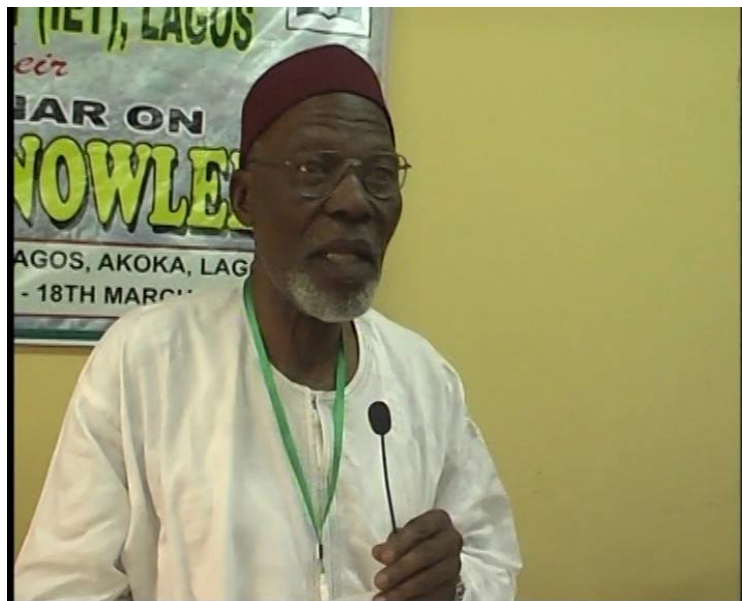


ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE: AN OVERVIEW

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE SEMINAR ON ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE SOUTH WEST OF NIGERIA

BY

Professor Dawud O. S. Noibi



**Executive Secretary
of the
Muslim *Ummah* of South West Nigeria
(MUSWEN)**

The challenge

As Muslims, we believe that Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is the Source of all true knowledge. In this regard, the rhetoric question coming from Allah (swt) Himself comes to mind:

“How could it be that He Who has created (all) should not know (all)...” (Qur’an 67:14). He taught the first man, Adam, the *“names (of) all (things)”* (Qur’an 2:31) thus raising him above the angels by a dint of the knowledge which was bestowed on him. Subsequently, He taught the descendants of Adam the use of the pen and the ability to access knowledge and disseminate it, thus teaching humanity what they did not know (Qur’an 96:1 – 5).

The knowledge that was so bestowed on man was meant to enable him to function as the vicegerent, trustee of Allah on earth (Qur’an 2:30; 6:165; 27:62). He is

required to use that knowledge in fulfilling that function of *Khilāfah* (vicegerency) as well as the purpose of ‘*ibadah* for which he was created: “*And I have created the Jinn and human for no purpose other than to worship/serve Me*” (Qur’an 51:56).

The obvious implication of this is that knowledge that man is required to use in fulfilling that task and thus reciprocate the Creator’s kind gesture must be in accord with the purpose set by the Giver and the guidance coming from Him. Conversely, it is that kind of knowledge that enables man to appreciate the greatness and wisdom of the Creator and the need to adhere strictly to that guidance coming from Him (Qur’an 35:28).

It means, therefore, that any approach to knowledge which does not recognize the aforementioned facts is a huge challenge to a Muslim and the Muslim *Ummah*. The challenge would be much greater and too daunting if such approach frontally challenges the divine authority.

The Western education curriculum which is dominant even in the Muslim world in modern times is, as is well known, secular. Its philosophical basis is the humanist outlook on life. It assumes that man is sovereign, so the source of knowledge is human reason and experience. According to this philosophy, man’s freedom of thought and expression respects no limits; so spiritual truth has no relevance to it. This naturalist outlook pervades all fields of education including the social and natural sciences. It teaches that man should order his social, economic and political life as it suits him without reference to any spiritual ethics. And, in the field of the natural sciences, it is as if “nature” is the “artist” itself and not “the work of art”.

Re-Islamization

The challenge that this approach to knowledge constitutes for the Muslim *Ummah* was further facilitated and strengthened by the long period of stagnation that the *Ummah* experienced following the era of intellectual advancement. Yet, the consciousness of the Islamic identity was not entirely dead in the *Ummah*. While appreciating the products of the intellectual activities of the West, elements within the *Ummah* felt the need to synthesize the Islamic belief system and worldview with the products of the Western intellectual efforts. The effect of the synthesis would be the removal of the dualism of the sacred and secular on which the Western education curriculum is based. That would be a starting point for re-uniting the sacred with all human endeavours through education as envisioned for mankind by Allah.

The end-product would be the evolving of a scientific method that does not violate Islamic ethical norms as well as the re-emergence of an all-embracing social system, which does not allow a dichotomy between religious ethics on the one hand and the rest of human concerns on the other. That would pave way for the ideal situation envisaged by Islam, where knowledge, curiosity and power are led by spiritual

ethics and the resultant curtailment of those scientific and professional activities that offend Islamic ethics. In summary, the Islamization of education phenomenon is the attempt by Muslims to “adapt foreign science” into the Islamic paradigm of worldview. That is in line with the saying of the Prophet(s) to the effect that wisdom and knowledge are the lost property of a Muslim which he should pick up wherever he finds it.

