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<i>Masitoh Ahmad Jamil Hashim</i>	

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Issues of Islamic Spirituality and Moral Excellence in Higher Education

Mohd Mumtaz Ali*

Abstract

This research aims at discussing the issues of Islamic spirituality and moral excellence in higher education. The emphasis will be given not only on the crisis and chaos in the academia but also human lives as a whole. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore and examine the nature of contemporary educational system. The research employs a qualitative methodology wherein the analysis is made of materials that include books, journal articles, newspaper cuttings, audio visuals and others. Some scholars have highlighted the crisis of higher education manifest in some technical dimensions such as drop out the students, high cost of living and increasing in tuition fees etc. However, one of the findings reveals that the real cause of crisis lies somewhere else. It is not the crisis in higher education alone but also in environment. The statistic available in the area of business, economy and political domain suggest that the real nature of crisis lies on lack of spiritual and moral dimension. Therefore, to solve some issues of higher education should commence with fixing the basis of spirituality and moral of mankind.

Keywords: Spirituality, Islamic Ethics, Education, Islamic Philosophy

Introduction

During 1970' and 1980' a new awareness among the Muslim scholars, thinkers and educationist was observed which resulted in the establishment of the International Islamic Universities in various parts of the Muslim world. These universities redefined their educational goals. They highlighted a new purpose of education along with a new curriculum, method of teaching and structure of the system of education. All these developments were the result of the deep-rooted spiritual consciousness and the need for moral excellence. One can say the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia [IIUM] was the result of the realization of the spiritual foundation for education. Therefore, IIUM came up with the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge

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[CFK]. It was CFK which was mainly responsible for the spiritual development and moral excellence among students. It was hoped that through the establishment of IIUM and the development of a new curriculum the crisis in Higher Education can be addressed. The dominant modern Western educational system, currently prevalent all over the world, had rejected the Truth of the spiritual dimension of life and the world and excellent moral foundation of human beings is absolutely an essential ingredient of civilization. Due to the absence of the truth of spirituality and lack of moral excellence, humanity today observe a lot of unending competition for material achievements among nations. Consequently, the dominant modern Western educational system has created hundreds and thousands of problems in the world. It continues to create crisis and chaos in life and society despite its positive aspects. It has now become clear to the world that the dominant modern Western educational system needs some modification and change. Hence, the idea for the need of holistic education was presented. This prescription also seems to be a failure due to its inherent ideological shortcomings and prevailing conditions of life and society. It is now expected that with the revival of the original Spiritual Spirit and the emphasis on Moral Excellence, IIUM would become a role model and may be capable of helping humanity to reduce some of the crisis and chaos. Here I would like to emphasise on the need of reinforcement of spirituality with a more clarity and the actualization of moral excellence.

The Current Scenario of the World

During the period of the Coronavirus pandemic, we all were concerned with one another. It unconsciously created a new awareness among the people of the world to think everything fresh. We were forced to think for the well-being of people as human beings regardless of nations, regions, races, countries, and communities. We all realized that we were sailing in the same ship. This truth became manifest. We understand that the contemporary environment in which we all live and share demonstrates the same fate of all. There is no difference if we claim we belong to different nations and races, religions, and ideologies but our fate is the same. Our sense of humanity suppressed to a certain extent our national and racial prides and prejudices. We started looking at ourselves in terms of humanity and human beings.

Despite the above short-term situation, we observe a huge amount of crisis and chaos in contemporary societies. There is now another alarming scenario. Look at the conditions of people living around the

world. We all are subject to health issues, issues of poverty and issues of education, crimes, frauds, and a rising number of cases of financial and moral corruption. No one can escape from the natural calamities. We do not know when and where what will happen. Can any one nation or country claim that they are free from corruption, frauds, crimes, and natural calamities. These are the common issues with which we all are confronted whether we live in this country or in that country. All citizens of the world are subject to the implications of crimes, frauds, and corruption, irrespective of their faiths, doctrines, religions, or ideological commitments. If we look at some of the reports regarding financial frauds and corruption, we realize that we have almost lost our sense of humanity and belonging to each other.

