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## Translating the Qur'ān and Sunnah: The Islamisation Project of IIUM

Ahmad Nabil Amir, PhD.\*

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to analyse the role of the International Islamic University in achieving Islamisation and in bringing out an integrated curricular and educational program aiming for the holistic development of the ummah and institutions at all levels of society. It also offers profound analysis of the universal values and teachings the University had imparted and its function to provide a broad spectrum and avenue for potential human growth and in driving the intellectual reform and constructing *ummatah wasa'at* (the balanced community) based on Islamic worldviews, norms, principles and values in realizing Islamization process. The study also dealt specifically with the vision of the University, as enshrined in its constitution that define her character, psyche, culture and direction. It also turns to discuss specific intellectual and spiritual challenges that the modern world had posed to contemporary Muslim and the role that the University can play in providing the means to answer these challenges.

**Keywords and phrases:** International Islamic University, Islamisation, Integration, Modernisation, Scriptural bases.

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## Introduction

The term Islamisation has provoked various responses since the last two decades and has brought tremendous impact on the intellectual movement to Islamise contemporary knowledge and to re-project its epistemological and philosophical construct based on Islamic worldview. Scholars had produced definitive works that expound the principle ideas and work plan for this project grounded in their particular school of thought. And the debate continues with no definitive definition produced on the term. Nevertheless, its prevalent usage, in theory and practice, seems to embody certain common elements which are best expressed as “the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition, and then from secular control over his reason and his language.”<sup>1</sup> As the Companion Rib‘iy ibn ‘Āmir RA stated on the purpose of Islam, it is “to liberate man from being a slave to another man, to become a servant of God; from the constriction of this world, to the vastness of this world and the hereafter; and from the oppressions of religions and myths, to the justice of Islam.”<sup>2</sup>

In the context of International Islamic University,<sup>3</sup> the unifying vision of Islamisation serves as a holistic and comprehensive perspective for the Islamicity of the University. The concept embraces not only academic standards but also moral, spiritual, physical, and technological standards of high value, which evolves out of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, practices, tradition, and norms which bind the University’s community together and provide its distinguishing traits.

The moulding of this culture undertaken in the spirit of *jihād*,<sup>4</sup> *iṣlāḥ* (reform)<sup>5</sup> and *tajdīd* (renewal)<sup>6</sup> which features the spirit of an egalitarian culture of Islam. The University with her mission to achieve comprehensive Islamic excellence provides the environment, the curriculum, the incentives, and the opportunities to realize the goal of global intellectual prowess for her students and staff.

It stands for a true model of a unique Islamic institution which originated and sprang out through Islamic aspiration, guidance, and planning. From such a view, it is important for us as a Muslim to appreciate what the University is trying to achieve for the sake of the progress of the Muslim Ummah and the holistic wellbeing of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. (1978). *Islam And Secularism*. (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM)), 41.

<sup>2</sup> al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. (1992). *The History of al-Tabari Vol. 12: The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine A.D. 635-637/A.H.* Friedman, Yohanan (trans.). New York: SUNY Press. Vol. 12, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> The establishment of International Islamic University in different parts of the Islamic world is the result of the resolution mooted at the World conference on Muslim Education held at Mecca from March 31 to April 8 in 1977. The conference emphasized that social studies needed prior attention and that concepts like man, society and knowledge, being the bases of education, could be approached from the Islamic perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Qur’ān, al-Ḥajj:78.

<sup>5</sup> Qur’ān, Hūd:88.

<sup>6</sup> Abū Dāwūd, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash’ath, al-Sajistānī. (2003). *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Riyadh: Dar al-Ma’rifah. Pp. 768, ḥadīth 4291.

## 1. The process of Islamisation in the International Islamic University

### 1.1 Formulating Islamic concept of education: an intellectual effort to produce a good man

The establishment of the International Islamic University is undoubtedly one of the outstanding achievements of the Muslim world today that we can all feel proud of. It is a fulfilment of a long-felt need of the Muslim community in the world for a model of Islamic educational Institution that would serve as an alternative to the dominant secular institution of higher learning which has functioned, among other things, as an agent of Westernization and secular modernisation in Muslim countries.

