

Orientation Guidelines for the International Conference on Islamization of Knowledge

AbdulHamīd A. AbūSulaymān

In modern times, the *ummah* has suffered from numerous crises which have adversely affected nearly all aspects of its life. These crises have been so persistent and so exacerbating that no serious Muslim may any longer escape the duty to investigate their causes and apply himself to the tasks of saving the *ummah* from their suffocating clutch.

Any careful look into the recent efforts of Muslim intellectuals to explain the *ummah's* unfortunate debacles, or to justify the solutions offered for its salvation, betrays the lack of insight, the superficiality, and futility of those efforts. Indeed, such examination leads inevitably to the conclusion that the cause of all of these crises is that of the Muslim intellectuals themselves. It consists in their failure to apply their minds to the problems of their *ummah* and candidly to seek efficient solutions without compromise; in short, the *ummah's* failure is really their own failure. It was with this awareness that a few Islamic scholars held a number of conferences to look into the state of contemporary Islamic thought. Their purpose was to make the Muslim thinker aware of his responsibility for the malaise of the *ummah* in modern times.

The first of these conferences was held in 1397/1977 in Switzerland. The net result was to make us aware that the first step toward a genuine solution of the crisis of Islamic thought is the *Islamization of knowledge*; i.e., the critical examination of modern disciplines in light of the vision of Islam and the recasting of them under categories consistent with that vision. A careful probing of this "first step" quickly revealed two other steps that it presupposed and that are still far from accomplished, namely, the mastery of the modern disciplines and of the Islamic legacy of thought. Whereas the modern disciplines were at least accessible to the contemporary researcher, the latter was not; thus a number of measures would have to be taken to make it so. The conference therefore resolved that an international institution of Islamic thought

be formed for the purpose of realizing these preliminary objectives. It was thought that the time had come for a real translation of our occasional insights, into a program of sustained effort and problem-solving action on the level of ideas. Thus, the International Institute of Islamic Thought was born in 1401/1981.

A second international conference was held in Islamabad in cooperation with the Islamic University in 1402/1982. Its theme was the Islamization of knowledge. Its purpose was to reach a working consensus among scholars on the general principles of Islamization and to map out a work plan for Islamizing the disciplines. Eventual production of a textbook, in each discipline in the humanities and the social sciences, which incorporates modern knowledge while giving it an Islamic mode, was to be the ultimate end of current effort.

This work is presently under way. In order to promote it, to examine its product, and generally to move it toward realization, it was decided to hold a third international conference on 25 *Shawwal* 1404/July 24 1984 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was hoped that the third conference would fulfill the following objectives:

1. Lay out concrete plans for reforming and moving Islamic thought forward in specific areas and define a scale of priorities for these plans.
2. Examine the Institute's works so far accomplished, or in progress by the participants in the conference, and evaluate the plan drawn for Islamization of the modern disciplines.
3. Draw a plan of activities for the Institute for the coming five years.

Toward Reform of Islamic Thought

Papers therefore were invited that contributed to the movement of Islamic thought on these fronts. In particular, they were to raise and seek answers to the following issues:

1. Is contemporary Muslim awareness of the crisis adequate?
2. Is the contemporary Muslim understanding of Islamic values, of their nature, their relations, and the order of rank the Qur'an has assigned to them, correct?
3. Is the methodology of presenting Islamic values available to us adequate for the reconstruction process desired? for actualization of the "ought-to-be" of Islamic values and principles?
4. Are our applications of Islamic values true to them?
5. Is our understanding of Islamic history, with all its lessons and landmarks of positive achievement or failure, correct?

6. What are the historical roots of our failure? the contemporary causes of our shortcomings? How can they be altered or surmounted? What is both needed and possible in this regard?

7. Is the failure of Muslim analysis in the various fields of human endeavor responsible for the *ummah's* failure in its application of the precepts of Islam?

Were true and adequate answers to these inquires readily available to us, the *ummah* would have the necessary foundations for genuine self-reconstruction, for achievement of the level of civilizational development worthy of the *ummah* of Islam. Certainly, the *ummah* would not be languishing in its present crisis if we had the right answers today!

From such self-questioning, it is hoped that the Muslim mind will reconsider the patterns under which it has so far labored. Certainly, our axioms and presuppositions must be subject to a new scrutiny if future failure is to be avoided and the true mission of Islam reestablished.

Research in the Islamization of Knowledge

The proposed conventional disciplines for the July 1984 conference were (1) economics, (2) sociology, (3) psychology, (4) international relations, (5) anthropology, (6) political science and (7) philosophy.

Papers were invited in each of these disciplines to treat the following questions:

1. How are the general principles of Islamization developed in the Institute's publication, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*,¹ to be applied to your discipline?

2. What would their application entail for the methodology and theory of the discipline?

3. What does their application promise by way of limitation expansion of knowledge?

4. What can it contribute to the integration of human knowledge?

5. What fruits may be expected of such an epistemological revolution in the given discipline?

6. What concrete plans (in a five or ten year period) do you envisage that could move the discipline toward Islamization?

Because of its strategic importance to Islamization of knowledge in general, the 1984 conference considered papers on the following additional themes:

1. What has been the contribution of Islamic thought in your specific discipline during the last 100 years? Needed to answer this question is a com-

¹Al fārūqī (ed.), *Islamization of Knowledge* (Herndon Va.) International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1402/1982), 23-38.

plete bibliography of works (articles, monographs, books), a topical classification of them, and a critical evaluation of their content or contributions leading to a statement on the “state of the art” of that discipline in the Muslim world.

2. What has been the contribution of the legacy of Islamic thought to that section of human knowledge or concern that your modern discipline seeks to cover? Granted that the Islamic legacy is inexhaustible, can you identify some of its greatest chapters that may be regarded as crucial to that specific discipline? Can you classify, analyze and evaluate their contents critically?

3. Assuming that works on *fiqh*, *uṣūl al fiqh* and *Sharī‘ah* are the greatest expression of Islamic spirit, it is absolutely necessary to make their contents readily available to the research scholar in each of the specific disciplines of modern times. The expected illumination of those disciplines cannot proceed without reckoning with the Islamic legacy, of which the works on *fiqh*, *uṣūl al fiqh* and *Sharī‘ah* are the quintessence. What system of classification, indexing or computer programming would make the contents of these works instantly retrievable? Has any system been devised or followed? With what results?