According to the *Fraud-The Fact 2021 Report of the United Kingdom*, some unauthorised financial fraud losses across payment cards, remote banking and cheques totalling £783.8 million have been registered in 2020. In addition to this, UK Finance members reported 149,946 incidents of Authorised Push Payment (APP) scams in 2020 with gross losses of £479 million¹. In addition to this throughout 2020 there has been significant growth in the use by criminals of social engineering to trick consumers out of their money. This is a tactic by which criminals use psychological manipulation to trick people into making security mistakes or giving away sensitive information². In early 2020 the researcher became the victim of a scam and lost 39 thousand US dollars without any help to recover the money.

Highlighting this sort of scams, it was reported that the world witnessed the biggest increase of any scam type, almost doubling in 2020 compared to 2019³. For example, criminals have turned to mass scam texts, phone calls and emails impersonating trusted organisations such as the NHS, the police, or the government to trick people into giving away their personal and financial details. One such scam, purporting to be from the NHS, invited people to provide their personal and financial details in order to ‘receive the vaccine’.

The banking and finance industry is working hard to protect customers from fraud and scams, while partnering with law enforcement

¹UK Finance. (2021). *Fraud-the Facts 2021 the Definitive Overview of Payment Industry Fraud*, p. 6

² Ibid, p. 6

³ Ibid, p. 11

to catch and prosecute the criminal gangs responsible¹. UK Finance Annual Fraud Report 2021, reported 195,996 incidents of Authorised Push Payment (APP) scams in 2021 with gross losses £583.2 million, compared with £420.7 million in 2020².

In India, in the financial year of 2022, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reported a total of around 9,103 bank fraud cases across India³. This was an increase compared to the previous year and turned around the trend of the last decade. The total value of bank frauds was noted in trillion and billion Indian rupees. In the financial year 2022, banking frauds in India amounted to 1.38 trillion Indian rupees. Collectively, the bank frauds have resulted in India losing at least 1 billion rupees (rough 1.255 million USD every day over the past 7 years," reported RBI. According to the report entitled "Global Corruption Barometer – Asia" 2022, "India has the highest overall bribery rate (39%) and the highest rate of citizens using personal connections (46%), following India, Indonesia and China have the second and third highest rates of people using personal connections with 36% and 32% respectively."⁴ Secretary-General António Guterres, United Nations said on International Anti-Corruption Day, December 9, 2018: The annual costs of international corruption amount to a staggering \$3.6 trillion in the form of bribes and stolen money.⁵ The U.N. lists corruption "one of the biggest impediments" to achieving its 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which include the elimination of poverty and hunger, as well as improved education, well-being, and infrastructure. 25 percent of people worldwide said they had had to pay a bribe to access public services in the past 12 months. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 57 percent of people said their government was doing "badly" at fighting corruption. The survey

¹ UK Finance. (2021). *Fraud-the Facts 2021 the Definitive Overview of Payment Industry Fraud*, p. 13

² Ibid, p. 53

³ Statista Research Development. (2022). "India: Number of Bank Fraud Cases 2022." *Statista*, www.statista.com/statistics/1012729/india-number-of-bank-fraud-cases/#:~:text=In%20financial%20year%202022%2C%20the.

⁴ Global Corruption Barometer Asia. (2020). "Global Corruption Barometer- Asia 2020." *Transparency International*, 2020, www.transparency.org/en/gcb/asia/asia-2020; The Hindu Net Desk. (26 Nov. 2020) "India Records Highest Rate of Bribery in Asia: Survey." *The Hindu*, www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-records-highest-rate-of-bribery-in-asia-survey/article33184156.ece.

⁵ United Nations News. (8 Dec. 2018). "The Costs of Corruption: Values, Economic Development under Assault, Trillions Lost, Says Guterres." *UN News*, news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027971. Accessed 26 Sept. 2022.

also found that police and elected officials were ranked as the most corrupt groups, based on global average¹.

