cause of crisis and become a solution instead.

- Al-Ghazālī dealt with the split between theory and application in his book, *Ihyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. He confronted the Greek challenge and presented the Islamic alternative in his book, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, and discussed many aspects of the crisis of the Muslim mind by offering solutions and alternatives. He even attempted to present a complete theory of Islamic knowledge.
- Ibn Rushd endeavored to dispel the illusion of a contradiction between Islamic law and wisdom and to formulate a new jurisprudence which, unlike the existing conflict-based jurisprudence, would be capable of creating mutual understanding and harmony.
- Ibn Ḥazm played a prominent role in dealing with a significant number of intellectual and methodological issues.
- In his book entitled *al-Radd ilā al-Amr al-Awwal*, Abū Shāmah called for a return to the methodology which had been prevalent in the early days of Islam in dealing with all issues over which there was disagreement.
- Ibn Taymiyyah attempted to deal with the intellectual crisis and to offer a methodological, epistemological, cultural alternative. He treated the issues of thought, method, logic, jurisprudence and politics and founded a widespread intellectual and cultural reform movement. Whoever examines the legacy left by Ibn Taymiyyah and his disciples will find distinguished treatments of virtually all aspects of these matters.¹
- Imam al-Shāṭibī made his primary concern the reform of the principles of jurisprudence, which represents the law of Islamic thought. Al-Shāṭibī labored to deliver this field from its focus on the doctrinal questions of scholastic theology which had weighed it down, by breathing new life into it through the introduction of the intents of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*) on a wide scale and in a powerful, effective way. By reforming the study of the fundamentals of jurisprudence, al-Shāṭibī's intention was to reform and rectify Islamic thought itself.
- When Ibn Khaldūn saw how Islamic civilization had halted and even regressed, he initiated the movement to found the social sciences from an Islamic perspective. This aimed at introducing the intellectual content and cultural framework to the social sciences which Islamic society desperately needed if it was going to resume its civilizational evolution on a

solid academic foundation. Had Ibn Khaldūn's intellectual and cultural venture been carried out during his day, the course of history would have been altered. However, Ibn Khaldūn's efforts were not followed up and the Islamic world went into a long hibernation. Instead Ibn Khaldūn's thought was picked up by Westerners, and it significantly contributed to their renaissance.

Subsequently numerous other reform attempts were made. Such attempts differed in their approaches to issues and in their places of origin. However, they all agreed on the Ummah's need for reform and renewal. They include, for example, the work of Shah Walī Allāh al-Dahlawī, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Imam al-Shawkānī, al-Ālūsī, al-Ṭabāṭibāʿī, al-Sanūsī, and al-Mahdī, followed by al-Afghānī and his school, al-Kawākibī, Ibn ʿĀshūr and Ibn Bādīs. They were followed more recently by the leaders of the modern Islamic movement and their well-known role in Egypt, India and elsewhere, such as Imam Hasan al-Banna, al-Mawdudī, Sayyid Qutb, Malik Bin Nabī, Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhani, and others.

Our cause, then, is not a contemporary innovation; rather, it has firm roots in the history of the Ummah with beginnings that date back to the first harbingers of the intellectual crisis. Like any other human phenomenon, thought-related problems begin to emerge with the thought itself. After all, thought does not emerge out of a vacuum, nor does it move toward a vacuum. Rather, it is an interaction between a starting point or a goal, and human reason, between reality, language, time, place and human beings, and between movement, history, and all of life.

Our cause is, essentially, that of civilizational renewal, the revival which the Prophet promised this Ummah. However, it was a promise which was meant to rouse us to action for the sake of renewal, not a promise implying an inevitability the anticipation of which would lead to passivity and dependency. It is the cause which was taken up by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, al-Shāfiʿī, al-Ghazālī, al-Ashʿarī, Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Rushd, al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, Abū Shāmah, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Shāṭibī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, al-Shawkānī, al-Dahlawī, al-Afghānī, al-Nāʿinī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Rashid Rida, Iqbal, al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, al-Mawdudī, al-Nadwi, Ibn Bādīs, Malik Bin Nabī, Shariʿati, Mutahhiri, al-Sadr, al-Nabhani, and all other leaders of reformist Islamic thought, including both earlier

thinkers and later ones.

Each of these reformers and heralds was able to treat whatever was apparent or hidden, major or minor, of the intellectual aspect of the Ummah's difficulties in accordance with his own understanding of the Ummah's problems and the pressures and circumstances associated with his own upbringing and struggle. With the passage of time, the various reformist notions which had emerged led to the development of the two primary renewal and rebuilding enterprises: the modern, movement-based Islamic enterprise which, more than anything else, represents the Islamic political response, and the secular Westernization enterprise representing the drive to imitate and emulate the West.

A given trend of thought may be sound in every way when it first emerges. However, errors and distortions may enter into it at the point when it is heard and received, or in interaction with any element of the reality in which it emerges. After all, the possibility of mental error is simply a manifestation of our humanity. The various reasons for such error are well-known and even intuitive, while the natural, sensory, cultural and human influences on human thought are undeniable. This being the case, early philosophers attempted to establish logic as a means of protecting the mind against errors in its thinking and devised methods to ensure the soundness and integrity of the various phases of inquiry and reflection. Despite these measures, however, human logic itself was not free of error, nor was human method immune to deviation. In fact, attempts continue to this day to correct logic and rectify method in the hope of protecting the human mind from error or, at the least, to minimize the rate at which it occurs. After all, human experience, capabilities and knowledge are relative and limited by nature, as a result of which we stand in need of constant renewal and fresh interpretations.

**THE BASIS AND ORIGIN OF THE ENTERPRISE IS THE QUR'AN, WHILE
THE SUNNAH IS ITS SOURCE OF INTERPRETIVE GUIDANCE
(SEE FIGURE 4.1)**

The Qur'an draws attention to numerous thought-related errors, lapses of logic, and failings to which human methods are subject. The Prophet likewise drew attention to such realities. Indeed, he took a significant number of

what might be viewed as systematic precautionary measures whose aim was to protect the Ummah from falling into the clutches of intellectual crisis or committing those errors which would lead to such a fall. Thus, for example, when some individuals found it difficult to understand the concept of fate or predestination (*al-qadar*) as man's responsibility for his actions and his freedom of action and choice, the Prophet vehemently denounced and warned against the method and approach on the basis of which the question of *qadar* had been dealt with. Indeed, he reproached those who dealt with this issue for confusing, on one hand, the realm of the unseen (knowledge of which the Creator has reserved for Himself) with the visible, sensate world whose various unseen aspects are brought to light with the passing of the ages and with man's expanding epistemological capabilities.² This way of approaching the issue causes faith in the realm of the unseen to lose its effectiveness and positive impact, and causes man to lose sight of the value of his actions and his sense of responsibility. As a result, people are rendered powerless and unable to choose among the authoritative points of reference related to the worlds of the seen and the unseen respectively, or to identify an authoritative framework which will allow them to criticize, review, adjust and correct their actions.

This fact may be seen clearly in a number of hadiths which deal with the issue of fate or predestination. One such hadith, narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah reads,

The Messenger of God once came out and found us arguing over the matter of *qadar*. When he heard what we were saying, he got so angry his cheeks flushed red as a pomegranate. He said, "Is this what you have been commanded to do? Is it for this that I was sent among you? Those of your ancestors who argued over this matter have perished. As for me, I adjure you not to dispute over it."³

The Prophet responded in a similar way when he learned that some individuals understood complete reliance upon God (*al-tawakkul*) to mean disregard for earthly causes. When he encountered this mistaken belief, he corrected it, pointing out that proper regard for earthly causes is part of the concept of reliance on God. Hence, to someone who was disregarding earthly causes he said, "Be conscious of them, and trust in God."⁴

Similarly, when some Muslims were about to restrict the concept of wor-

ship to the performance of obligatory and voluntary acts of devotion while excluding mundane activities, the Prophet corrected this understanding and clarified the error it entailed. In doing so, he restored to faith its all-inclusive meaning, saying, "Faith consists of seventy-some or sixty-some branches. The best of these branches is reflected in [utterance of] the words, 'There is no deity but God,' while the least of them is reflected in removing something harmful from the road or path. Modesty is also a branch of faith."⁵ Hence the Prophet delineated a holistic framework for worship which protects against both excess and neglect, saying, "Although I am the most God-fearing amongst you and the most conscious of Him, I fast and break my fast, I perform the ritual prayers [at times] and take my rest [at others], and I marry women. And whoever spurns my example, has nothing to do with me."⁶

Moreover, in order to help people see the importance of the time-space dimension, discern intents and purposes, and distinguish between the relativity and specificity of some rulings and the absoluteness and comprehensiveness of others, he stated, "I had prohibited you to visit graveyards. However, Muhammad was allowed to visit his mother's grave, so visit them, as they can serve to remind you of the life to come."⁷ Also relevant to this is his statement to 'Ā'ishah, "If it weren't for the fact that your people only recently emerged from an age of ignorance [a variant reading has 'unbelief (*kuf*)'], I would spend the wealth in the Ka'bah for the sake of God's cause, I would raze it and rebuild it, and join it with the northern wall."⁸

In order to reinforce the concept of an authoritative framework within which to operate and the methodology on which one is to deal with it, the Prophet reproached 'Umar for reading the Torah, saying, "[What need have you of] another book besides the Book of God when I am in your midst? If my brother Moses were still alive, he would have no choice but to follow me."⁹

When the Prophet was commanded to have the Qur'an written,¹⁰ he employed scribes to record what he said and to put every word in its proper place. At the same time, he prohibited the recording of the Sunnah lest any part of it be confused with the Qur'an, and to prevent people from becoming distracted from the Qur'an by focusing on commentaries and explanations. It is within the context of nurturing cultural sensibilities on the part of Muslims that we can best understand the Hadith, such as the hadiths that speak of the cat, the pigeon, Mount Uhud, and the she-camel, as well as many others.

Similarly, it is in the context of increasing people's awareness of the importance of broadening the range of those actions which are permitted to Muslims, thereby enabling human beings to act productively and engage in independent reasoning, that we can understand the Prophet's prohibition of excessive inquisitiveness. The reason for this is that undue questioning has the potential of leading to conflict and disagreement and narrowing the range of what is permitted [rather than] presenting opinions and broadening the sphere in which independent reasoning is required. It was with these concerns in mind that the Prophet said, "The children of Israel only perished due to their excessive questioning and their disputes over their prophets."¹¹ The Prophet's command to engage in independent reasoning under his supervision and the training which he provided for this endeavor can be understood in this context, as can hadiths warning of sedition and discord and their damaging impact on the fates of other nations.

