

Crisis
in the
Muslim Mind

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Crisis in the Muslim Mind

ʿAbdulḤamīd A. AbūSulaymān

translation by
Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo

International Institute of Islamic Thought
Herndon, Virginia USA



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FOREWORD

There is general agreement that the Ummah is passing through an extremely difficult stage, one of disintegration and schism, loss of identity, failure of institutions, and inability to extract itself from its present state of bewilderment.

There is also general agreement that change is needed. In particular, the Ummah became acutely aware of its problems following its early encounters with Western civilization in Egypt and Turkey. In the two centuries that have passed since then, the Ummah has suffered through periods of dictatorship and submission to foreign experiments with its political and administrative systems, its culture and business, ethical and social makeup, and science and art. None of this, however, has yielded the kinds of results that the Ummah wanted or hoped for. Instead, the Ummah found itself caught up in a vicious circle.

What this means is that the leadership of the Ummah has been unable to determine the proper approach for bringing about the change needed to lead it toward its true objectives. After pondering the matter at length, looking at it from different perspectives, and considering objectively the attempts of the Ummah in the past to extract itself, we are convinced that the process of change must begin in the thought of the Ummah. This is because thought naturally precedes deeds, whether they prove to be correct or faulty.

Only sound thinking will result in sound reconstruction, and only sound thinking will deliver the Ummah from the crisis which threatens to strangle the life from it.

Since Islam represents the sound core of the Ummah's thought and its true spirit, which tempers its sensibilities, moves its consciousness, and kindles within it the power to create, to construct, and to contribute, only Islamic thought is suitable for the Ummah.

Therefore, we may state confidently that the desired process of change is based on the thought of Islam and guided by its teachings, a process rooted in Islamic doctrines, values, and ethics and deriving its essence from Islam's sources.

Islamic thought is a general term, and interpretations of it differ. Since its definition is crucial, this book seeks to provide a definition which precisely delineates its method, identifies its principles, and anchors its basic concepts.

The book begins with a critical discussion of the traditional methodology of Islamic thought, which is followed by a look at its fundamentals and sources. The discussion then moves on to the subject of this methodology's performance in terms of the comprehensiveness of its scope and means. Finally, a general comparison is made between Islamic and scientific methodologies.

Thereafter, the author deals with the social sciences and humanities from the perspective of the Islamization of knowledge.

At the end of the book, the author speaks of two matters: Islam and the future, and the future of humanity. Finally, he announces his satisfaction with the idea that Islamization is the most important issue before the Ummah, that it is indeed the Ummah's future, its destiny, its objective, the means of its emergence from its crisis, and the way to its building a new civilization and a new renaissance.

Undoubtedly, rectifying the methodology of Islamic thought, returning to the roots of the matter, moving from the particular to the general, treating the causes of the problem rather than the symptoms, and advancing general principles and axioms, all in accordance with the teachings

of Islam, are the guarantees for the success and correctness of the process of change in thought that will enable the Ummah to put its feet on the right path. This is what this book attempts to explain.

Some may feel that the author attaches more importance to this issue than it deserves. But there can be no doubt that the issue of thought is fundamental and is of great concern to all Muslim scholars. Furthermore, according priority to this issue does not mean that other issues are forgotten. On the contrary, renewal will only come about when all issues are treated from a sound Islamic basis.

A number of studies have been published recently on the crisis of thought, the makeup of the Arab mind, the reconstruction of the Muslim mind, and issues of Islamic thought and methodology. This present study, however, takes a very different approach.

In his analysis of the crisis of the Muslim Ummah and its intellectual, methodological, and historical dimensions, the author takes a uniquely penetrating look at the problem. The ability to detect linkage between different issues and to derive lessons and wisdom from events are among the qualities that distinguish the author and his work. He is not distracted by side issues or by academic or technical discussions that pointlessly engage the reader's attention. This is one of the reasons that some readers may find the author's style difficult at first. On rereading, however, in the light of the author's objectives and basic ideas, the same readers will have no trouble in following what the author intends.

As readers delve further into this book, they will discover that they are not reading a fairy tale or a cleverly-written piece of literary forte. Rather, readers are bombarded with new ideas and perspectives that penetrate their innermost being. In short, the author is a hardened veteran who has weathered the concerns of *da'wah* and the difficulties and burdens of struggle for the sake of Islam.