A Fundamental Question

Education of children and youth is the most important issue. Unfortunately, for a long time due to the dominant paradigm of modernity and its offshoots ideologies of rationalism, empiricism, relativism etc., it has lost its true purpose. We are producing professionals and skilled workers but not human beings who are aware of their purpose of life and universal values. Harry R Lewis, former Dean and Professor of Harvard University rightly commented about the role of universities:

In short, universities have forgotten their larger educational role for college students. They have succeeded better than ever, as creators and repositories of Knowledge. But they have forgotten that the fundamental job of undergraduate education is to turn eighteen- and nineteen-year-old into twenty-one and twenty-two-year-olds, to help them grow up, to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings.²

He had been a Harvard professor for more than thirty years, having started in 1974. Over the decades he says has heard many academic discussions about teaching, about the curriculum, about grading, about athletics, and about responding to student misdeeds. But he had almost never heard discussions among professors about making students better people.³ He further comments “Universities have lost the sense that their educational mission is to transform teenagers, whose lives have structured by their families and their high schools, into adults with learning and wisdom to take responsibility for their own lives and for civil society.”⁴ But the roles given to science, engineering, and the humanities are indicators of how the university perceives its role in

¹ United Nations News. (8 Dec. 2018). “The Costs of Corruption: Values, Economic Development under Assault, Trillions Lost, Says Guterres.” *UN News*, news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027971. Accessed 26 Sept. 2022.

² Harry R. Lewis, “Excellence without Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education”, (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), xii.

³ Ibid, p. xiii.

⁴ Ibid, p. xiv.

shaping worldview and morals of undergraduates.¹ At the level of college and university, at its best, is where students should start to understand themselves and to find the ideals and objectives for their lives.² The superimposition of economic and scientific motivations on ivory-tower themes has exposed how a university without a larger sense of educational purpose or a connection to its principal constituents is playing its role. “We have forgotten that we teach the humanities to help students understand what it means to be human.”³ Professors and professionals are hired as scholars and teachers, not as mentors of worldview and values and ideals to the young and confused.⁴ These students, “if they know anything about cooperation and communication with peers, kept it locked away in a part of their brains they did not use while doing academic work. They had been conditioned to a particular way of pursuing excellence-making sure *others* did not profit from *their* excellence.”⁵

Harvard Model of Education

Harvard university today tiptoes away from moral education, little interested in providing it and embarrassed to admit it does not wish to do so. Its general report on the ongoing curricular review grandly stated that “we remain cognizant of our responsibility to educate morally responsible citizens and leaders”. More generally, there is no consensus on what counts as good character, so colleges are reluctant to help students become better people.⁶ It is expected that professors can play the role of good advisors only if the university pays some attention to the personal character, moral probity, and wisdom of those who are appointed as professors. In some educational institutions importance is given to moral and character building. Historically, Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh included in its curriculum *Diniyat* [religious] and moral studies but it did not work out well. Experts did not realize that education needs to be organized in a holistic and comprehensive way connecting to the basic issues of life and society. As a result, universities did not focus on the purpose of life and goals of society. The university's

¹ Ibid, p. 2

² Harry R. Lewis, “Excellence without Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education”, (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), p. xiv.

³ Ibid, pp. 2-3

⁴ Ibid, p. 4

⁵ Ibid, p. 75

⁶ Ibid, pp. 96-97

professors are not interested in being truthful and realistic to the True, Authentic and Universal Worldview. At present the educational system everywhere in the world is suffering a spiritual and moral crisis due to the epistemological shortcomings. For Michel Godet, there exists an epistemological crisis followed by lack of clear objectives of education.¹ Some other scholars think that to overcome the crisis they need to focus on the development of human capital, promotion of creativity, adaptability, and imagination and appreciation of culture and inculcation of altruism etc.² According to some other scholars, IMF has recently acknowledged that the neoliberal agenda of the past thirty years has turned universities into supermarkets catering to venture capitalists who are interested in liberal values. For some other scholars, the purpose of higher education is to provide knowledge and expertise needed by the nation. They argued the main aim of the university education is the training of the professionals who can manage and running systems and subsystems of society and government. In recent years the focus is on the development of a coherent and efficient university education that stimulates mobility and employability, making countries more competitive in the global economic market. Commenting on these, Sardar says accelerating technological change and growing global interconnections and complexity have transformed this lack of vision into an acute identity crisis.³