It was the Sunnah which provided the foundation for the intellectual framework within which the Companions understood issues. Hence, when the concept of predestination was repeatedly misunderstood during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, he swiftly dealt with the matter and clarified it as much as possible. Commenting on the Companions' digression from a proper understanding of this concept, he stated, "So-and-so (that is, Ibn Abī al-Aṣḡagh) has forfeited what he was given charge of, and has taken charge of what he was spared" (in order to show the dividing line among the various areas of thought).

The position taken by the Companions on the issue of apostasy and the manner in which it was dealt with by Abū Bakr was indicative of a profound awareness and understanding of human nature and it showed an awareness of the nature of systems and the relationships which exist among their many and varied aspects. When people's understanding of one aspect of a reality is distorted, this constitutes a threat to all other aspects as well. Hence, the confusion which arose among the new Muslims between the era of prophethood and the era of the caliphate, and the distinction which they drew between monetary and bodily religious obligations (*farā'id al-māl* and *farā'id al-badan* respectively) was evidence of their having departed from the wider Muslim community and a destruction of the Ummah's anticipated role as civilization-al witness.¹² This being the case, Caliph Abū Bakr consciously rejected this way of thinking. Consequently, he gave no importance to the inadequate jus-

tifications given by the apostates supporting their positions and attitudes.

The Companions took a similar intellectual position with respect to the Muslim's authoritative framework. Thus, they held that they had to preserve the Qur'an just as it was revealed to the Prophet and without any alteration by way of either addition or removal. Accordingly they began, without delay, to memorize it, compile it and commit it to writing. As for the Sunnah (which is an interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an and the teachings of Islam) they did not urge that it be written down. It was initially narrated word-for-word but then passed down in terms of its meaning and how it had been understood. The Companions were strict with respect to the accounts which they deemed acceptable and warned against overemphasis upon the Sunnah lest their attention be distracted from the Qur'an. This would undermine their capacity for reflection on and understanding of Qur'anic verses, and cause people to rely on narratives rather than on the Qur'an itself. The Companions were clear with respect to this approach and adhered to it faithfully. However when Muslims departed from this approach in subsequent generations, the result was that without giving the matter careful thought, people contented themselves with the Sunnah while leaving the Qur'an aside. Thereafter they contented themselves with Islamic jurisprudence¹³ while leaving both the Qur'an and the Sunnah aside. As time passed, they then contented themselves with commentaries on the jurisprudence of the earliest scholars, then with footnotes on the commentaries and shaykhs' remarks on them.

The Prophet did not depart from this earthly realm until he had fulfilled his mission and carried out the trust he had been given, completing the religion and bringing the grace for which it was a conduit. Similarly, it was during his lifetime that the Muslim mind was set on the right course, the 'pure path' was set out clearly for believers, and the sound method was made visible. Logic was set aright such that no argument could be raised against God and human beings were made aware of their responsibilities, powers, potentials, and freedom of choice: "Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good; and whoever goes astray, goes astray but to his own detriment,"¹⁴ and, "If you persevere in doing good, you will but be doing good to yourselves; and if you do evil, it will be [done] to yourselves."¹⁵

The Prophet laid down principles for renewal and reform in order for the

discerning and upright members of the Ummah to be able to meet the Ummah's needs lest with the passing of time, hearts grow hard, understanding wane, and thought become confused, or the ties that bind believers be broken. He established such principles in order for the Ummah to preserve its ongoing civilizational witness and to maintain the moderation for which it has always been known among the nations in its religion and way of life. In this way, he prepared the way for Islam to prevail over all [false] religions and its law to be manifested as universal and comprehensive, capable of meeting the Ummah's needs in all times and places.

It is within this context that we may properly understand the caliphate, jihad, ijtiḥad, the unity of the Ummah, the principle of commanding what is right and prohibiting what is wrong, as well as rulings pertaining to the monitoring of prices, religious endowments and the like, since each of these pillars and principles clearly serves the goal of renewal and provides the means of preventing crises of the mind and the stagnation of thought.

It is for this reason that viewing the call to deal with the intellectual crisis as a purely modern phenomenon, disregarding its importance or existence altogether, or viewing those who communicate this call as a product of their generation alone, is itself a manifestation of the crisis and glaring proof of its existence.

THE MAJOR FEATURES OF THE PROJECT TO REVITALIZE THE THOUGHT OF THE MOVEMENT, AND THE MOVEMENT OF THOUGHT (SEE FIGURE 4.2)

It might be said that in essence, the book entitled, *The Islamization of Knowledge* was a statement of principles and an action plan. However, whereas the principles set forth in the book are clear and fixed, the plan of action is interpretive, and therefore, tentative, in nature. When work on the plan began in 1984 AC/1404 AH, it was still only theoretical. However, since that time it has yielded numerous efforts in a variety of areas. The purpose behind such efforts has been to formulate a refined Islamic discourse whose content is academic/scientific, whose method is clear, whose style is lucid and flowing, and which is capable of both making individual Muslims aware of the intellectual crisis which they face and of presenting the ways in which they can

overcome this crisis. Some efforts, for example, have been aimed at indexing the verses of the Qur'an, while others have focused on the Sunnah; others have been devoted to making the wider Islamic legacy more readily accessible, while still others have focused on Western thought, and so forth.

Regardless of the scope of these efforts, however, they remain in need of study, review and evaluation if we are to ascertain the soundness of the plan, its faithfulness to its principles, and its level of integration. Most of the methods and means proposed in the plan have been put into practice thus far: from seminars, to discussion and research circles, publications and individual and group research projects. All of these likewise need to be evaluated and studied, and their results monitored.

When the IIIT first embarked on the task of dealing with the Ummah's intellectual crisis, it was aware that it would not be able to formulate its program and carry out its plan in a centralized manner, isolated from interactions with Islamic communities. Consequently, given the gravity of the crisis in which the Ummah finds itself and the enormity of the effort required in order to analyze its causes and examine its solutions, the IIIT has opened offices and branches in a number of Muslim and non-Muslim countries in order for them to serve as its sensors and survey outposts. The IIIT can communicate and spread its message from these offices and they also serve as a means by which it can fulfill its mission and formulate its program. Some of these offices have achieved encouraging results, while others have failed to accomplish what we had hoped. We must continue to evaluate the work of these offices in order to guarantee sound progress toward rescuing the Ummah from the present crisis and to carefully and thoroughly plan for the best possible performance on their part.

Hence, there is an intellectual and epistemological content for the work plan, but limited means of carrying it out. Both of these aspects remain in need of evaluation, review, correction and renewal. By virtue of my role in following up the formulation and implementation of the Institute's plan together with the late Isma'īl al-Faruqī, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman and others, I can summarize our cause – in terms of its principles, aims, means, conditions and practical steps – as follows:

General Principles

The general principles of our project are outlined in Part I of the Islamization of Knowledge Series entitled, *Islāmīyat al-Maʿrifah: al-Mabādi' al-ʿĀmmah, Khiṭṭat al-ʿAmal, al-Injāzāt*. This is a valuable resource for anyone who wishes to reform Islamic thought and pursue the Islamization of knowledge. However, there is no harm in reiterating some of these principles to encourage those who desire further clarification and explanation to refer to the earlier work.¹⁶ These principles are:

- 1) Affirmation of the unity of God, since this is the first principle of Islam and the most important of all its governing values.
- 2) The unity of the created realm: The unity of God requires, by logical necessity, the unity of His creation.
- 3) The unity of Truth: There is no inconsistency or disparity between the truths of revelation and the truths of the cosmos.
- 4) The unity of life: This oneness is based upon human beings' role as God's vicegerents on earth, their bearing of this God-given trust, and their patient endurance of the afflictions which this entails.
- 5) The unity of humanity: People are a single creation, and no one is superior to anyone else based on anything but his or her consciousness of God.
- 6) The complementarity of revelation and reason: There is no conflict or contradiction between the givens of the written Revelation and God's cosmic manifestation.
- 7) Comprehensiveness of both means and method: Islam is a religion which is inclusive of all aspects of life.

Within the framework of general principles, emphasis must be placed on certain governing values, namely, the oneness of God in every sense, including the oneness of divinity, and the oneness of the divine attributes; the prosperity of the created universe; and the purification of man as God's vicegerents on earth. It is to these intents that appeal is made and on the basis of which all things are related. For without observing these higher intents of Islamic law, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to perceive the conceptual link which binds the elements of the metaphysical-natural-human dialectic. Moreover, without a perception of this link it will be impossible to construct

a sound epistemological system by means of which we are able to derive the method for defining the relationship between the worlds of the seen and the unseen, and between the Absolute and the relative.

The Goal (see figures 4.3 & 4.4)

The fundamental goal which extends into all other goals is the creation of an enlightened Muslim mind capable of fulfilling its role by practising independent reasoning, renewal, and human development and prosperity, as stated in *The Islamization of Knowledge*. In this way, Muslims will be qualified to function as God's vicegerents on earth, to exercise their rights as good stewards of the natural world, and to bear the trust given by their Creator. There are two paths by means of which this goal may be attained:

First: By reconstructing Muslims' intellectual scheme based on the Qur'an and its epistemological methodology, on the Sunnah as that which contains a methodology for applying the values of the Qur'an to particular situations, and on the cosmos as the other source of knowledge alongside Revelation.

Second: By basing the comprehensive Islamic epistemological and cultural paradigm on what was mentioned under 'First' above.

These two paths require action on the basis of five fundamental focal points, each of which has the potential of generating a set of secondary focal points.

The First Focal Point: Thought

The word 'thought' (*fikr*) appears nowhere in the Qur'an as a noun or as a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*). However, it appears twenty times as a verb in the past or present tense. We read, for example, "he reflects and meditates,"¹⁷ "and perhaps they might reflect..."¹⁸, and "Will you not, then, take thought?"¹⁹ In Arabic, as in other languages, a verb is something which points to an event and to a person. Therefore saying 'he hit' (*da-ra-ba*), the verb 'hit' indicates the event of hitting, as well as a person who did the hitting. Similarly saying 'he thought' (*fak-ka-ra*), alludes to an event of thinking and a person who brings

about this event, the thinker. Thus, when the word ‘thought’ is used in the Qur’an, it is as though God is drawing our attention to the fact that this mental activity is an action which is, by necessity, linked to a person, since it would not be possible for thought to be abstracted from the thinker. Rather, wherever there is thought, there is likewise a thinker. Moreover, thought or thinking must not be something which is of no avail, or upon which no movement or action in this universe is based.