The Ummah's pain and anguish are not merely subjects for treatment from a literary point of view. Its pains are his, as is its suffering. If he were a poet, it is possible that he

would have filled a library with his verses on the subject. Were he a professional writer, the bibliography of his works might have run to several volumes. In fact, a professional writer might develop each one of the author's ideas into a separate book.

The author, however, is a distinguished thinker whose concern is with the goals of the Ummah and the objectives of its existence. At times, readers will notice that his words have the hardness of a *mujāhid* or the directness of a pioneer. His writing is frank, for he goes straight to the point that he wishes to make. Rather than use a circuitous route, he shakes the reader with his exposition and forcefully draws his attention to the objective.

The original publication of this book in Arabic was delayed for several years in anticipation of the moment when the Ummah's political and intellectual leadership would be ready to look realistically and candidly at such a deep and comprehensive discussion of the Ummah's situation. Recent events, however, have made the translation of this book and the adaptation of the topics it deals with a matter of great importance. We can only hope that the book will find a place for itself among the issues that engage the attention of the intellectual and social leadership, as well as the youth, of the Ummah.

May Allah Most High grant that this book proves to be as beneficial as we hope it will be; and He is the Granter of Success!

All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe!

Dr. Tāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī
President, IIT
DhulHijjah 1314AH/June 1993AC
Herndon, Virginia USA

PREFACE TO THE ARABIC EDITION

**All praise to Allah, Lord of the Worlds!
Peace and blessings on Muhammad, His
Servant and Messenger!**

The book in your hands is very special. It is not a compendium or a composition, but a study, a contemplation, and an analysis that has occupied me throughout my life.

As a child, I opened my heart and soul to the Ummah's trials and anguish as expressed by its writers and poets. Where I grew up, in Makkah, in the classroom and between the covers of my books, the pages of history opened before my eyes and, in my imagination, I relived the Ummah's best and worst moments along with the finest and most courageous of its heroes. Often bitterness and frustration crept into the depths of my soul; but more often did the urgency of the crisis fill my heart with determination and the conviction that things must change.

The voyage of life provided me with experience and knowledge, and I never stopped asking myself about the reasons for the Ummah's decline and fall. As I was never prone to intimidation, I was unwilling to accept anything less than a satisfactory answer. Moreover, aided by personal experience and my studies in both the classical disciplines of Islam and in modern knowledge, I constantly pondered the crisis of the Ummah, searched for its causes, and

sought answers and solutions. Nor was I ever satisfied with lamentation, emotional outbursts of anger, or even sentiments of zealous loyalty. To me, the problems of the Ummah demand understanding, study, and analysis. Therefore, I put all my personal and practical abilities, all my learning, and all my accomplishments to work. Day and night I pondered the Ummah's history, event by event, in quest of deeper understanding. I sought only the truth and the remedy.

When I write, I do so because I have made the Ummah's problems my own problems. Nothing I write is criticism, or faultfinding, or objection, or slander. Rather it is straight talk whose truth and candor are sharp and bitter.

As I speak to you in these terms, I am aware of the wealth of goodness residing in the Ummah, of the excellence of its essential being, of the strength it possesses in its depths, of how it is favored by its profound faith, its readiness to sacrifice, and its sincerity. I am not seeking to bestow compliments, nor am I looking for excuses, nor attempting to make the affliction seem less than it is. Rather, I have taken it upon myself to identify areas of impotence and backwardness for the purpose of rectifying these and seeking a way out of the crisis.

If I have been remiss in praising the Ummah's contributions, outstanding individuals, scholars, leaders, youth, or mujahidin, then my excuse is that, while the malaise grows more insidious, I am attempting to uncover the true nature of the affliction in order to prescribe an effective cure.

I do not insist on adherence to anything I have said in this book or to any opinion I have offered. Nor do I fear that something I have written may prove to be wrong. My only concern is that readers should join me in considering my vision of the reasons that led to the downfall of the Ummah.

No one could be happier than I if this book leads to serious discussion. Despite its modest proportions, this book is not an easy one to read, for its subject matter, which is extremely complicated and involved, stretches across populations, generations, and centuries. In order to

follow its arguments, the reader should know the Ummah's history and have an understanding of the *sunan* (natural laws) that Allah applies to nations and civilizations.

I hope that readers will give as much of their time and patience as is required for true comprehension of the issues discussed. A quick turning of the pages may not enable readers to see more than the externals, so that they understand the words mechanically. This is why the result of a cursory reading will only be to further cloud the vision I have intended to create. Since the subject is so vast, there is little opportunity for the book to go into the details of every matter discussed, or to produce historical evidence, or even to include other opinions. Rather, its focus is on the major issues and those at the very crux of the matter.