It is also argued that the mission of higher education is to promote ideas and culture. It is asserted that we flourish when our ideas flourish and so does our culture. Thus, university education should help to reflect continuously and systematically on ideas. Universities should always work for advancement of ideas in a rapidly changing world. What kind of ideas and on what basis? In recent years, not only the process of dissemination and transformation of knowledge has changed but also the very idea of knowledge itself. The most important question is: what constitutes knowledge and how we acquire it. For some time, universities were conceived as the institution of production of knowledge. But in recent years through the eyes of post-normal science the conventional view of production of knowledge is seen as inadequate. Gibbons and his colleagues argue that universities must ‘re-engineer’

¹ Godet, Michel, “Worldwide Challenges and Crises in Education Systems”, *Futures*, 1988, p. 243

² Zinser, Richard, “A Curriculum Model of a Foundation for Educating the Global Citizens of the Future”, 2012

³ Sardar, Zia, *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education*, 2017, p. 16

themselves to survive and achieve success. Re-engineering requires ‘re-enchantment and the extension of the university’s socio-economic, cultural and scientific roles by opening up its life-world’. The cultural studies, critical theory, feminist theory and postcolonial studies have severely criticised the conventional mode of knowledge production. They focus on ‘decolonization’ of university. This critique demonstrates the crisis in contemporary academia. Their aim is ‘dethroning western epistemology’. These schools argue that all the modes of modern Western knowledge focussed on the justification of domination and exploitation of the resources of so-called undeveloped nations. The fact is that for the legitimating of the supposedly epistemic superiority of western nations over the rest of the peoples of the planet the western military superiority is used. Based on epistemic superiority a new paradigm, a new set of beliefs, and a worldview was developed within which knowledge is produced, researched, and developed by human efforts. This worldview defines the nature of the world, place of man in it, and the nature of relations between humans and nature. It provided a metaphysical framework for inquiry, change and development that does not correspond with the Truth and Reality of life and the world. Relativism, individualism, liberalism dominated both epistemic consciousness and modes of behaviour of individuals and communities. New ontology, epistemology and methodology were developed differently from traditional ones.

Throughout this process of development of new ideologies, metaphysical frameworks, epistemologies, and methodologies for the development of education nobody raised any question about the True, Authentic and Universal Worldview, the True, Authentic, and Universal Purpose of Education, and the need for Spiritual and Moral Transformation of Individual and Society through the process of Higher Education. Consequently, all the developments concerning the notion of knowledge and system of education in modern times were immensely influenced by speculation and conjecture. Nobody realizes that they need to know with epistemological certainty what is the Truth and Reality of life, its goal and relation with society and the world of nature. Modern educational system, modern body of knowledge, science and all other disciplines do not focus on the necessity of the Truth and Reality of life and the world. Accordingly, they failed to comprehend that no peace and harmony can be established based on the uncertainty of life and the world. We need to know at first the Truth and Reality of life and the world based on the True, Authentic and Universal Knowledge [TAUK]

generally known as Islamic revealed knowledge. The Truth of the existence of TAUk was rejected and human reason and sense-perception were considered the source of knowledge. Due to observable crises in the world, one can ask a basic question for the clarity of the purpose of education: Who is involved in global corruption and fraud cases, crimes and organized financial scandals? Illiterate, uneducated, uncivilized people of the world or the highly educated with techniques and tools? Millions of dollars of scandal were committed in various countries not only by the richest people of the world but also highly educated and professionally qualified experts. What kind of education and moral training did they receive during their educational career?

Islamic Position on Education

Islamic position on education is not clear to many because it is reduced to the level of a religion and the truth and reality of the existence of Allah SWT to the level of a religious God. The existence of TAUk and Allah SWT as the Absolute Truth and Reality were denied in the name of rationality and scientific thinking and unproved and unprovable views of life and society were accepted. We are working today for untrue and unrealistic goals of life and society and competing with one another in the unending race of technological development. Today, all educational systems all-over the world are full of blind faiths, dogmas, myths, doctrines, superstitions, desires, fancies, imaginations, assumptions, distortions, presuppositions, biases, prejudices, reactions, hasty decisions, speculation, conjecture, illusions, enmity, hate, etc. For the understanding of the reality of the metaphysical truth [unseen world], it is claimed that we are applying the so-called rational and scientific frameworks along with ethical, empirical, historical, comparative, critical tools, and techniques. Quite contrary to this, we find certain claims in the Quran, the source of TAUk which is also reduced to the level of a religious book. First, it is declared by Allah SWT that there is a truth “which is beyond the reach of human perception” [2: 3]. There are many things “which are beyond human range of knowledge” [2: 33]. Allah has full knowledge of the truths beyond the reach of human perception both in the heavens and the earth; ... [16: 77]. Allah SWT asks: “Does he have any knowledge of the world beyond the ken of sense-perception, and therefore, clearly sees [the Truth about life and the world]? [53: 35] It is made clear by Allah SWT, beyond any doubt, nobody can inform us about the truth of life and the world save the All-Aware [35: 14].