Thought is a characteristic which sets humans apart from all other creatures; hence, the term ‘thought’ is only used to describe the cognitive operations engaged in by humans. In the case of animals, even the phenomena which resemble the human thought process are not referred to as ‘thought’, but rather, as instinctive direction. Even ancient logicians defined humans as ‘talking animals,’ that is, rational beings or thinkers. As for the remaining animals, they have instinctive direction or something similar thereto, which corresponds to thought, the mind, and rational powers.

Muslim scholars have exhibited an interest in explaining and defining thought and demonstrating its true nature and meaning, although contemporary thinkers have neglected it to a large extent. By looking at the nature of thought and which phenomena might be considered manifestations of it, I have found that many Muslim scholars of the 3rd Century AH, during which time Islamic sciences began to crystallize, and the 4th Century AH, during which time these sciences began to be recorded, discussed the subject of thought in great detail. In fact, in some references²⁰ discussions of thought, its specifications and conditions spanned over a hundred pages or more. However, and as one would expect, Muslim sources differ from one another, while different books have their own ways of dealing with this theme or that. Consequently, sometimes the term ‘thought’ and its definition are found in books on Islamic mysticism, linguistics, philosophy, scholastic theology, and the fundamentals of jurisprudence. In the writings of scholars and in relevant encyclopedias, one will find long treatments of thought, its synonyms, its conditions and its variations.

From my study of these sources I ascertain that ‘thought’ is the name for the process by which an individual’s cognitive and cogitative powers – be they the heart, the spirit or the mind – investigate and reflect in order to derive meanings from known realities, or in order to arrive at judgments or proportions among things.

This meaning of the term ‘thought’ is clarified further by the statement by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, “Know that thought involves bringing forth two pieces of knowledge in the heart in order that from them one might derive a third piece of knowledge.”²¹ In other words, thought, in al-Ghazālī’s view, is to prepare two premises so that one might arrive at a conclusion. For example turning the command “Perform the ritual prayers” into a matter for thought requires the premise, “The phrase, ‘Perform the ritual prayers,’ is a command as is the verb, ‘Perform,’ and every command from the Creator is an obligation.” The evidence for the first premise is linguistic, namely, the use of a verb in the imperative mood, while the evidence for the second premise is juristic in nature. A command is something which we are obliged to carry out, hence, it follows that ritual prayer is obligatory, and this is the conclusion, or the third piece of knowledge.

Similarly, if someone does not know whether a given prayer is obligatory or simply an emulation of the Prophet’s example, he might recall the fact that the mid-morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-Duḥā*) was performed by the Prophet on some days, and not on others. The evidence for this premise is historical in nature, based on an investigation of the Prophet’s actions. Things which he did at times and refrained from at other times are viewed as examples for us to follow, not obligations. Hence, the mid-morning prayer is an emulation of the Prophet’s example, this is the third piece of knowledge.

Thus, two or more pieces of knowledge are always adduced in order for us to go from the premises known to what is referred to as the conclusion. This activity is thought. The Qur’an links thought with action, thereby drawing our attention to the fact that indolent, idle thought is an undesirable thing. Thought for its own sake does not lead to any benefit either in this world or in the next, rather, we must think in order to arrive at something. As for thought for its own sake, or thought in the sense of unqualified reflection or wandering in pursuit of fantasies or something not based on factual evidence, it is a kind of imagination, not thought. The ancients had a great deal to say about the distinction between thought and imagination, and between reflection and recollection. However, this is not the place to deal with such issues in detail.

There are two tasks remaining on the discussion of thought. The first is to define the features of Islamic thought and its methods, while the second is to deal with the issues and difficulties of Islamic thought. In undertaking both

tasks, we rely on the Qur'anic epistemological methodology which combines a reading of Revelation with a reading of existence.

*The Second Focal Point: Method*²²

The universal nature of the crisis requires a universal solution; similarly, it requires that the Islamic solution put forward must be on the level of a universally applicable discourse. Its fundamental point of entry is the epistemological methodology based on the Qur'an, since the Qur'an alone is capable of reshaping the contemporary mind and developing its perceptive faculties in a sound manner.

As for the term 'methodology' (Arabic, *manhajiyah*), we intend by it to mean the controls or criteria for human thought which are derived from an authoritative framework qualified to identify the means for producing, generating and selecting ideas. Such a methodology brings the human mind out of the state of auto-generation of concepts based on selective reflections, notions and inclinations, and forces it to discover an authoritative framework to which reference can be made in the course of following a particular method. Such a framework consists of a summation of laws and principles which have been observed and compiled, then transformed into theories and rules so that the system which provides order for theories becomes an authoritative framework which regulates their movement, ensuring that there be no conflict, contradiction or inconsistency among them. In this way, the circles of ideas, however far they happen to spread, will always return to their common center as though they were bound by an invisible thread.

Hence, methodology is what lends order to concepts and theories, adapting laws in such a way that they are cohesive and mutually consistent. This being the case, methodology has a place in the formulation of a researcher's questions and hypotheses; it is likewise connected to epistemology, which approaches every issue by studying, critiquing and analyzing it, then piecing it together again. Methodology, then, might be said to be the science of identifying the path and the steps needed in the direction of a particular epistemological end. The relevant concepts may be seen as the building blocks upon which the methodology is constructed, while the authoritative framework is the 'organizer' which makes it possible to arrange concepts in relation to another, and which works to shape them and put them to work in a way which achieves their epistemological objectives.

For others there may be numerous possible methods and a variety of methodologies in keeping with the variety of theories which they espouse in relation to knowledge, its classification and the various areas of knowledge. However, the Islamization of knowledge, given the fact that it is based on a combined reading of Revelation and the created universe, works to read both these dimensions of reality based on a single methodology whose authoritative framework is founded upon monotheism, or the unity of truth. Unlike secular epistemologies, the Islamization of knowledge seeks to bring together explanations of written Revelation and the wisdom it conveys, and the purposefulness of the universe and the laws which govern its cause-and-effect relationships. It is here that one may clearly discern the difference between ‘method’ in the sense of rules of thought and research standards in this or that area, be it partial or universal in focus, and ‘methodology and method’ as seen from the perspective of the Islamization of knowledge.

As for epistemology and methodology when viewed side by side within the framework of the Islamization of knowledge, there is, as the rhetoricians would say, a link and a divide between them, or as the logicians would put it, both generality and specificity. On the one hand, epistemology stands in need of methodology and depends upon it while on the other, methodology takes its practical form from epistemology, as a result of which they are interdependent and, indeed, inseparable. Epistemology rests on broad-ranging mental activity which encompasses the processes of criticism, analysis and deconstruction. It makes use of all elements, givens, relations and potentials available within the contemporary epistemological framework in order to bring to light whatever social and cultural difficulties exist and to engage in reconstruction in accordance with the laws of the methodology being employed and its associated criteria. However, in order for the Qur’anic epistemological methodology to perform its role in the Islamization of Knowledge, and in order for it to complete the process of combining the reading of Divine Revelation and the reading of the universe – which we consider to be a necessary condition for overcoming the current intellectual and epistemological crisis on both the local and international levels – it must highlight the relationship between God (the realm of the metaphysical), man and nature, thereby delivering knowledge and its associated methods from disregard and denial of, or even neutrality toward, the realm of the unseen. In other words, it must overcome the split between the Divine and the human

and all other positivistic philosophies with their one-sided readings of existence.

This is a task which can only be properly undertaken by those who possess knowledge of the Qur'an, a sufficient familiarity with the sciences, as well as other areas of knowledge. Only then are they able to explore the methodological overlap between the Qur'an, humanity and the cosmos. Any initiative whose epistemological methodology fails to recognize the effect of the unseen on the universe cannot be accepted as an effective logic capable of protecting the mind from error. Nor can any method which does recognize this be derived from any pure and sound source but the Qur'an.

Hence, the Islamization of knowledge is a clearly defined epistemological methodology that constitutes an alternative to materialism and positivism, both of which disregard the Divine and the realm of the unseen. At the same time, it poses an alternative to the type of theology and sacerdotalism which rob man and nature of their proper link to each other.

Given our current awareness of the Islamization of knowledge, we may affirm that the rules governing epistemological production – within the framework and perspective of the Islamization of knowledge – must be based on the following foundations:

One: Reconstructing an epistemological vision based on the components and distinguishing features of a sound Islamic conceptualization. The purpose for such a reconstruction is to clarify what may be viewed as the Islamic epistemological system which is able to provide answers to universal human questions and produce needed epistemological models without overlooking any aspect of such questions. In addition, a reconstructed Islamic epistemological vision will enable us to build up an autonomous capacity for the type of epistemological criticism which makes it possible to absorb and transcend both our legacy and the production of our contemporaries in a disciplined, methodical manner. In this way, we can begin to engage in orderly epistemological generation and the type of epistemological interpretation which is not based on persuasion and rhetoric but, rather, on precise epistemological methodology.

Two: Reexamining, reshaping, and rebuilding the rules of Islamic methodology in light of the Qur'anic epistemological methodology. Serious damage has been done to this methodology as a result of individual, atomistic readings which look at the Qur'an as separate, disjointed parts rather than as

an integral unit, and which view the cosmos and man in isolation from the Qur'an.

Three: Constructing a method for dealing with the Qur'an through the lenses provided by this vision, based on the view of the Qur'an as a source for method, law, knowledge, and the components of the Islamic civilizational and developmental witness. This may require that we rebuild and reformulate the required Qur'anic sciences while bypassing a good deal of the material we have inherited in this area. Arabs have tended to understand the Qur'an in light of the outward features which distinguished the Arab character of the past, which was limited socially and intellectually by comparison with the features that mark the civilizational makeup of today's world. During the time when the rhetorical and linguistic sciences were officially recorded, there was a trend toward atomization and observation of individual words or sentences in their capacity as the micro-units of expression. Hence, the understanding generated by these sciences was understandably viewed as acceptable and sufficient for that period of time. In fact, its rules are still useful and important when placed in their historical content. However, the current phase of history is dominated by the need for a more systematic perception of things and the search for the relationships which govern them in analytical, critical ways which make use of a variety of academic frameworks and link them with multifaceted civilization issues. Hence, there needs to be a reconsideration of the sciences and a search for ways of understanding, serving and reading the text which can be combined with the reading of the universe and a recognition of the interconnection between the created universe and the written Revelation. In this manner, the Qur'anic text can be freed from many types of interpretation, both literal and allegorical, which are based on projections influenced by folkloric myths, in favor of interpretations based on the powerful connection between the text and the causes and occasions of its Revelation.

