ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE: THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Bashir S. Galadanci

Allah, the Most High, clearly gives the mantle of leadership to Muslims when He categorically states in the Holy Qur'an:

> You are the best community ever brought forth to mankind.

This leadership is in all spheres of life, whether it be economic, polit-ical, social, spiritual, moral, or educational. This leadership must be bal-anced, exemplary, and in line with Allah's admonition:

> And We made you a balanced nation so that you may be wit-nesses over mankind just as the Messenger is a witness over you. (2:143)

The necessity of leadership in the realm of education and knowledge becomes all the more important because it is a prerequisite to leadership

Bashir S. Galadanci *is currently the IIIT coordinator in Nigeria.*

in other spheres. Allah, the Most High, provides the basic epistemologi-
cal and methodological framework in the first revealed verse of the Holy
Qur'an thus:

> Read! In the name of Your Lord who created, created humans
> from a clot. Read! For your Lord is Most Bountiful, He who
> taught by the pen, taught humans what they did not know.
> (96:1-5)

This verse and the various related prophetic injunctions gave the nec-
essary thrust that motivated Muslims to forge ahead in all academic
spheres and to produce scholarly works in all disciplines—philosophy,
medicine, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. The intellectual
traditions were so solidly grounded that even after the Muslim ummah
began to stagnate politically, it continued to lead in the intellectual arena.
Alas, however, the ummah was overtaken by events and it fell into an
intellectual coma that lasted several centuries. It woke up to find itself
surrounded by a body of knowledge and a civilization that are derived
from a foreign value system, rooted in a foreign ideology, based on for-
eign axioms, and completely detached from the Creator. Unfortunately,
everything revolved around this body of knowledge, and the ummah had
no choice but to get subjugated by the bearers of this civilization.

A good number of our Muslim thinkers are convinced that the only
way to break free from this subjugation and to eradicate the problems
that the ummah faces, whether they be political, economic, social, or
moral, is to bring knowledge back to its proper Islamic axis (the *tawhidi*
episteme) and thereby check the intellectual invasion that continues to
maintain the ummah in its present pathetic and deplorable state. Based
on this analysis, several individuals and groups have come up with
strategies on how to solidly address this intellectual challenge. The term
"Islamization of knowledge" has been coined to refer to the efforts
required to pull the ummah out of the intellectual stagnation it has lan-
guished in for so long and put it back in the leadership role that it has
always held. The novelty of this concept has brought about different def-
initions and approaches. The actual meaning and scope of Islamization
of knowledge as well as the best methods to employ in order to achieve
the best results continues to be debated.

Some argue that knowledge as it is today is, to a large extent, neutral
and that it is the imparter of the knowledge who needs to be Islamized.
Others frown at this supposition and assert that knowledge, whether of
the sciences or humanities, is greatly influenced by the aims for which it
is pursued, by the value system it develops within, by the sources used
to extract it, by the methodology used to derive it, and by a variety of
other factors. The current body of knowledge cutting across all disci-
plines has generally been developed outside the framework of Islam and

because of this, while some of this derived knowledge may be found to be Islamically acceptable, a good part of it is totally off course.

The proponents of this school of thought further assert that Islamization of knowledge goes beyond making cosmetic changes to science textbooks or proudly adding Qur'anic verses to explain some scientific or social phenomena where they appear relevant. The Islamization of knowledge undertaking must go far beyond superficial issues to the core issues of epistemology, methodology, and content.

These two differing opinions can probably be joined together by saying that we require Islamized individuals just as we need Islamized knowledge. Each is indispensable and each is greatly incapacitated without the other. With this fundamental issue resolved, the question of the best approach and the most pressing priorities arises. Should the emphasis be on methodology or on content? Should we start with the social sciences and humanities or the natural sciences? From an Islamic perspective, is this categorization relevant in the first instance? Should we use a top-down approach (starting from the universities) or a bottom-up approach? Should we resuscitate the current educational system, which is already on the verge of collapse, or should we just concentrate on academic and intellectual issues?