Say: “None in the heavens and on the earth has knowledge of the Unseen save Allah [27: 65].

About the truth and reality “many indeed say misleading things without knowledge, driven merely by their lowly desires” [6: 119]. No one either has any access to [the Truths in] the realm beyond sense-perception [52: 41]. We all are bound to seek knowledge and guidance from Allah SWT, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, to know the Truth and Reality of life and the world. Children and youth, everyone in fact in society, must know through the process of education the main goal of life. Hence, by the founders of International Islamic University Malaysia [IIUM] it was contended that the modern and traditional educational systems must be remoulded based on the Truth and Reality of life, society, and the world. Consequently, IIUM was established and the main goal of education was identified based on TAUKE. The focus from the beginning was on academic and moral excellence. Academic excellence implies the excellent understanding of the Truth and Reality of life, society, and the world. Based on correct comprehension of life, the need for moral excellence was emphasised: “The Truth is that most of them do not truly believe [understand the Truth of life]” [2: 100]. Thus, Allah SWT reminded us that everyone should know the Truth of this world and life [2: 22]. Those who understand life and do righteous deeds are informed that they will be rewarded [2: 82]. We are asked to ‘excel one another in good works’ [2: 148]. Those who believed and acted righteously and remembered Allah much, are promised for excellent reward [26: 227]; Those who believed and acted righteously will be placed in a Garden and jubilant [30: 15]. Hence, our real concern should be moral excellence rather than material achievements. Without knowing with certainty, the Truth of life, we cannot take any single step in the right direction for a right purpose. Hence, at the time of the inception of life on the earth man was taught by Allah SWT about the Truth and Reality of life and the world. He said: ...Allah taught man what he did not know [96: 5]. The declaration of presumed self-sufficiency of man was rejected from the very beginning. Allah SWT made it clear that those who do not understand the Truth and Reality of life transgress the boundaries of rationality and scientific thinking and assume wrongly that they are self-sufficient [96: 7]. Hence, Allah SWT taught man about the Truth and Reality of life and the Right way of it:

...Beware of the wrath of Allah. He teaches you the Right Way and has full knowledge of everything [2: 282] Allah has full knowledge of all that you do [2: 283].

The Right Way stands clearly distinguished from the Wrong [2: 256].

All that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. Whether you disclose whatever is in your hearts or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it, and will then forgive whomsoever He wills, and will chastise whomsoever He wills. Allah has power over everything [2: 284].

Those who can understand and accept the Unseen realities and truths of the universe and life are informed that they finally in their life would be successful subject to correct perception of life and the world along with the righteousness and good deeds [2: 25]. This must be reinforced in IIUM curriculum with a fresh and innovative understanding. All communities in the world are confronted with untrue and unauthentic perceptions and selfish interest with greediness. Therefore, it is crucial for us to direct all our resources and energies to share our concern about the contemporary crisis and chaos. Our contention is that the deep-rooted crisis and chaos in life and society is mainly caused due to lack of spirituality and moral excellence. These weaknesses are related to intellectual, epistemological, educational, missiological and political aspects of the life of all communities and their political and intellectual leadership. Unless these weaknesses are not addressed properly, the achievement of sustainable development goals seems to be difficult. For this, we at IIUM need to focus with full commitment on the following:

Focus in Teaching on the Truth and Reality of Life and the World and the Importance of Moral Excellence At All Levels of the University