Four: Constructing a method of dealing with the Sunnah based on this methodological vision, given that the Sunnah is likewise viewed as a means of clarifying method, law, knowledge, and the components of the civilizational and developmental witness which the Ummah is called upon to offer. The era of Prophethood and the generation during which the Companions lived depended upon direct contact with, observation and emulation of the Prophet. As the Prophet himself said, "Take your ceremonies and rituals of

worship from me,”²³ and, “Pray as you have seen me pray.”²⁴ Emulation depends, of course, on the practical actions taken by the Prophet in response to life’s realities. In his conduct, the Prophet fleshed out the Qur’an in real life, as a result of which no problems arose in connection with the Qur’an’s practical application. Rather, the Prophet’s manner of applying the Qur’an and of making its meaning clear, fully closed the gap between the components of the Qur’anic approach to life and the Arab-Islamic reality, together with the mindsets and intellectual and epistemological capabilities of those who experienced this reality, and the social and intellectual conditions and epistemological limits which applied to them. It is for this reason that the Companions who narrated the words and deeds of the Prophet took the greatest of care not to miss even the slightest particular of relevance to the Prophet’s life, since this was the only alternative to awareness of the Prophet’s overarching method of dealing with life’s varied questions. This is why the Sunnah includes such a phenomenally large number of the Prophet’s sayings and actions, and why we have received all of these details enabling us to follow his daily movements, morning and evening, in peacetime and war, in his teaching, judicial decrees, leadership and legal decisions, and humanitarian practices. It is these which reveal his approach to dealing with reality, that is, his Sunnah. In addition, the Sunnah serves to disclose the distinguishing characteristics of the reality with which the Prophet was dealing and in which he lived and moved. For it was a reality which differed significantly, in both its makeup and mentality, from the one in which we ourselves live. Even so, there was a constant emphasis upon the fact that the sole source and origin of legal rulings was the Qur’an and that the sole binding source of clarification of the Qur’an’s meaning was the Sunnah.

The Prophet in his Sunnah thus embodied the link between the Qur’anic method and reality. Consequently, it is difficult to understand many issues [connected with interpretation of the Qur’an and the Sunnah] in isolation from an understanding of the reality in which the Prophet lived. When, for example, he prohibited sculpting and visual representations, declaring that those who engage in such activities will be the most grievously chastised on the Day of Resurrection, this prohibition should not be understood as a prophetic position since it is in conflict with the attitude taken by the prophet Solomon, who used to recruit the jinns to produce whatever statues he wished to have. Nor should it be understood in the framework of the ques-

tions and arguments raised by our contemporaries on this subject. After all, we have no desire, or even inclination, to worship such three-dimensional objects. Hence, why should they be forbidden to us? Nor should the solution be sought in isolated legal decisions which permit one kind of statue and forbid another. Rather, a more systematic position may be arrived at, one to which the Prophet referred in numerous situations, as when he stated, "If your people [O ʿĀʾishah] had not just recently emerged from a time of unbelief, I would do such-and-such and such-and-such..."²⁵ Hence, the controversy is settled without being allowed to lead to a discussion of the authority of the Sunnah itself, because in the framework of this epistemological method, the Sunnah is not simply scattered particulars unconnected by any methodological link, but, rather, a set of systematic rules which provide a model that facilitates emulation of the Prophet.

Given this model, it may be said that the Prophet was striving to do away completely with the manufacture and promotion of idols among people for whom idol worship was still a recent memory. For this reason, he could not afford to be lenient in connection with anything which had even the slightest potential of undermining the abstractness of monotheism. Under such circumstances, his uncompromising position was a necessity. We now need to arrive at a method capable of regulating and lending order to such issues, and to view them from an epistemological perspective which places hadiths in the realm of methodology and systematic understanding. For the alternative is to deal with them in the realm of conflicting particulars which are frequently turned by those who disagree with each other into specific statements or legal decisions which communicate opposing messages, as though they were the pronouncements of imams representing different schools of jurisprudence.

During the phase in which the Qur'an was being revealed, the Arabs became familiar with the concept of emulating [the Prophet] based on the details and particulars of his words, deeds and decisions. They took the Prophet as a practical model to be emulated in keeping with the actual conditions of their lives. Through this understanding of the concept of emulation, there emerged the notions of *al-ma'thūr* and *al-manqūl*, that is, what has been passed down from one generation to the next in our textual tradition. Then, in an attempt to alleviate the [potentially regressive] effects of these notions, some thinkers resorted to esoteric, symbolic interpretations as a means of avoiding the necessity of adhering to the literal meaning of transmitted say-

ings. However, the effect of such measures was simply to confuse matters even further. What they should have done was to discern the prophetic, Qur'anic method as a means of lending order to all subordinate details and particulars, clarifying the intents and purposes [of the texts in question] and propagating a universal, intention-based understanding of them.

The contemporary mindset is in constant search of an objective framework which lends order to affairs. In doing so, it seeks to arrive at a full-dimensioned methodology on the basis of which analysis, criticism and interpretation become an objective framework for the intellectual movement in its dealings with cosmic and local issues. With such a methodology, it is possible to penetrate to the intents of the Qur'an in such a way that the Sunnah may be understood without falling back on esoteric interpretations, a static frame of reference which cancels out the law of historical evolution, or inadequate attempts at reform which attempt to introduce modifications or past applications which simply reproduce such applications in the present without any essential change, as though they were an expression of the past decked out in new attire and adorned with newfangled terms and titles.

Five: Reexamining our Islamic legacy by means of a critical, analytical and epistemological reading which frees us from the three loops which govern the ways in which we relate to our legacy at the present time: (1) total rejection, (2) total acceptance, and (3) selective, arbitrary eclecticism. None of these three loops is capable of achieving continuity with those aspects of this legacy which need to be preserved, nor can it achieve the needed epistemological break with those aspects with which such a break needs to be made.

Six: Constructing a method for dealing with the contemporary human heritage in a way which frees the Muslim mind from its current approaches. For such approaches grow out of attempts to approximate and endorse the thought of the Other as a distinctive, separate centrality, followed by comparisons with this same system of thought which have led either to its complete rejection, its unconditional, unquestioning acceptance, or haphazard picking and choosing devoid of any sort of method or methodology.

These six steps, focal points or tasks are what we have referred to variously as the Islamization of knowledge, the monotheistic epistemological method, the Islamization of the social sciences and the humanities, steering the natural sciences in an Islamic direction, and/or the Islamic grounding of the sciences. For the first time, Muslims are faced with a worldwide positivism which is

working to employ knowledge, the sciences and their discoveries and achievements in a manner which severs the relationship between the Creator, the created universe and man, thereby disregarding the world of the unseen and driving a wedge between science and values. Such an endeavor poses conceptualizations of the universe which appear to be diametrically opposed to our Islamic perspective. Such conceptualizations may or may not be as they appear. However, the issue is not for us to reject these conceptualizations, branding them as unbelief; nor is it to choose from among our religious sayings that which happens to be consistent with such conceptualizations so that we can say: This already exists in our tradition. For our basic attitude toward the natural sciences has not been theological or sacerdotal in nature. Nor are we required to emulate others, whose experience in confronting science and its achievements differs from ours. If the Qur'an were theological and sacerdotal in nature, it would only allow for the reading of a single dimension of reality, that is, the metaphysical dimension. However, we have been commanded to approach reality in a different way. We are not waging war on science, since we realize that the Revelation found in the Qur'anic universe, as it were, is likewise the revelation found in the natural universe. Hence, if distortions appear and are attributed to science, our job is to not to abandon science but, rather, to purge it of such distortions. Similarly, if [unsound] interpretations of the revealed text appear, we have no choice but to refute the forgeries of falsifiers and extremist distortions which the ignorant have read into the text. This is the foundation for bringing knowledge and the sciences together and linking them to the Qur'anic epistemological methodology. The abstract positivistic thought which confronted religion in the past was not armed with the contemporary applied sciences, the results of which have led to the establishment of schools of thought which go beyond traditional positivism. Thus, what is required of us is to reclaim science by purging it of loyalties to this or that school of thought and by putting it to use anew based on combined readings of the written Revelation and the created universe.

The Third Focal Point: Science and Knowledge

Among Muslims, the concept of science has always been associated with reading. Before the Qur'an, the Arabs were an unlettered people who had no book, and it was through the Qur'an that they made their first advances

toward science and knowledge. Similarly, the Qur'an was the means by which they gained access to the 'reading' which was revealed with the first words of the Qur'an: "Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell. Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, Who has taught the use of the pen – taught man what he did not know!"²⁶ These verses from the Qur'an contain a number of essential points. First, they contain a command to read, while affirming the link between science and the pen. They make clear that the source of science is God, that the command to read is addressed to human beings whom God created from a germ-cell, and that it is part of human beings' nature not to know until God teaches them. Moreover, the reading which human beings are commended to engage in is a reading in the name of God. This reading proceeds in God's presence until it arrives at a science which can be recorded with the pen and thereby transferred to lines on paper and disseminated among people. The term 'reading' must likewise be recognized as broad enough to include both that which is written in a book and that which is manifested in the created universe; the words of the Qur'an are read, and so are the horizons of the cosmos. These two readings are inseparable, and out of this inseparability there arise sciences and various realms of knowledge, experimentation and experience which serve as the basis for development, prosperity and the civilization of faith. This is the kind of inclusive reading which leads to beneficial science and indispensable knowledge. Hence, if the reading is altered, it loses its epistemological value and its scientific effects. It was clear in the days of the Companions and in the first generation of Islam that the fundamental purpose of reading is to build up a scientific, epistemological mindset and to provide both the authoritative framework required by such a mindset and the scientific model which can, by means of independent reasoning and creativity, generate what people need by way of sciences and fields of learning. Moreover, such sciences are based on texts which, although they contain a limited number of words, are nevertheless capable of encompassing an untold number and variety of events, situations and problems and, indeed, the entire universe.