The barrage of questions is unending, yet this does not signify any lack of clear vision on the concept itself. Indeed, many scholars argue that at this stage of the development of the Islamization of knowledge concept, it is healthy to have a lot of debate on what it is exactly and what it is not, on its scope and on the best approach to follow. In fact, as the concept develops, there are bound to be many changes in the scope as well as in the approach.

Even though the issues are far from resolved, it is gratifying to note that the concept has continued over the centuries to grow and develop in a very constructive way. Looking back, it is interesting to note that the concept of Islamization of knowledge has been at the forefront of the minds of Muslim thinkers and philosophers for the past few centuries. Early efforts, as far back as Imam al-Ghazali's, attempted to construct a bridge between reason and revelation and to bring the entire domain of knowledge back to an Islamic axis. Later scholars, such as Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Abduh, went further in their attempts to reconcile the dichotomy between the Western (secular) body of knowledge and the Islamic spirit and to bring both the secular knowledge and the religious sciences under the same roof.

Today, by the grace and mercy of Allah, the Most High, there are several institutions that are deeply engaged in furthering the Islamization of knowledge undertaking. While their methods and approaches may differ, there is general consensus that they are all making very valuable intellectual contributions. The International Institute of Islamic Thought

(IIIT), established in 1981 for the purpose of reviving and promoting Islamic thought and knowledge, is at the forefront of this intellectual struggle. With its headquarters in Herndon, Virginia, U.S.A., and several offices spread around the globe, IIIT is deeply engaged in research and the production of scholarly works. The concept of Islamization of knowledge, as viewed by the Institute, has gradually developed from general ideas to more specific plans. Early attempts focused on defining the problem, outlining an Islamic paradigm of knowledge, and producing textbooks in different disciplines based on this paradigm. Attention is now shifting into more specific methodological issues which include articulating the Islamic paradigm of knowledge, developing a Qur'anic methodology, developing a methodology for dealing with the Qur'an, developing a methodology for dealing with the Sunnah, reexamining the Islamic intellectual heritage, and dealing with the Western intellectual heritage.

The International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM) is also at the forefront of these efforts. Established in the 1980s, it aims to provide Muslim students from different parts of the world with a balanced system of education that satisfies the yearnings of the Muslim ummah and their needs in all spheres of life. All attempts have been made to recruit the most committed and best academic minds from different parts of the Muslim world, and they are harnessing all their efforts to design suitable curricula and develop appropriate course contents. Luckily for the university, many of the professors are deeply grounded in the concept of the Islamization of knowledge including the rector (vice chancellor) of the university himself, Professor AbdulHameed Abu Sulayman, who is a past president of IIIT. In a way, the students of IIUM are partaking of the results of IIIT's research efforts just as they are being made ready. The same story can be said about the Islamic University in Uganda under the leadership of Professor Mahdi Adamu who is an early pioneer of Islamization of knowledge programs at Usman Dan Fodio University in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, we are very lucky to be part of a rich Islamic cultural and intellectual heritage that dates back more than two centuries. This heritage allows us to build solid Islamic institutions within the imposed secular ways and systems. Some universities have been quick to capitalize on this heritage to the benefit of the Muslim students, staff, and surrounding communities. Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, has taken the boldest initiatives so far by introducing a wide range of Islam-based courses in the social sciences, arts, and education both as core courses and as electives. In addition, over forty lecturers were recruited and trained to teach these courses. Now every student who graduates from any of the faculties that offer these courses will come out with a clear

understanding of the Islamic view of his/her discipline—whether it be economics, sociology, political science, or management.

In Bayero University, Kano, there are also several Islam-based courses in the faculties of arts and Islamic studies, law, education and social and management sciences. There is, however, the need for many more such courses and for a more well-defined and structured Islamization of Knowledge program. We are lucky to be surrounded by a 100 percent Muslim constituency, both inside and outside the university, that is yearning for a better, more balanced system of education that is more in tune with its rich Islamic heritage and that will better address current challenges and problems.

This seminar should be looked at as a milestone in our efforts at Islamization of knowledge in Kano. While the papers to be presented are general in nature, it is hoped that they will generate interest and motivate both students and staff to do research in the various aspects of Islamization in knowledge and to be vanguards in this noble effort.

Danjuma A. Maiwada *is a professor in the Department of Education at Bayero University, Kano.*