This new model is based on the classical Islamic philosophy of knowledge and education which is grounded in the worldview of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Messenger of the Allah (PBUH). This unique philosophy of education as expounded in the First World Conference on Islamic Education in Mecca in 1976<sup>7</sup> stresses, among other things:

- The unity of knowledge in which the revealed knowledge becomes the most important component and centre of Islamic education.
- The purpose of acquiring knowledge as a means of assisting the seeker to play the fundamental role as Allah's servant (*'abd*) and vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth.
- The all-embracing scope of Islamic education as the process of nurturing the cognitive, affective, spiritual, and behavioural aspects of the human personality in the light of Islamic *'aqidah* (creed), *sharī'ah* (laws) and *akhlāq* (ethics).

The aim of educational process as envisaged by Islam and the concept of Islamic University as reflecting man,<sup>8</sup> has been the core aspects of the University's educational methodology, educational curricula, and the basic tenets for its ideal framework. It has places great emphasis on the formulation of a curriculum that caters the development of a balanced Islamic personality. This curriculum strives to produce a blueprint of an integrated curriculum where Islamic teachings and values are imbedded across all subject areas.

This form of the system of education in Islam has been the goals of the University which have been made to project right knowledge and action in universal form as university. It aims to present to the Muslim Ummah a convincing vision of the Muslim civilization in the future and work towards the return of the primacy of Islam in all fields of knowledge as a continuation of the tradition of Islam in the pursuit of knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> Organized by King Abdul aziz University, Makkah al-Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia. See the *Conference Book*, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah & Mecca al-Mukarramah, 1397/1977.

<sup>8</sup> The curriculum of the International Islamic University contains a broad major feature that helps in Islamisation. It has focus a framework for Islamisation in the subject area offered with respect to the worldview, epistemology and values in the senses defined by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on his philosophy of Islamic education. Al-Attas has given priorities to the formulation of theories with regard to the concept of Universal and Perfect Man as reflecting the functions and deployment of the faculties and department at the very structure of the University. See: Al- Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. (1999). *The Concept of Education in Islam*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought (ISTAC)), 44.

## 1.2 Islamisation of knowledge: International Islamic University as an integrationist model

As part of the University's culture and aspirations to establish a reputation of excellence, and the provision of a unique holistic system of a higher education which it provides for students in the University, it has projected a work plan in making a critical examination on the various Western division of the rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences, and constitutes its Islamisation through a radical reorientation of its formulation and systematization, with the isolation of the foreign elements from every branch of this knowledge, which all have to be a functioning imitation of the schema of Islamic philosophy and world view as envisaged by Islam.

This standpoint, which is consistent with, and indeed characteristic of the Islamic religious and intellectual tradition, has embodied the highest expression and systematisation of the harmonious unity of knowledge, which is based on Islamic experience and consciousness and belief; and its true nature. The University has set forth a philosophical program projecting a worldview of an academic excellence, dedicated to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and its methodology in order to enable the Ummah to deal effectively with present challenges, and contribute to the progress of human civilization in ways that will give it a meaning and a direction derived from divine guidance.

The University also has formed an integrated learning program designed for all levels of society aimed at enhancing and achieving a balanced life through integration of the Islamic and Western tradition of learning. The core knowledge representing the *farq' ayn* or the religious sciences, has been integrated and composed as a harmonious unity at the University level as a model structure for the successive educational progression from the religious sciences to the rational, intellectual, and philosophical sciences<sup>9</sup>. The dimension of the natural and applied sciences has been added and composed to its own specifically Islamic cosmology, and its arts and sciences developed within the vision of a distinctly Islamic Universe and worldview.

The goals of the University were intrinsically desirable for the Ummah, for it incorporates modern methods of study and research into the best techniques of traditional scholarship. It attempts to recreate and revitalize the ancient Islamic tradition of learning where to seek knowledge is an act of prayer, and the spirit of science emanates from the Holy Qur'ān.

The establishment of the University has provided the impetus for the reform of Islamic studies, under the concept of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences which is integrated in a single faculty with the social sciences (called Human Sciences in the University) courses. With the introduction of the global mission of Islamicisation of human knowledge, otherwise popularly known as 'Islamisation of knowledge' movement in the University, all the social sciences curricula, including economics and law, being secular in

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<sup>9</sup> al-Attas has given an outline in his book of the division of knowledge and the classification of the sciences, with some exposition of an evolvement of ideas firmly rooted in the Muslim religious and Intellectual tradition. See: al-Attas, Ibid. 40.

origin and content, have been undergoing the process of Islamisation, bringing them in harmony with the holistic Islamic worldview, values and perspectives.