Those who lived in the early days of Islam also understood that 'science' is that which has been uttered by God and the Prophet. The Islamic sciences are tied to the [revealed] texts, which are absolute and sacred. However, the human beings who deal with such texts are finite creatures. Consequently,

their understanding cannot be described as absolute or sacred. The text is a linguistic vehicle for the words of God, in order that these words might become divine discourse addressed to people in need of insight, understanding, explanation and rules capable of regulating such understanding and explanations. It was within this framework that there emerged what are known as the Islamic sciences. The first of these to emerge were the sciences of intents (*‘ulūm al-maqāsid*): Qur’anic hermeneutics, hadith, doctrine (or scholastic theology), the sources [of Islamic law], and jurisprudence. These were followed by sciences that dealt with the means by which knowledge is acquired and conveyed (*‘ulūm al-wasā’i*), including linguistics, logic and the like. In the beginning, such sciences were fragmented and were circulated orally and memorized. Efforts at compilation and recording were limited at first to the Sunnah, which was compiled in 99 AH on orders from the Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, although some recording of the Sunnah had taken place prior to this on a small scale.

As for when recording began on a wide scale, al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī dates it to the year 143 AH.²⁷ Hadith scholars restricted the concept of knowledge (*‘ilm*) to hadith narratives, Qur’anic interpretation and other such sciences which later came to be known as the Islamic textual sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-shar‘īyah* or *al-naqlīyah*). These scholars included within this concept all passages from the Qur’an and the Sunnah which urge us to pursue knowledge (*‘ilm*) and learning (*ta‘allum*) or expound on its virtues and associated rules of etiquette, while excluding everything else.

Scholastic theology and the science of the fundamentals of jurisprudence began to spread and were infiltrated by statements derived from logic (translated from other languages). Hence the concept of *‘ilm* began to take on an additional dimension in the thinking of these scholars. They did not censure those who applied the term *‘ilm* to the various branches of knowledge having to do with a single topic which raises questions, ramifies into branches and has an associated purpose and benefit, including, for example, the disciplines of hadith and Qur’anic exegesis. At the same time, they began to draw a link between the concept of *‘ilm* and the degree of one’s perception or understanding on one hand, and knowledge (*ma‘rifah*), the means by which it is acquired, and the methods by which it is generated on the other. Once this link had been forged, they sometimes referred to the latter (*ma‘rifah*) as *‘ilm*, and at other times did not. Scholastic theologians disagreed sharply over how

to define the concept of *‘ilm*. In fact, Imam al-Rāzī and others rejected the notion of defining the concept to begin with, saying, “It is intuitive, and cannot be defined.” Al-Shawkānī compiled a large selection of definitions of *‘ilm* taken from the writings of later scholars of the fundamentals of jurisprudence. By noting the names of the scholars associated with these definitions and the times during which they lived, one can learn a great deal about the development in their understanding and the observations they made in their use of the term. Most later scholars eventually agreed to define the term *‘ilm* as, “a definitive, fixed perception which conforms to reality based on evidence.”

As for the term *ma‘rifah*, some have held that it is equivalent to *‘ilm*, while others have held that they are different. The reason for this is that *ma‘rifah* may be preceded by ignorance, *‘ilm* cannot. It is for this reason that we may refer to God as ‘Knowing’ with the term *‘ālim*, but not with the term *‘ārif*. In addition, *‘ilm* has to do with attribution, or placing one thing in relation to another, as a result of which the verb *‘alima* can take two direct objects.²⁸ However this is not true of the verb *‘arafa*, which can only take one direct object, as in the statement *‘araftu zaydan*, “I knew (or recognized) Zayd.”

In spite of this, however, the words *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* may sometimes be used interchangeably. Hence, in logic either of them can be used to refer to a comprehensive understanding of conceptualization and rational assent. And it is in this last sense that the words *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* are used in the definitions of the recorded sciences.

Al-Jurjānī attempted a brief overview of the most important classifications and divisions of *‘ilm* by his predecessors. According to al-Jurjānī, *‘ilm* is divided into two categories, eternal (*qadīm*) and time-bound (*ḥadīth*). Eternal *‘ilm* is that which has existed for all eternity in the Divine Essence, and which cannot be likened to the time-bound sciences of man. As for time-bound *‘ilm*, it is divided into three sub-categories, intuitive or self-evident, necessary, and deductive.

According to Imam al-Ghazālī, the sciences (*al-‘ulūm*, plural of *‘ilm*) belong to one of two categories: legal, and non-legal. The legal sciences are those whose content has been derived from the prophets and which cannot be arrived at through human reason, experience or hearing. As for the non-legal sciences, they are divided into the categories of praiseworthy, blame-worthy, and permissible.

Ibn Taymiyyah categorizes the sciences into three groups: (1) rational sci-

ences, that is those which deal with topics of concern to philosophers such as the sciences of logic, the natural [sciences] and theology. Consequently, such philosophers include both believers [in God] and those who associate partners with Him; (2) confessional sciences, that is those that deal with questions of scholastic theology such as proofs for the existence of the Creator, proofs of prophethood, and proofs of the divine laws, etc.; and (3) Islamic legal sciences, that is those that deal with questions of concern to scholars of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Ibn Taymiyyah's disciple Ibn al-Qayyim introduced still other divisions, saying that *'ilm* is the act of transferring an image of the entity known from the objective realm to a person's psyche, and that if the image impressed into the person's psyche conforms to the reality in itself, it may be said to be sound *'ilm*. It often happens that images which are presented to and instilled in the psyche have no true existence; even so, they are believed by the person who has established them in his or her mind to be true *'ilm* when, in fact, they are nothing but suppositions with no reality. Most of what people take to be true sciences are actually of this type. As for those aspects of such sciences which do correspond to objective reality, they may be divided into two types: (1) the type of *'ilm* which brings one's soul to completion, as in the case of the knowledge of God, His names, attributes, actions, books, commands and prohibitions, and (2) the type of *'ilm* which does not contribute to the soul's perfection or completeness. This type includes every type of knowledge which does not bring benefit to the knower nor harm if one is ignorant of it. The Prophet used to pray for God to deliver him from knowledge which brings no benefit. However, most valid, truthful human sciences – such as astronomy, knowledge of the number of celestial bodies and their extent in space and time, knowledge of the number of mountains in the world, their arrangements, their locations, etc. – entail knowledge of things which it would do no harm to be ignorant of. The dignity or worth which attaches to a given type of knowledge is derived from the dignity or worth of the entity known and the urgency of the need which exists for it. No type of knowledge has unconditional worth or dignity but the knowledge of God and what follows from it.

As for those who were known as the 'philosophers of Islam' such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and others who engaged in similar investigations, most of their classifications of *'ilm*, despite differences in certain details, may

be summed up in the affirmation that the sciences belong to two fundamental categories, each of which itself branches into several types. The two fundamental categories of sciences are the theoretical sciences and the practical sciences, each of which comprises three subcategories. The theoretical sciences are divided into mathematics, natural science and theology, while the practical sciences are divided into ethics, home economics and civil administration.

Ibn Khaldūn divided the sciences into two categories. The first category is that of the philosophical and wisdom-related sciences. These are sciences which may be formulated by human beings. Led by their natural mental capacities and perceptive faculties, human beings are able to determine the topics and issues relevant to these sciences, the various aspects of the proofs which can be adduced in their support, and how to instruct others in them. Hence, through inquiry and research, human beings can develop the ability to distinguish error from truth within this realm in their capacity as rational creatures. The second category of sciences identified by Ibn Khaldūn comprises those which deal with Islamic law as established through Revelation and authoritative texts passed down through the Islamic tradition. All such sciences rest upon traditions passed down on the authority of the Prophet. As such, they leave no room for the exercise of human reason except insofar as reason plays a role in tracing subsidiary questions and issues to their roots or origins. The reason for this is that successive, time-bound particulars are not automatically included under universal authoritative textual traditions; rather, such traditions need to be applied to such particulars through the drawing of analogies. Ibn Khaldūn goes on to affirm that all of these Islamic legal sciences find their source in the legislative passages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, that is, what has been legislated for us by God and the Prophet, and whatever is related thereto by way of sciences which help put such legislation into effect, etc.

Ibn Khaldūn was succeeded by others who essentially held the same view of *ilm*, its essence and its related issues. They did not disagree with Ibn Khaldūn on the matter of research, which they saw as being little more than research into the subject of *ilm*, its classifications and its premises, in light of which one may discern its position and priority. All of this, moreover, serves as evidence of the fact that *ilm* is attributable to a single, isolated reading, namely, the reading of the text alone.

As for the reading of the cosmos and existence, it emerged in some branches of knowledge which gained recognition in light of the principle that, “Whatever is necessary in order for one to fulfill one’s unconditional obligations, and is within the individual’s capacity, is itself obligatory.” Such branches include, for example, astronomy, medicine, mathematics and some geometry and engineering. In addition, certain scholars gained prominence based on specific initiatives and unusual perspectives related to varied fields such as optics, medicine and the like, but which were not transformed into an epistemological system based on a systematic model. In his famed book, *Mawqif al-‘Aql wa al-‘Ilm wa al-‘Ālim min Rabb al-‘Ālamīn wa ‘Ibādihī al-Mursalīn* (The Attitude of Reason, Science and the Scientist Toward the Sustainer of All the Worlds and His Messengers), Mustafa Sabri uses the term ‘*ilm* to refer to that degree of *ma‘rifah* which is not subject to doubt, whether the source of certainty is sensory experience or faith in Divine Revelation. The sources of *ma‘rifah* are Divine Revelation and the created cosmos, while the means by which we access these sources are reason and sensory perception. Hence, whether man arrives at this certainty by means of revelation and the use of reason, or through direct observation and experience by means of sensory perception, all of this for man is a source of the tranquility borne of certainty. However, [if we are speaking of] complete certainty in and of itself, and within the psyche [of the knower], then it makes it difficult to apply the word ‘*ilm* as it has been defined by most Muslim scholars to anyone but God. For the ‘*ilm* of God is absolutely certain, whereas the *ma‘rifah* possessed by man and their perception of certainties, as well as other things, is influenced not by the certainty of the entity perceived but, rather, by their level of understanding. For if a human being fails to perceive something with complete certainty, this may [still] be referred to as ‘*ilm*; whereas if he or she perceives something based on reasonably certain evidence, it is referred to as a supposition (*ẓann*). If, by contrast, he or she perceives something as being true and there is evidence against it, this is ignorance (*jahl*), and if someone affirms with complete certainty that which we have referred to as ignorance, it is compound ignorance.