It is suggested here that the existing curriculum must be comprehensively revived taking note of the true and authentic views of life and the world and the need for moral excellence. The current curriculum may require some changes both in its perception and implementation. A clear understanding of true and authentic view of life is the need of everyone in the University and elsewhere. The current scenario, the mode of thinking, understanding and the way of living of most people suggest that they have not been able to understand it

properly. Here, it is contended that the solutions of all the current challenges depend on one side, the correct view of life, and on the other, the dynamic and revolutionary role of the intellectual leadership. The intellectual leadership of the University at different levels must focus to upgrade the correct understanding of life and society. Both must have the strong spiritual and moral foundation. Life is not granted by Allah SWT just to think and work for the material development and success in this world. If we fail to understand this, we would fail to contribute towards the development of people and communities of the world. The problem is that since the dawn of the so-called era of modernity and the slogan of liberalism and independence of man, we, all communities of the world, have become 'independent' from the true and authentic and universal view of life and the world. The origin of Islam is neither understood properly nor its culture and civilization. It is not understood as the worldview explained by the Creator of life and the world since the time of inception of life on earth. It is not taken as the way of life, code of conduct, values and morals, scheme of life and society, source of culture and civilization. Islam unauthentically is confined to personal and private life and to the Muslims alone.

We at IIUM are bound ethically and spiritually to present Islam in its proper, truthful, realistic, and universal form. We must teach our students and revive the correct understanding of Islam of academia. All departments must design courses and teach which can help students to strengthen their understanding of the Truth of life and the world and dedicate themselves to equip them with excellent morals. Before we transform them into skilled professionals, we must upgrade them in *iman* [correct understanding of life and the world, Allah SWT as Creator] and morals. Without making them sound in terms of true worldview and morals, we cannot expect from them that they can plan and achieve the goals of sustainable development. The true, authentic, and universal view of life is the key that provided in the past the basic ideological framework and commitment for sustainable development. It must remain always a source for energy, dynamism, identity, and legitimacy. We must always remember that our existence is as a divinely mandated and guided community with a sublime purpose and a universal mission towards humanity: "There has now come to you a light from Allah, and a clear Book through which Allah shows to all who seek to please Him the paths leading to safety. He brings them out, by His leave, from darkness to light and directs them on to the Straight Way" [5: 15-16]. IIUM curriculum of all the departments in their initial programs of

graduation must work as a fountain head of truthful ideas and concepts and save people from false perception and outlook, safety from misdeeds and their consequences.

Who is responsible for the undesirable situation of the contemporary world of frauds, corruption, and crimes? Our contention is that it is the existing intellectual and political leadership that has brought down the people of the world to the current pathetic predicament. Any sincere observer who is not a partisan to either leadership can observe that for the last few centuries the leadership which has ignored the Truth and Reality of life and the world is ruling and leading the entire world and this same leadership still claims that it can further lead them to the path of sustainable development. To educate this existing leadership, the intellectuals of IIUM, moderate and enlightened scholars must come forward with courage and vision to develop a new discourse. This must be at large and indeed a giant collaborative and a master plan of IIUM intellectuals. My assessment is that the actual decadence of humanity in terms of lack of spirituality and moral superiority is mainly caused by the absence of the Truth and Reality of life and the world. My main argument here is that at least for the last two centuries a leadership that lacks a clear perception of life and the world at both the political and intellectual levels has governed humanity. These leaders and intellectuals collaborated with each other and misguided people around the world. Most of the people of the world are illiterate, poor, and even unable to understand the real nature of the weaknesses of the contemporary world. The following analysis of the current weaknesses will illustrate my argument.

The discourse generated by the liberal and modern leaders and intellectuals is not based on the true, authentic, and universal view of the world. The world is not directed to produce the development of spiritual and morally sound human beings. The world communities rather pay full attention towards material achievements. The main objective of the modern discourse has been to direct the devotion of people to this world and success in this world in terms of material achievements. According to the liberal and modernists, this is the way through which people can achieve development. However, the empirical understanding of the present phenomenon of humanity indicates that this is not the way for development but rather for subordination to and dependence on desires and fancies, which finally results in the development of unhuman condition with the presence of weapons, wars, conflict, pride, hegemony etc. Hence, their argument seems to be unfounded and imaginative, as it

is not supported by the empirical and historical facts of life and history. The history of humanity tells us that wherever and whenever the Truth and Reality of life and the world were neglected, it first changed the mentality of individuals and then society and created selfish and greedy personalities and civilization. The modernist assumption is basically based on a major illusion: the belief in the superiority of human faculties and their liberation from the guidance of Allah SWT.