The University has played an essential role to develop an appropriate methodology for dealing with Islamic legacy and contemporary knowledge and formulate a comprehensive Islamic vision and methodology that will help Muslim scholars in their critical analysis of contemporary knowledge. Therefore, the dissemination, comprehension & understanding, and practice of knowledge are the main emphasis in all the University's contents. Universal skills and values are the main focus of guidance in all the activities.

The work plan of Islamisation of Knowledge; after all, does not exclusively depend on the efforts of the University. The task indeed is an *'amānah'* to every sincere Muslim and all concerned Islamic organizations to undertake the role to re-establish Islamic order and civilization, to partake in this plan for Islamising Knowledge; for reforming the contemporary mode of Islamic thought; for reviving its methodology; and for restoring its dynamic originality, creativity and ability.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 Positioning the University work value towards achieving vision.

The embodiment of comprehensive excellence in building a visionary organization is the directive mission of the University to strive for the holistic excellence in pursuing physical, moral, spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions in accordance with the holistic vision of Islam. It is committed to produce better quality of intellectuals, professionals, and scholars by integrating quality of faith (*īmān*), knowledge (*ilm*) and good character (*akhlāq*) to serve as agents of comprehensive and balanced progress as well as sustainable development in the Muslim world.

A new development in the way the whole University's community –students, academics, administrative staff, support staff, managers, and leaders– works, serves, or produces are based on the shared value of comprehensive excellence, such that it becomes an enduring and distinguishing feature of the University. Both the Ummah's vision and its pursuit constitute its concern to develop an environment which instils commitment for life-long learning and a deep sense of social responsibility among staff and students.

The formation of a universalised system that promotes for the Islamicity of the University has been directive in the process of reform and changing of attitude, work habits, will power and teamwork. It seeks to nurture a culture of quality, a culture of excellence, a culture of commitment to virtuous deeds and a culture of cooperation among Muslims. The inculcation of the quality culture as the key to comprehensive excellence is a functional approach adopted by the University to exemplify an international community of intellectual scholars, professionals, officers, and workers who are motivated by the Islamic worldview and code of ethics as an integral part of their work culture.

As a University of international standing, using the Islamic principle of integration of knowledge and faith, of professionalism and morality, of reason and revelation, the

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<sup>10</sup> al- Faruqi, Ismail Raji. (1982). *Islamisation of Knowledge: General Principle and Work Plan* (Washington DC: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)), 26.

University has successfully growing its international reputation of world class standard of teaching, research and development; which has earned the respect and praise of many Muslim scholars throughout the world who appreciate the international standard it has maintained. The University has been receiving widespread appreciation in the Muslim world for the successful planning and implementation of the Islamisation project which has contributed to the progress of the nation and the regeneration of Islamic civilization on the international front.

#### **1.4 Realizing the University's Aspiration**

The attitude towards Islamic values, as well as adaptation of methods and theories within the framework of Islamic worldview from the major focal points of the University's vision. The University implies a continuing and open-ended process in which her values and world views are continually in accordance with Islamic vision of reality and truth. It projects an absolute set of values in line with an ultimate divine purpose having a final significance for man. The true understanding and full grasp of Islamic world views and an essential beliefs and modes of thought that projected the Islamic world view has become a clear niche area to work for the University.

The University indeed has a great role to play in the development of human intellect and in developing human civilization through its mission of imparting Islamic vision to the human life, which reinforce the holistic perspective and accentuate its Islamic character as projected by the Qur'anic conceptual system. There has been a strong emphasis in the Islamic world to realize this vision of reforming contemporary Muslim mentality and the regeneration of Islamic civilization on the international front.

The University has undertaken the role by pursuing her aims to establish a reputation for special centres of excellent which seeks to revitalizes the intellectual dynamism of the Ummah and to regain the Ummah's leadership in the quest of knowledge. It endeavours to contribute to the improvement and upgrading of the qualities of human life and civilization and serves as beacons to scientific knowledge and philosophical wisdom for the whole mankind.