It is hoped that academic and cultural circles in the Ummah, as well as the social leadership, will deal with the thought and vision presented in this book in a manner befitting the issues that it raises. Hopefully, the book will motivate a great deal of serious and frank discussion that will in turn inspire more study and contemplation.

There is nothing in this effort that is intended to malign or detract from the work of any group or party in the Ummah, or from any of its individual scholars. I am well aware of the faith, sincerity, generosity, and jihad in the hearts of those who compose the Ummah. This work is an attempt to arrive at an objective understanding of the Ummah's history and the events that prompted it to tread on roads for which there were no maps, along which vision was limited, and for which there appeared to be no alternatives.

I hope that the Ummah's thinkers, leadership, scholars, and youth will rise to the challenge and accept their responsibility in dealing openly and truthfully with this undertaking. Moreover, I am confident that they will use all the means available to them in confronting the challenges before them. Certainly this will not be accomplished by snubbing our identity and nature; nor will it come about through an increase in resources, or in sacrifices, or in calls to honor values and principles, or in sermonizing, or in

becoming emotional. In fact, nothing will change unless we rectify, before all else, the ways in which we think! This, in turn, will lead to the rectification of the ways in which we teach, and then to the rectification of our social system and institutions. Only in this manner will the Ummah be able to revitalize itself.

"O Lord, show us the truth as the truth and grant that we should follow it. And show us falsehood as falsehood and grant that we should avoid it!"

I ask Allah Most High to grant the Ummah guidance, direction, *tauḥīq*, assistance, and competence. Surely, He hears and answers those who supplicate Him.

'AbdulḤamīd A. AbūSulaymān
1413AH/1992AC
Herndon, Virginia USA

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This work, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, is an abridgement and translation of an original Arabic text of high literary style. The subject matter, which is not always easy to follow, is aimed toward the initiation of serious discussion among Muslim intellectuals regarding the roots of the malaise of contemporary Muslim society. Such a work is undoubtedly difficult for anyone other than the author himself to translate. Unfortunately, I had neither the time nor the opportunity to undertake it myself. However, as I have full confidence in the abilities of Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo and those who edited and reviewed the work, I am confident that the message of the original has been conveyed.

The translation comes out at a time when the Muslim Ummah finds itself in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the bipolar world order. Throughout the world, the adversaries of Islam continue their aggression against Muslims, in places like Bosnia, Kashmir, Kurdistan, southern Sudan, Somalia, the Phillipines, Burma, Palestine, Afghanistan, Algeria, and in many other places. Such dreadful conditions serve only to magnify the Ummah's crisis. While Muslims may react to these situations in the short term, we must never lose sight of the fact that the malaise lies in our own weakness and incompetency. Perhaps the most striking difference between the early Muslim generations and those that have followed is that the early Muslims were raised to be strong, both physically and psychologically. The dynamics of the Prophet's instructions

(to strut and show their strength) to those performing *tawāf* before the conquest of Makkah were not lost on the early Muslims.

This book deals briefly with issues of methodology, the relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the time and space dimension in the Sunnah, and the rift between the political and the religious-intellectual leadership of the Ummah. It is the contention of this work that while the political leadership used force to keep the masses in order, the intellectual leadership used emotional and psychological means to keep them in check. The net result of such pressure was the creation of inhibitions within the Muslim mind, which caused the mentality of the Ummah and its character to develop in such a way that it lacked initiative and the ability to innovate and think for itself.

At the present time, the Ummah clearly needs to address these problems and to deal with them openly and honestly. As a precondition, it is essential that the Ummah as a whole overcome its reservations and superstitions in regard to understanding and reinterpreting both the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In the final analysis, however, it is the education and upbringing of new generations of Muslims that must be our first concern.

The responsibility for instituting the needed change lies squarely on the shoulders of Muslim intellectuals. These are the ones who must break the psychological chains that have bound the Ummah for the past several centuries. They are the ones who must diagnose the malady for what it really is and then prescribe the right cure. Only then will Muslims be able to actualize the true Islamic way of life represented by *tawhīd*, *khilāfah*, and brotherhood. Finally, once Muslims have regained their dynamism, courage, and morality they will not only improve their own lot, but contribute positively to world civilization as well.

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