Against the background of the liberal discourse, the recent history and discourse of Islamic thought was presented purely in terms of "responses to the modern West" due to the pressures of a civilization evidently superior in the accumulation and manipulation of material power. It is a fact that life is given by Allah SWT and it must be lived in accordance with His guidance. But the dominant discourse of liberal school of thought does not allow the intellectuals to understand and accept the above reality. It is also a fact that due to the false perceptions of the liberal and modern intellectuals, a considerable portion of the intellectual energies of those who understand the Truth and Reality of life and the world have been directed to confronting the alien intrusion, that is, modern Western thought and civilization. No doubt their reaction could not have been other than in large part defensive, apologetic and unsure. We bitterly fail to generate an authentic and genuine discourse based on the Truth and Reality of life. The assumption that through the liberation of man, man will enjoy an unprecedented opportunity of finding happiness on this earth proves to be an illusion. Modern man, victim of various assumptions and illusions, is subject to several challenges. The biggest illusion is the denial of spirituality and need for moral excellence. The liberal and modernist wrongly assume that after rejecting the true guidance of Allah SWT they and society can achieve development and happiness. They overlook a more important factor that the scientific and technological progress achieved by the modern Western world after neglecting the true guidance of Allah SWT is not the first, nor even the fundamental, ingredient of life and society. Bertrand Russell argues that increase in knowledge should be accompanied by increase in wisdom. He means by wisdom, a right conception of the ends of life. He said: this is something which science does not provide. Today, all aspects of life are controlled by the totalitarian states and authoritarian rulers. Currently, with the machinery of propaganda in the hands of the rulers, the formation of independent public opinion seems to be impossible. Children and youths are educated but either to be governors or workers.

The above discussion and observations further confirm the truth that the liberal and modern intellectuals and leaders who deny the Truth and Reality of life and the world have caused the current deplorable conditions of the world. Whatever injustice, exploitation and oppression is done in the world by the ruling elites is fully shared by those liberal and modern intellectuals who, on the one hand, provided false perspectives to the ruling classes for the sake of material gains, and on the other hand, diverted the attention of the intellectuals from the Truth and Reality of life and the world to the imitation of the models of the West based on the false view of life which have failed to take the humanity out of the darkness of humiliation, illiteracy, poor health, and poverty. Both the intellectuals and leaders have failed to guide and govern humanity towards the path of peace and prosperity and free from crisis and chaos. Hence, it seems to me that now it is high time for the intellectuals and scholars of IIUM to be proactive and present our own positive point of views. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, therefore, cautions the *ummah*:

What is required of us is that we understand the intellectual and cultural dimensions of the imported foreign solutions. If we can accomplish this, then we will not waste any more time on imitation and parody, and therefore spare ourselves and the rest of the Ummah more suffering and pain. It is certainly neither fair nor just that the Ummah continue to be led by the political and intellectual leadership, be they nationalist, secularist, Marxist, or whatever, who have failed it so badly over the centuries. Why should they be allowed to direct the Ummah along the same useless path?¹

Serious, committed and sincere intellectuals and scholars of IIUM must come forward to commit themselves to the path that is truly open to them, regardless of realism and pragmatism. They must make certain that the agenda which they adopt originates from their own sources, the Islamic revealed knowledge, and their history, and that they use it to steadfastly confront the challenges of contemporary life. If it is not done, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman claimed “the bitter failures suffered by the Islamic world over the past several centuries will pale in

¹ AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, translated by Yusuf Tall DeLorenzo (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), p. 13.

comparison with the new problems that it will have to face"¹. What is seriously needed today is a change in the present ways, means and modes of thinking based on the Truth and Reality of life and the world following the frameworks of Islamization of Knowledge and Relevantization of Islamic [religious] sciences. We must look for a curriculum that can equip our students with the Truth and Reality of life and the world based on our own sources.