The concept of ‘*ilm* has been significantly influenced in the modern age by the dominant Western civilization and its concepts. Moreover, it is observed that despite the relativism which characterizes Western culture, and despite the fact that this culture derives from Western sources and is marked by

Western aims and concerns, it has, nevertheless, by virtue of its global hegemony, imposed itself on the world.

Influenced by the West's application of the term *‘ilm* to the natural sciences and what they require by way of experimentation, observation and testing, many have attempted to limit the term exclusively to direct, physical observations, empirically proven phenomena and their methods. It is in keeping with this attempt that UNESCO once defined the term *‘ilm* as "every known fact which is subject to sensory perception and experimentation." It has been noted by some that the term *‘ilm* in its broader sense may likewise be applied to any branch of knowledge which is characterized by a method and rules and which operates on the basis of a system. However, whoever desires precision must apply the term to empirical science alone.

Arabic authors continue to employ the term *‘ilm* with a variety of meanings, thereby reflecting the same inconsistency that Western thinkers do in their use of the term. Consequently, we find from time to time that this concept is raised anew for discussion, which in turn stimulates renewed controversy over its use. However, the situation today is not one of rivalry or conflict. Rather, it is a situation which requires that we be honest with ourselves in order to clarify our vision and the way ahead. No single, isolated reading will be sufficient to extricate humanity from its predicament.

The Islamization of knowledge is able to affirm that this old-new conflict over the concept of *‘ilm* and over which fields or entities may be referred to with this term, as well as the declared superiority of the empirical sciences and the battle for such superiority, are matters which should be excluded from Muslims' entire experience. For the Muslim experience is based on a combined reading of two sources of knowledge, the written Revelation and the created universe.

Moreover, the knowledge which is derived from these two sources is a knowledge which has been bestowed upon us by the All-Knowing, the All-Aware. It is God who established the unchanging laws on which the universe operates. As for materialistic conceptions of the universe, they disregard the Creator and the purposefulness of creation. As a result of this they view natural phenomena as independently existing events which develop and evolve of their own accord in such a way that they yield new forms without any intervention from a higher Power.

Bringing together the two readings – the reading of the written Reve-

lation and the reading of the universe – confers honor upon all forms of knowledge, since it views them as having been bestowed upon man by their Creator. As such, man can draw upon these forms of knowledge for aid and assistance, while benefiting from them in carrying out the task which God has entrusted to him. Consequently, the Islamization of knowledge acknowledges no conflict between knowledge taken from the written Revelation and that taken from the universe. Nor does it turn these forms of knowledge into competing dualities, each of which attempts to demonstrate its superiority over the other. On the contrary, ‘Islamization’ here means disengaging human scientific achievement from positivistic philosophical premises and re-employing these sciences within a systematic epistemological framework based on Divine Revelation.

The Islamization of knowledge thus means the Islamization of the applied sciences and scientific rules based on an appreciation of the similarity and correspondence between the patterns which reveal themselves in these sciences and their laws, and those that reveal themselves in the cosmos and its laws, then using them to achieve the divine intents. In addition, it concerns itself with the Islamization of the social sciences, which includes the Islamization of the philosophical premises of scientific theories by ridding them of the positivistic dimension which pays no heed to the Creator and denies the world of the unseen. Hence, the Islamization of knowledge strives to reformulate these branches of knowledge and to place them in a cosmic perspective by linking them to the divine purpose for the entire creation. It follows, then, that in this phase, the Islamization of knowledge has no need to affirm the scientific nature of Revelation and the non-scientific nature of other sources of knowledge; nor does it need to do the reverse, by affirming the scientific nature of knowledge that derives from sensory perception and experience and denying the scientific nature of what arises from other sources.

The Islamization of knowledge does not preoccupy itself with stirring up controversy in particular areas of academic research. It attempts to encompass all areas of knowledge in a systematic epistemological formulation by means of which it can deal with the various forms of knowledge, laws and research methods based on the dual reading of the universe and Revelation. Hence, it does not seek simply to put a religious label on human knowledge in order to give it a phony legitimacy or to bolster its own power or prestige in one way or another.

The Islamization of knowledge movement considers the present time to be an advanced phase in which Muslims must transcend the mindset of approximations which prevailed in the last century, as well as the mindset of comparisons which still prevails in some locations. Hence, it is now seeking to undertake a radical review of human knowledge as a whole, be it traditional or contemporary. Such a review will render Islamic thought, with its Qur'anic epistemological methodology, capable of offering the methodological criteria needed to regulate all of human thought by providing it with clear limits, yet without being preoccupied with issues of compromise, moderation or conflict. Humanity is in need of an epistemological methodology which emerges directly from both Revelation and the created universe, and which is capable of providing man with the knowledge he needs in order to carry out the task of being God's vicegerents on earth, to bear the trust he has been given, and to offer the civilizational witness which God has commanded him to.

The Fourth Focal Point: Culture and Civilization

The Arabic word translated as 'culture' (*thaqāfah*) is derived from the verb *thaqafa*, which conveys the sense of being skillful, clever, understanding and mastering something's content, and undertaking or achieving something. It can also convey the sense of being perspicacious, intelligent, and confident in one's knowledge of what one needs, and refining, modifying, straightening or correcting something which is warped or crooked.

Based on the aforementioned meanings, Nasr Muhammad Arif²⁹ has summarized the essence and dimensions of the concept of 'culture' as it is used in its original Arabic context:

One: The concept of 'culture' in Arabic is not imported from some external source, but arises from the human essence. The word 'culture' refers to the purification, refinement and correction of inborn human nature when it has been warped in some way. It is the process of inducing it to express the meanings which are inherent within it and release its potentials and energies in order to bring forth the types of knowledge which human beings need.

Two: The concept of 'culture' in Arabic includes the notion of searching in order to arrive at truth, goodness and justice, and in order to apply those values which will improve human existence by refining and straightening in it whatever is crooked. It is, therefore, a concept which opens the human

mind to all forms of beneficial knowledge and science, yet without introducing those types of knowledge, science or values which corrupt human existence and are inconsistent with the requirements of refinement, education, adjustment and correction.

Three: It focuses not on knowledge and sciences in an unrestricted sense but, rather, on the knowledge which human beings need in accordance with their environmental and societal conditions. As Ibn Manẓūr notes, “He’s a lad who is quick to understand and clever (*thaqif*), that is, perspicacious and intelligent, by which I mean to say that he knows clearly what he needs.” By linking the concept of culture (*thaqāfah*) to the social context in which a person lives, this statement frees it from criteria or standards which classify cultures on the basis of how they compare with a specific culture which is held up as the norm for all. Such measures of culture are based on a patronizing, self-satisfied attitude and the belief in the right to impose one’s standards on others when dealing with other cultures. As enshrined in its original use in Arabic, the term ‘cultured’ (*muthaqqaf*) refers to anyone who has a clear knowledge of what he needs in his own particular age, time, society and environment. Consequently, the cultured person is one who is powerfully connected to his or her own society and its problems regardless of the quantity of knowledge and information he or she happens to have accumulated. After all, as Malik Bin Nabi remarks, such knowledge and information might embody ideas which are dead, or even deadly.

Hence, what is meant by ‘culture’ is the realization of the nature of society’s issues and problems and what is capable of improving and reforming it. This being the case, the function of the ‘cultured’ individual is to manage life and move society in the direction of empowerment, benefit and the improvement of people’s conditions. Such a person’s role is that of a reformer, or, as [Antonio] Gramsci put it, that of the organic intellectual who is intimately connected to his own social model and its issues. If, on the other hand, we employ the term ‘culture’ to refer to knowledge, customs, values, etc., this may lead to the appearance of groups of intellectuals who may be adherents of another civilizational model which destroys the society in which they live for the sake of applying what they believe to be the Absolute Truth. This is done without understanding the circumstances of their society and what would truly reform it. Alternatively they may be intellectuals who are little more than receptacles for huge accumulations of conflicting knowledge and data.

Four: Culture is a continuously evolving process which never comes to an end. As such, it does not mean that a given society has developed the knowledge, sciences and values which place it at the top of the cultural ladder, or that a given society or individual has reached the ultimate goal. Rather, the concepts of refinement and correction mean self-renewal, that is, repeated refinement, self-examination, self-evaluation, and the correction of one's errors.

Five: The concept of culture does not entail value judgments which determine the quality of a given culture, that is, whether it is to be termed backward and barbaric, brutal and reactionary, advanced, modern and enlightened, etc. The reason for this is that the starting point for the concepts of refinement, improvement, enhancement, etc. is that all cultures, when judged in light of the values of their own societies and circumstances, are of equal human value.

Six: The concept of culture is not restricted or specialized. It is a general concept pertaining to individuals, groups and societies which includes all types of human practices and their varying degrees. It yields meaning on a variety of analytical levels so long as it recognizes the processes of refinement and correction in a sense which applies equally to all cultures everywhere.

Nasr has observed that Ibn Khaldūn's use of the term *ḥadārah* (civilization), was consistent with the roots of the European concept. Arab researchers then stopped at the meanings which Ibn Khaldūn had associated with the term, despite the fact that Ibn Khaldūn had not been discussing civilization as a universal, all-inclusive concept which provides an overall framework for human movement and development and which imbues them with specific value-related features. Rather, Ibn Khaldūn's use of the term is consistent with the intellectual edifice which he constructs in *al-Muqaddimah* and his discussion of the evolution of the state and its various phases. It will also be observed here that Ibn Khaldūn was not speaking of the state in its contemporary sense (government). Rather, he was using the term 'state' to refer to what might be termed social contracts, social systems, the process by which power is passed down and transferred, or the succession of ruling families. Consequently, his use of the term 'civilization' was limited solely to the meaning derived from residing in a metropolis rather than in the desert.