Proponents of the Islamization process

Prominent among Muslim scholars who have led the proposition and process of Islamization is the Malaysian scholar Professor Sayed Muhammad Naquib Attas, author of *Islam and Secularism* (1978) in which the term, “Islamization of knowledge” was first used. He was soon followed by the famous Palestinian Muslim philosopher and scholar, Professor Isma‘il Raji Al-Fārūqī who also proposed the term in 1982 just four years before he was assassinated. Another was Professor Sayyed Hassan Nasr who focused on the interpretation of the terms *Khalīfah* and *Khilāfah* in relation to man’s obligation to respect ethical values in the course of the pursuit of knowledge. Others include Najatullah Siddiqi who focused specifically on Islamic economics and Dr. Nasmi Butt with whom I worked in the United Kingdom on the integration of Islamic teachings into the Science curriculum for the British GCSE class.

Methodology

For Naquib Attas, Islamization of knowledge is about the liberation of man from those traditions that were based on magic, mythology, animism or national culture that are opposed to Islamic teachings. It is also about liberating the *Ummah* from the control of secularism over reason and language. The process proposed by him is one of de-westernization, that is, the isolation of key concepts and elements that make up western culture from every branch of knowledge considered relevant today. This would be followed by the infusion of Islamic concepts and elements.

The style and language employed by Prof. Al-Faruqi were slightly different. He viewed the Islamization of knowledge as recasting knowledge as Islam relates to it. That is to say, it “re-defines and re-orders data, and involves the review of the reasoning process in relation to the data and the re-evaluation of the conclusions and re-projecting the goals – and doing all of those in such a way as to make the disciplines enrich the Islamic horizon and serve the cause of the Islamic ideals.

He had argued that using the Western scholars’ “tools, categories, concepts and modes of analysis leads to a disconnect with the ecological and social reality of the Muslim nations” as well as a total inability to notice the violation of the ethics of Islam. He therefore, proposed the restoration of *Ijtihād* and the integration of the scientific method within Islamic limits.

To accomplish the Islamization project, three main components must be involved:

1. The modern disciplines of knowledge must be mastered with their methodologies and theories and research findings critically assessed – all within the guidance of Islamic teachings;
2. This presumes a mastery of the Islamic legacy including basic Islamic values as well as the critical assessment of the Islamic scholarship;
3. There must be a creative synthesis of the Islamic legacy and the modern corpus of knowledge. This will bring about a creative leap “to bridge over the gap of centuries of non-development”, stagnation.

So, the foundation of the methodology of all serious efforts towards Islamization of knowledge lies in a well-researched and clearly understood Islamic perspective on human nature. This involves a comprehensive account of how Islam views the Supreme Being (God), man, society and the universe.

The process will involve the following:

- (i) identifying the passages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah that pertain to the subject under study as well as the accepted interpretation of same.
- (ii) carefully researching the works of Muslim scholars, past and present, which deal with the subject matter. The main focus of the research should include an assessment of intrinsic values of their views which transcend the specific time and space configuration.
- (iii) combining the insights from the Qur'an and the Sunnah with emphasis on *maqāsid* and the appropriate scholarship into one theoretical framework. The product of such combination should be worthy of being seen to represent the Islamic perspective on the subject.

Prof. Faruqi's programme already has profound effect on Islamic economics which, as we know, operates a zero-interest and labour-capital structure. The flourishing of the Islamic banking models across the world can be regarded as a by-product of his ideas and efforts. But the founding of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), which he played a leading role in establishment is one great achievement attributable to his ideas and efforts. The *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* has published numerous scholarly works in this field of Islamization of knowledge. The movement left behind by Professor Al-Fārūqī continues to advance his thoughts particularly in the fields of Islamic social sciences.

The approach adopted by Prof. Nasr was that of producing congruence between Islamic ethics and modern ecology movement. It was that of looking at the origins of science with a view to determining what limits ethics should or can be imposed.

Scholars in Indonesia took ideas from Prof. Naquib Attas' concept of de-westernization and de-secularization towards "building a correct worldview that will illuminate all agenda of Islamization in practice. The approach is represented in the form of the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization based in Jakarta and a formal education institution, Universitas Sultan Agung, Semarang.

Conclusion

Given the steady spread of the idea of Islamization of education among Muslim scholars in different parts of the world, this seminar is not only appropriate but also timely. At a time when the secular western type of education has failed to inject the right understanding of man's relations with the sacred, Muslim scholars and intellectuals have before them a call to duty. It is our collective responsibility to find the right way of relating our respective disciplines to the teachings of Islam. That is not just because we are Muslims but also because the faith is rapidly gaining acceptance in those parts of the world where, hitherto, it was little known. With the undeniable strength of Islam and the Muslims in South West Nigeria, the seminar is even more relevant.