The Qualities of Creativity, Innovation and Excellence

Other than the above aspects, the need to inculcate, in an applied sense, the skills of critical, creative, innovative thinking for academic excellence is necessary for our students. We need to adopt them as challenges and make sure that they are reflected in teaching and research. There is no place for imitation and repetition in the life of the developing communities. Every single student of IIUM must understand this fact of life, from the beginning of undergraduate level that he/she must equip himself/herself with the qualities of critical, creative, innovative thinking. The curriculum at present manifests them but it must be made the reality of the University. The most important thing in this respect is to understand that there are certain factors which guarantee the development of people and society. It is an undeniable fact that all human beings are endowed with the capacity of observation, cognition, reflection, and understanding. But not everyone possesses the ability to distinguish between good and evil. In this context all students need to recognize the Social Laws of Rise and Fall of communities according to which everyone can produce new knowledge which is, in fact, the source of development, peace and prosperity. The history of mankind is presented in the Qur'an as a means of knowledge. The general spirit of the Qur'an tells us that the communities who watch carefully and critically the development of human thought and maintain an independent position and develop their own point of view continued their march towards the path of development as that is the method of producing new knowledge. The notions of imitation, adoption, assimilation, reconciliation, borrowing, mediation, integration, should not be the important vocabulary in our discourse. We must guarantee that all our students understand that those who borrow and adopt remain undeveloped. Development and leadership both, therefore, depend on the production of new knowledge. This is the reason that everyone has been

¹ Ibid, p. 13.

endowed by Allah SWT with the faculties of seeing, listening, and perceiving. Similarly, a community which is more advanced in knowledge assumes both the development and the most eminent position in the world. How to create new knowledge? In our view, borrowing and even learning whatever exists are not the true means and methods of creation of new knowledge. Unless we all at the University demonstrate capacity to produce new knowledge in all domains of life, we cannot contribute to achieve sustainable development. And for excelling in knowledge, we require motivation from a visionary and committed scholars. The scholars generally inspire students to devote themselves unsparingly to the creation of new knowledge. They must purify traditional knowledge of impurities and irrelevance in the light of their own findings and deductions. They need to improve their existing body of knowledge with new facts discovered by them empirically. Thus equipped, they strive to restructure life and society to the best of ability that guarantees justice, peace and prosperity and all sorts of sustainable development. When a community thinks in terms of 'learning', 'borrowing', 'absorbing' 'assimilating' and 'adjusting' itself to the changing conditions, it restricts its forward march. The enthusiasm for producing new knowledge must be strengthened at every stage of education. Negative thinking in terms of what has been achieved by others in the past is sufficient, relevant, and compatible should not be the nature of our teaching method. Thinking up to the level of democracy as the best possible system of government indicates the "End of Thinking". No system created by humans can be eternal and final. We can think of better systems. More better concepts and systems can be developed, it is a continuous phenomenon. There is no end to the thinking process and creativity.

It is evident from the above brief exploration that the status of sustainable development is achieved by those communities who make the best use of the faculties and produce new knowledge and are blessed with the development and prosperity. Now, one can deduce correctly that unless we get rid of the slavish mentality and create our own world based on new knowledge, there is no possibility of making sustainable development goals a reality. Each member of the IIUM community should stand for creative and innovative productions in each area of studies and thought. At the intellectual level our scholars and intellectuals need to develop their own models and structures not only different from the existing ones in the so-called developed world, rather they must be superior to those existing models. All our energies,

therefore, must be directed to create this sense of creativity, innovation and excellence, and everyone must be prepared to excel in every aspect of life. IIUM must be identified as the Fountainhead of New Thought. In order to achieve this target, we must benefit from the sources of the University which has created an environment of hard-working culture in a real sense. Instead of using technicalities, we must be able to motivate both academics and students for creativity from the depth of our hearts. The culture of publication of academic papers based on payment in index journals is not suitable for IIUM. The realization of the Truth and Reality of life and the world is more than sufficient to generate the new ideas. In our University those who work seriously and prove to be creative are acknowledged and rewarded continuously. For creating a culture of new knowledge and excellence, the IIUM community needs to understand that there is no development of new knowledge and culture of excellence unless the existing theories of knowledge are replaced by a truthful and realistic epistemology derived from the Islamic revealed knowledge. All scholars and intellectuals of IIUM should come forward courageously to contribute to creating new knowledge. Healthy criticism must be taken as a source of consensus for reaching something good for society. If we fail to create new knowledge, new models, new theories etc. then no one can change the fate of humanity. Injustice, exploitation, frauds, corruption, and oppression will continue to prevail.

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