The point of ambiguity here arises not from Ibn Khaldūn's use of the

term. Rather, it arises from the fact that Arab researchers had extracted meanings derived from the concept of ‘civilization’, on the basis of which they formed a mental picture which was associated in their minds with particular nuances. They then referred to Ibn Khaldūn or to classic Arabic dictionaries with sole emphasis on the sense of residence in urban areas to the exclusion of all other uses of the word. Their appeal to Ibn Khaldūn was, thus, not for the purpose of searching out the true meaning of the concept by allowing Arabic to speak for itself and listening to all the various significations of its concepts. Rather, it signaled a desire to find an Arabic counterpart to meanings which had become firmly entrenched in their minds, and to justify their own preconceived understanding of the concept.

It will be observed that *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, *Asās al-Balāghah* and other Arabic lexicons list seven meanings for the term *ḥaḍārah*. The first, most general and most frequently used meaning points to the use of *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of *shahida*, that is, presence as opposed to absence, and the term *ḥaḍārah*, in the sense of *shahādah*, or ‘witness.’

This is virtually always the first use mentioned in Arabic dictionaries, as though it were the origin of the concept’s use, or a companion to the term *ḥaḍar*. In spite of this, however all of those who went back to the linguistic origin of the term searched for *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of residence in the metropolis, or the opposite of nomadic existence. Even if such researchers encounter the first meaning and make use of it, they are quickly sidetracked in the direction of other meanings of ‘civilization.’ We find one of them, for example, defining *ḥaḍārah* as follows: “The term *ḥaḍārah* is derived from the verb *ḥaḍārah/yaḥḍuru*, meaning to come, or be present. We may say, for example, that so-and-so has come, or presented himself (*ḥaḍārah*) in order to work with others so as to enjoy their companionship and to provide companionship for others. In doing so, he helps to fulfill the conditions necessary for him to experience dignity. Hence, the term *mutaḥaḍḍir*, or ‘civilized’, applies to every society which respects human dignity and embodies this dignity in the transactions among its members. Civilization, *ḥaḍārah*, is likewise a heritage shared by all peoples, ancient and modern. As such, it is a human heritage which is in a process of uninterrupted development, like a sea into which many tributaries are constantly emptying, these tributaries being the many and various national cultures.”

Based on the root *ḥaḍārah* in the sense of witnessing, that is, being present as

opposed to being absent, we may search for the Qur'anic meanings of this concept. We find that the word *ḥaḍāra* in the Qur'an bears the same meaning as *shahida*, to witness, see, attend or be present at. For example, the phrases: "when death approaches (*ḥaḍāra*) any of you...",³⁰ "and when [other] near of kin and orphans and needy persons are present at (*ḥaḍāra*) the distribution [of inheritance]...",³¹ and, "whoever witnesses (*shahida*) this month...",³² all of which convey the sense of *shahādah*, or presence.

The concept of *shahādah* in the Qur'an has four complementary meanings which unite to convey the meaning of *ḥaḍārah* in Islamic understanding. These meanings cannot be separated from one another; otherwise, their true content is lost. Each of these four meanings makes up part of the structure of the concept of *ḥaḍārah*; however, none of them by itself expresses the concept of *ḥaḍārah* in full. Instead they must all be present simultaneously in a single constellation or system in order to give the concept its complete meaning. These meanings are:³³

- 1) *Shahādah* in the sense of the affirmation of the divine unity and the acknowledgement of human beings as God's servants, as well as the acknowledgement of God as the Divine and Sovereign. This is the pivot upon which the Islamic creed turns, and the basis for the determination of whether or not human beings are adhering to God's way.
- 2) *Shahādah* in the sense of speaking the truth and treading the path of justice, demonstration and explication, knowledgeable reporting of events, or observation and scrutiny. This meaning may be viewed as one of the portals which leads into the realm of *ʿilm*, and one of the means by which *maʿrifah* may be obtained.
- 3) *Shahādah* in the sense of sacrifice, redemption, and offering oneself for the sake of God in order to preserve the Islamic creed and in defense of human beings' liberation from subservience to and the worship of other creatures in order to become servants and worshippers of God alone.
- 4) *Shahādah* as a function or duty of the Ummah: "And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you."³⁴

The meaning of the term *shahādah* applies both to this world and the next, since,

...the duty of *shahādah*, of being present and bearing witness, can only be fulfilled by the Ummah of the middle way, whose autonomous Islamic character refuses to be dissolved into any other entity or to lose the distinguishing features of its personality. Only by retaining its authentic character can the Ummah be a model to be emulated and followed by other nations. The first generation of Muslims realized that bearing witness to other nations requires that this Ummah be a liberated, and liberating, world power which is founded on justice and which applies justice in its dealings with its own citizens as well as others. Such an Ummah is one which protects the right of others to choose and their desire to establish a new society based on emancipation from the worship of creatures in order to worship God alone. Similarly, such a society frees people from the injustice of [man-made] religions in order for them to pursue the justice of Islam, and from the constriction of this earthly life in order to experience the expansiveness of both this life and the life to come.³⁵

In keeping with these four meanings, then, ‘civilization’, or *ḥaḍārah* is presence and bearing witness in all senses which give rise to a human model imbued with the values of monotheism and affirmation of God’s sovereignty. This model grows out of a metaphysical dimension coupled with the unity of the One who created the universe, established its laws and patterns, and controls its course. Seen within this framework, human beings’ role and mission is to live as vicegerents of God by populating, developing and improving His earth. They must purify people’s lives of all that is unworthy, empower them to exercise their full rights and prerogatives, benefit from its bounties and deal prudently with the natural resources which have been placed at their disposal. Man must build a relationship of peace with them based on the fact that they, too, are God’s creation which declare His praise, or sources of sustenance which must be preserved and maintained. Similarly, it is imperative that the Ummah establish relations with other human beings throughout the world based on brotherhood, harmony, the love of what is good, and the call for happiness both in this life and the next.

If this is the meaning of the concept of civilization as found in Islamic sources or, rather, in the Qur’an, and if this definition applies to the experience of Islam, then what view should be taken of the human experiences outside the Islamic framework? Does the same definition apply to them as well, despite the fact that they have not believed in Islam? Or are we to view

them as beyond the pale of civilization, as the European perspective views human experiences which differ from its own? In other words, is the aforementioned definition so particularistic that it cannot be applied to the human experiences of others? Moreover, can such a perspective be justified in light of our belief that Islam is the religion for all people and that it encompasses all cosmic phenomena without exception (“Nothing have we neglected in Our decree?”)?³⁶

As we have mentioned, the essence of the concept of civilization in Islam is presence and witnessing. This being the case, ‘civilization’ in the aforementioned sense is the civilization of Islam, or Islam’s presence in the universe. However, this does not mean that it is a ‘model of presence’ for all other experiences, religions and schools of thought. Rather, each of these experiences, religions, or ways of thinking has a presence of its own, however close to, or distant from, the Islamic presence it happens to be. Consequently, the concept of civilization in its general sense is simply the nature and type of presence which characterizes any human experience which has been able to formulate a human model for life in all its aspects and dimensions and which seeks to present this model to others in order for them to emulate it and proceed in accordance with its system of thought and values. In doing so, the civilization is acting on the belief that it is the human model which is most worthy of being adopted.

It follows from the foregoing that ‘presence’ (*hudūr*) represents an advanced stage in the experience of any society, since many human societies are limited to nothing but existence rather than going beyond this to ‘presence.’³⁷ Consequently, it is not possible to apply the term ‘civilization’ to them, no matter how extensive their intellectual and material production. Here the question arises: What is the difference between ‘presence’ and ‘existence’? How can one ascertain and evaluate the type of presence in this society or that? It might also be asked: Is ‘presence’ always a positive arrangement which is suited to human life? Is the concept of civilization in this sense always a positive characteristic or an advanced stage in human life?

The establishment of any society calls for a network of values, standards, beliefs, ideas and modes of behavior, just as it also requires a set of inventions, tools, institutions, physical structures, arts, means of production and of making a living. These two aspects of a society indicate that it has achieved a type of prosperity and development. In other words, it has been able to populate

and develop the earth and to construct a human model upon it. However, this does not necessarily mean that it has created a civilization, since the mere establishment of prosperity in society means no more than mere existence, as in the cases of the models produced by China, the Mayas, the Incas, the Zulus, etc. The reason for this is that in addition to populousness, development and prosperity, 'presence' requires that a society offer humanity a model to emulate, that is, a pattern of relationships with other human beings, the universe, or the resources therein which God has placed at its disposal. It must present a model which it seeks to spread and to have others emulate, regardless of the content of this model.

Far from projecting any positive value on the concept of civilization, the models just described might actually be negative or destructive, or at the very least, be unsuitable for human life. However, this need not prevent us from applying the term 'civilization' to them provided that they are characterized by the following:

- 1) A doctrinal system which determines the nature of the society's relationship to the metaphysical world and the concept of the divine, be it positive or negative.
- 2) An intellectual and behavioral structure which shapes the pattern of prevailing values, morals and customs.
- 3) Material arrangements which include inventions, machines, institutions, regulations, buildings, arts, and all other material aspects of life.
- 4) A definition of society's relationship with the universe, including its resources and the world of things, as it were, and rules for dealing with these resources and their associated values.
- 5) A means of defining the pattern of relating to other human societies, and the principles and rules guiding this relation, in addition to the approach to persuading them to accept this model and its purpose.

We may then proceed to define and evaluate human experiences and experiments, provided that they have gone beyond mere 'existence' to achieve 'presence'. For example contemporary Western civilization takes a specific attitude toward the metaphysical world and the divine. Similarly, it has an intellectual structure, values, and specified modes of behavior, a material structure with particular distinguishing characteristics, a pattern of relating to

the natural environment and other creatures, as well as a particular pattern of, and aims behind, relating to other non-European societies. Hence, if we want to describe Western civilization and to ascertain its true nature, we have no choice but to study its attitudes toward these various dimensions of existence. Consequently, we will be able to determine what model it is offering to humanity and make a decision as to whether it is fit to emulate or not. The same approach could be applied to any other human experiment as well.

From this it will become clear to us that it is not logically possible for there to be a single civilization with multiple tributaries unless this civilization is so clearly the best human model that all peoples on earth abandon their own inherited traditions and models and adopt it entirely. Similarly, competition or clashes among civilizations is a natural occurrence which is inevitable given the nature of human existence and its givens. After all, difference is a divine law of the universe. As God declares, “And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors....”³⁸ Nor may any given civilization assume automatically that it possesses a superior model for human beings. For the term ‘civilization’ does not imply a positive value in and of itself or a positive characteristic which can be attributed to objects and ideas. Rather, it is a neutral term whose content differs from one model of presence to another depending on the model’s particular components.

