

A Seminar Report

“Islamization of Knowledge” Seminar Held at the Institute of Education, London University

The seminar which was held on October 31, 1987 was aimed at introducing the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) to the Muslim intellectuals in the United Kingdom. The seminar was attended by over 40 people of different specializations from various parts of the United Kingdom. The seminar was divided in two sessions. The morning session was chaired by Dr. Tayyib Zain al-Abidin, the representative of the Institute in Khartoum, Sudan. The speakers in this session included: Dr. 'AbdulḤamīd 'AbūSulaymān, Director General, IIIT; Mr. Mashuq Aly, Head of the Department of Islamic Studies, Lampeter University College, Wales; and Dr. Salim Al-Hasani, Manchester University.

Dr. 'AbdulḤamīd 'AbūSulaymān outlined the objectives and goals of the Institute and clarified the concept of the Islamization of Knowledge which, according to him, constituted the very *raison d'être* of the Institute. He emphasized that the Muslim world lacked neither resources nor values; what it lacked was the correct methodology of thinking in order to tackle the pressing problems of today. The problem, therefore, is primarily a problem of thought. It is incumbent upon the *Ummah* to reform its methodology of thinking and of solving its problems.

Dr. 'AbūSulaymān then traced the developments that led to the establishment of the Institute. He explained that through their work in student organizations, he and his colleagues arrived at the conclusion that political and social work was not enough and that there was a need for work in the field of thought and intellectual analysis. It was also not enough to criticise and express dismay at the present bad conditions of the *Ummah*. What was needed was to present an alternative Islamic paradigm of intellectual thought and practical solutions of the problems of the Islamic world.

It was therefore decided to establish the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) in the United States of America. Building on the experience gained in the AMSS, the International Institute of Islamic thought was established as an independent organization to deal with the problem of intellectual

reawakening in the Muslim World. The Institute has held several international conferences including the ones in Pakistan (1982), Malaysia (1984) and Sudan (1987). He also mentioned the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* which has come to be recognized as an outstanding Islamic publication in scholarly circles.

I. Discussion:

Dr. 'AbuSulayman's talk was followed by a heated discussion. Dr. Ayub was of the opinion that we must make a clear distinction between theory and its application. He said that the *Ummah* tends to pay a lot of attention to practical applications and neglects theoretical developments with the result that there is no positive development. Dr. Ayub argued that one of the reasons for lack of intellectual development in the *Ummah* is that the research is done on a purely individual basis.

Dr. Syed Ashraf from Cambridge said that there are many institutions in the Muslim world that are undertaking works similar to that of the Institute. He thanked Dr. 'AbdulHamid 'AbuSulayman for his offer to cooperate with these institutions. He also emphasized the need for developing a clear conceptual framework for Islamization of knowledge.

Mr. Barakatulah asked why the Institute is interested only in social sciences and neglects natural sciences. Dr. 'AbdulHamid 'AbuSulayman answered that priority was given to social sciences but this did not mean that natural sciences were not important.

Dr. Ghulam Nabi Saqib recounted his efforts toward the Islamize education at London University. He complained that he did not receive sufficient support from the Muslim organizations. He expressed his concerns about finding enough committed scholars and researchers to carry out the Islamization programmes as proposed by the IIIT.

II. Seminar Papers

Mr. Mashuq Ally, in his presentation, surveyed the development of social sciences in the West. He said that empirical analysis based on collection of abundant data with no moral suppositions is a leading characteristic of the social sciences in the West.

Dr. Salim Al-Hasani reviewed the roots and developments of natural sciences and discussed the circumstances under which a conflict developed between the church and science in medieval Christian Europe. The result was that the emerging scientific elite considered religion as their enemy and rejected it altogether.

Dr. Al-Hasani then reviewed the ideas of Darwin, Marx, Freud and discussed the implications of evolutionary and positivist thought on development of science in the West.

The afternoon session was chaired by Dr. Salim Al-Hasani and was addressed by Dr. TayebZin Al-Abidin; Dr. Manazar Ahsan of the Islamic Foundation; Dr. Ghulam Nabi Saqib, Mr. Abdulwahab El-Effendi; and Dr. J. Qureshi.

Dr. Tayyib Zain Al-Abidin emphasized that we have to re-cast the Western knowledge from the Islamic point of view. Dr. Zin al-Abidin said that Western social sciences are ruled by the behavioral rather than normative concepts and are thus incapable of providing any moral guidance. He stressed the need for making the Islamic heritage available to the modern scholar.

Dr. Manazir Ahsan talked about the Islamization of history. He said that as a result of the intellectual imperialism that was imposed on our countries, Muslims come to the West in order to study their languages, religion and history. As a result, the younger generation of Muslim scholars tends to reflect the views of its Western teachers and takes their biased approach to Islamic history as an objective interpretation of our past.

Dr. Ahsan emphasized the need for using the original Muslim sources for writing Islamic history and said that a distinction must be made between Muslim history and Islamic history.

Dr. Ghulam Nabi Saqib discussed the need to Islamize teachers at all levels (primary, secondary and university), to influence media and to develop more institutions so as to fulfill the educational needs.

Mr. Abdul Wahab El-Effendi talked about the Islamization of philosophy. He said that transferring knowledge from the West uncritically and transplanting it in the Muslim world will not succeed. Talking about the methodology of Islamization he said that Al-Ghazali did not Islamize philosophy by quoting Quranic verses to rationalize Plato's or Aristotle's ideas. He started by mastering Greek philosophy and questioning it on its own premises, and was therefore able to criticize it from inside and reject it. Eventually he decided to abandon philosophy entirely since he found that some doctrines of philosophy were completely anti-Islam. Mr. El-Effendi concluded that our Islamization efforts must begin by mastering modern disciplines and then trying to go beyond them.

Dr. J. Qureshi raised the issue of whether Islamized knowledge is meant for Muslims only or for all of humanity. His view was that Muslims should act as a catalyst of moral revival of entire humanity and should perform their role toward universal social improvement.