The core of this whole development is an ideal state of the University striving towards realization of the moral and ethical quality of social perfection which connotes to the worldview projected by Islam. The realization of such a position will help the Ummah regain its intellectual and cultural identity and re-affirm its presence as a dynamic civilization.

#### **1.5 The expanding spiritual-moral role of the International Islamic University: A quest for comprehensive excellence**

It is of particular important to deal with the role that the University can play in fulfilling the spiritual needs of modern man in general, which concerns so directly the present day plight of the Western man and to which the widespread intellectual secularisation has tended to confuse many of our scholars and intellectuals and create confusion and error in the minds of Muslims and disrupt intellectual and spiritual unity among them.

The University has laid an emphasis on bringing the doctrinal and practical teachings of the Islamic tradition to bear upon the existing problems of Western man, to turn to the message of Islam concerning the contemplative and active lives as possibilities for man to follow in his terrestrial journey. The University also has been an instrumental in a direct fashion in making the awareness of the primacy of Islamic spirituality, which was integrated much with the heritage of Islamic intellectuality that springs from ethical and moral values and virtues.

The University places great importance and centrality at nurturing the quality of holistic excellence which is imbued with Islamic moral-spiritual values, in the process of learning, teaching, research, consultancy, publication, administration and student life. It seeks to adopt Islamic approach and code of ethics as an integral part of its work culture and to transform by the light of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) the operative and practical aspects of human life.

It has formed an Islamic worldview and expounds it in a manner that is comprehensible to modern men and that address their real needs for the spiritual heritage and true reliance upon God. From such a view, it appears that the basis of Islamic intellectual life was therefore cosmopolitan and international in conformity with the world-wide perspective of Islam itself and the universal nature of the fundamental Islamic doctrine of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*).<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper is not exhaustive; however, the salient ideas have been laid out to demonstrate the nature of the process of Islamisation in every kind of basic reform exercised by the International Islamic University. Essentially, it is important for us to appreciate the Islamic identity of the University and the principles of looking at things and ideas from Islamic perspective, whereas such an agenda would be considered uncalled for or irrelevant in a non-religious based University or institution of higher learning. It is for this reason that the Islamisation of University's curriculum will have to be an important ongoing exercise to expose the students with an integrated and Islamised curriculum who will emerge as more balanced personalities with an integrated and holistic vision of life.

Education, from an Islamic point of view is, after all, a process of developing wholesome and balanced human beings who will nourish a culture and civilization of holistic moral-spiritual progress, advancement of knowledge and virtues. International Islamic University is only an instrument among other instruments for that high purpose.

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<sup>11</sup> The profound intellectual crisis of modern man can be brought into focus especially for Muslims through a comparison which would show the contrast between the sapiential teachings of the Islamic schools and what passes for philosophy or 'thought' in the West today. The amazing increase of interest in the West in recent years in the study of spiritual essence and esoteric dimension of Islam would reveal that nearly every aspect of Islamic tradition, from the procedures of law at Shari'ite courts to the description of Divine Beauty in poetry, can be an immense benefit in solving the problems of modern man. The various works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr contain many thoughtful pages on this theme and the whole problem of the confrontation of Islam and Western civilization. See especially his *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, Kuala Lumpur, 198.

It is incumbent upon scholars and the learned among us who are entrusted to teach and to educate the Muslims to explore the possibility of finding solutions to the intellectual crisis of modern man from Islamic perspective in its comprehensive and fullest sense. Scholarship today can do much in bringing to life religious tradition and its spiritual significance to look into its future potentialities to renew the intellectual and religious life of the Muslim Ummah and bringing unity to the life of man.

The University also has to be aware of changing circumstances and the new demands, challenges, and opportunities on the local as well as the global fronts. The University, we believe will have to contend with the more daunting challenges in the future, for the actual role and place of contemporary Islam and Muslim intelligentsia within the religion of Islam becomes ever more pressing for our world today.

It should give priorities for the concerted action in every kind of basic reform of Islamic people and to promote sound perspectives and realistic responses to the cultural, educational, epistemological, ethical, economic, techno-logical, and socio-political changes and problems encountered by contemporary human societies, particularly in relation to Muslim societies today. Only that can we look towards an International Islamic University as the repository of knowledge which would go into building the Muslim civilization, echoing the ideals of Qur'ān and Sunnah and will be source of pride and high esteem for our community and the Muslim world.

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