Given this point of departure, it is necessary to examine all human knowledge, sciences, methods, concepts and values. It is not logical to claim that the unity of human origins requires unity in human knowledge, sciences, methods and values, since this turns the sciences, concepts and methods of the predominant civilization into universal sciences, concepts and methods. The unity of human origins does not necessitate the unity of human sciences and knowledge, since human beings are not born with such sciences or knowledge. Rather, they acquire them through revelation and their interactions with the environment and society in the realm of time and space, as well as through the accumulation and inheritance of expertise: “And God has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds...”³⁹ Hearing, sight and the mind are the entry points for human knowledge, and it is through these entry points that we should reexamine and evaluate the concepts and methods in circulation among us in light of the model by means of which we hope to

achieve ‘presence’, and which is being proposed to humanity as a guide and source of inspiration.

This understanding of the concept of civilization gives every human experience its own uniqueness, distinctiveness and special flavor. No human experience may be viewed as superior to any other except on the basis of the model which it offers, the superior model being that which is in harmony with inborn human nature and which, for this reason, finds ready acceptance. It follows that the dominance of a particular human model over all others will not be possible so long as belief in this concept of civilization prevails. Moreover, it is of the utmost importance that there be a reconsideration of the validity and practicality of the sciences, methods and concepts which prevail in our contemporary world. Only in this way can we become properly acquainted with, and evaluate, contemporary civilizations and, based on this evaluation, determine what position Islamic civilization should take toward them.

The Fifth Focal Point: The Islamic and Human Heritage

Based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah, Muslims constructed sciences related to their understanding of these texts and what they derived therefrom. Hence, the entire tradition relating to Islamic jurisprudence and its fundamentals, scholastic theology, and Muslim civilization as a whole represent their understanding, interpretation and study of texts. This understanding and interpretation should be factors which serve to advance and edify Muslims in the process of epistemological evolution and continuity. However, some, by imbuing these components of the Islamic legacy with qualities similar to those of the Qur’an and the Sunnah, have turned them at times into factors which hinder and impede. Many students and professors who have dealt with this legacy have been of the belief that it is sufficient to reproduce what they need of it in modern terminology which students will find easy to understand. Indeed, beginning almost as early as the time when the Qur’an and the Sunnah were committed to writing, the bulk of this tradition began to be reproduced in the form of explanations, reports, and footnotes. Then came the era of professors’ reminders and synopses – our own era, that is. This phenomenon, however, is a dangerous one which sanctioned the mentality of imitation in the past, and continues to sanction it now.

It is for this reason that there is such a need to restudy and reinterpret our

Islamic legacy and to read it in a critical, analytical, knowledge-oriented manner, in order to free us from the three loops mentioned earlier and which, by and large, govern the ways in which we relate to our legacy at the present time: unconditional rejection, unconditional acceptance, and selective, arbitrary eclecticism. These three loops are incapable of achieving the knowledge-related evolution and continuity which are needed. All of the approaches which were employed of old and which are still being employed turn the Islamic legacy into a hindrance and impediment at the present time, as well as something which robs us of the future. However, through an appeal to the two sources of guidance, the Divine Revelation and the created universe, the re-reading of this tradition based on a sound epistemological methodology can help to free us from the grip of the three aforementioned loops. It will also actuate the authority of the Islamic epistemological system and methodology through an appeal to the two sources of guidance (the divine Revelation and the created universe). An appeal to these points of reference is essential when making judgments on issues relating to the Islamic legacy which may not be important for their own sake but, rather, due to the role they play in clarifying the methodology which determines how the Muslim mind relates to human phenomena and the rest of the created universe in different times. It also shows what such a methodology can reveal to us concerning contemporary phenomena. The reason for this is that the Islamic legacy is not mere thought abstracted from time and place; rather, like all human thought, it is restricted and qualified by virtue of the times and places in which it came into being and the human beings for whose sake it came into being. Since the Islamic legacy takes as its starting point an absolute, inspired text which transcends the limits of place and time, it follows that the proportion of truth which it contains will be greater than that found in thought which is divorced from Revelation. However, this does not grant it the same infallibility with which God has distinguished the Qur'an. Consequently, the Islamic legacy must be put in its proper place. It must be viewed as relative rather than as absolute, since it remains no more than ideas and treatments and explanations of a changing reality. We must seek to achieve specific aims through our understanding and rediscovery of our legacy. Specifically, we must seek to achieve continuity and accumulation, ascertain the method and epistemological models which govern our legacy, and benefit from the ideas and understandings therein which are valid and

useful for our own time and place.

The aforementioned approach likewise applies to the modern human heritage, and particularly the Western heritage. There is a need for a method of dealing with this legacy by means of which the Muslim mind can go beyond its currently prevailing approaches, which are holdovers from the attempts at approximation, comparison, then confrontation which led ultimately to either unconditional rejection or unconditional acceptance. It bears noting here that when the outcome was unconditional acceptance, it would either come about in a spirit of utter abnegation or be accompanied by a haphazard, pick-and-choose approach which was unguided by a disciplined methodology or by an epistemological reading which sought wisdom or sought to pass down authoritative texts in a conscious, purposeful manner. Such an acceptance did not reflect an awareness of the effect of civilizational and cultural differences on human knowledge.

In connection with each of these focal points, efforts need to be made to prepare one or more studies which would constitute a discourse addressed to all members of the Ummah. Such a discourse, would enable us to register an easily measurable achievement, and this in the following three ways: (1) by employing such a discourse to arouse the interest of the Ummah's intelligentsia, (2) by educating and preparing competent staff workers capable of registering genuine accomplishments, and (3) presenting cultural and epistemological material which the Ummah can deal with by means of all available educational and media tools, be they written or audio-visual.

Perhaps the most important ways of achieving the aforementioned are by:

- 1) Surveying, classifying, evaluating and critiquing the studies, research and textbooks which deal with these five focal points.
- 2) Selecting the best and most useful of such studies and textbooks.
- 3) Presenting written summaries of the materials selected.
- 4) Publishing outstanding studies of relevance.
- 5) Holding seminars and discussion groups.
- 6) Convening international seminars and publishing the results of the research presented.
- 7) Presenting lectures on these studies as a means of acquainting more people with them.
- 8) Inviting discussion of such studies through all available channels.

- 9) Observing the progress of the Ummah's interaction with such materials, then conducting ongoing review and evaluation.
- 10) Monitoring reactions and making plans suitable to each case.
- 11) Working to introduce such materials and studies into study methods and educational curricula.
- 12) Engaging in ongoing criticism and discussion of materials presented from an Islamic perspective in order to build up Muslims' critical sense, while excluding materials which are superficial in nature, even if they happen to be described as 'Islamic.'

We must realize, of course, that our job is not to carry out all these tasks ourselves, since this would undoubtedly be beyond our capacity. Rather, we must bring the issue of the Islamization of knowledge to the attention of the Ummah and the educated members thereof, and to make it their issue. As for our role, it may be summed up as follows:

- 1) To crystallize and clarify our cause, detailing its various aspects.
- 2) To present detailed models which will prevent the cause we are seeking to serve from foundering on the rocks of rejection and protect it from neglect due to its ambiguity; from failure due to superficiality; and from ineffectiveness resulting from the cause's having been presented in an overly vague or generalized fashion.
- 3) To monitor, investigate, analyze, interpret, guide, criticize, evaluate and correct.
- 4) To build up staff and support bases in universities and other cultural institutions by intensifying efforts and fostering connections in these contexts.
- 5) To engage in consciousness-raising with respect to various aspects of the plan and means of carrying it out; then present the plan to those with the capacity to execute it, offer them assistance, and observe and correct their work in order for it to fulfill the plan's purposes.

In this way, we take on the role of catalysts in relation to the cause. We assist rather than imposing burdens. We help rather than providing funds. We direct rather than expending our own efforts on details, thereby exhausting our resources. We criticize and evaluate, direct and bring together, and produce fundamental entities in relation to these focal points which ordinary

individuals would not be able to produce. Moreover, it may be helpful to do the following:

- 1) Prepare studied, detailed work papers on each of the aforementioned focal points in order to hold a series of relevant seminars and study courses in every Islamic country in which the IIIT has an office, representative, or cooperating agencies, organizations or individuals. Such seminars could be followed by international seminars for the purpose of achieving a kind of production capable of stimulating greater awareness within the Ummah of the crisis which it faces.
- 2) Publish suitable results in a timely fashion in order to create the needed accumulations in all possible channels.
- 3) Intensify communication with leading academic, intellectual and cultural figures and officials in universities and other educational institutions, and direct their attention to these focal points.
- 4) Establish close ties with university department heads and professors teaching in graduate programs, present ideas, academic initiatives, plans and projects, and invite such individuals to adopt them.
- 5) Contact graduate students and offer suggestions as to possible academic projects of relevance to these focal points.
- 6) Create distinguished social science libraries capable of attracting academic resources in every country.
- 7) Create a significant number of Masters and Ph.D. degree programs relevant to the aforementioned focal points and promote such plans in the appropriate departments.
- 8) Select the research projects necessary to crystallize these focal points, prepare relevant academic plans and work papers, and award suitable grants to those who choose to write on these subjects.

These are the focal points and approaches which we believe are necessary for the renewal of contemporary Islamic discourse in a manner which allows such discourse to contribute to the reform of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge.

For the first time, Muslims are faced with a worldwide positivism which is working to use knowledge, the sciences and their discoveries and achievements in a manner which severs the relationship between the Creator, the created universe and man, thereby disregarding the world of the unseen and driving a wedge between science and values.

Lacking even the most modest store of vital Islamic doctrine on the intellectual level, university students and researchers in the Islamic world are confronted with doctrines and philosophies which are presented to them together with a flimsy, miserable defense of Islam. There is not a single academic institution in the Islamic world in which Islamic thought is taught and in which the Islamic vision is given a deep-rooted foundation with the same force and persuasiveness with which Western ideas and the Western vision are taught to students in the West, in a coherent, comprehensive manner accompanied by seriousness and commitment on the part of all.

The book argues that this approach is diametrically opposed to the Islamic perspective and that we must disengage human scientific achievement from positivistic philosophical premises and reemploy these sciences within a systematic epistemological framework based on divine revelation, conferring honor upon all forms of knowledge, as having been bestowed upon man by their Creator.

TAHA JABIR AL-ALWANI

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