

A return to the Qur'ānic paradigm of development and integrated knowledge: The *Ulū al-Albāb* model¹

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Abstract: The paper highlights that the secular and modernistic paradigm of development that lacks spiritual and ethical moorings is partly responsible for the 2009 global economic and financial crisis. Muslim policy-makers, intellectuals and scholars are duty-bound to promote the *Tawhīdic* paradigm of holistic development and holistic knowledge. Closely related to the paradigm of development is the issue of the epistemology of autonomous human reason which denies the importance and validity of Divine revelation as a higher source of knowledge and wisdom. The Qur'ān projects the model of the *Ulū al-Albāb*, “people of sound reason” as intellectuals and scholars *par excellence* who combine the understanding of the Book of Nature with the Book of Revelation, and integrate human reason with Divine revelation. The paper ends by suggesting that Muslim countries develop institutions of learning or systems of education which integrates worldly knowledge with religious knowledge in a harmonious and symbiotic manner.

Keywords: Qur'ānic paradigm, systemic, *Ulū al-Albāb*, integrated, intellect

Abstrak: Makalah ini menekankan bahawa paradigma perkembangan moden dan sekular yang kurang tabatan kerohanian dan etika sedikit sebanyak bertanggung jawab atas krisis kewangan dan ekonomi 2009. Para penggubal polisi, intelektual dan cendekiawan Islam mempunyai kewajipan untuk mempromosikan paradigma Tawhīd bagi pembangunan holistik dan pengetahuan holistik. Berkaitan rapat dengan paradigma perkembangan ini

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adalah isu epistemologi akal manusia yang bebas yang menyangkal kepentingan dan kesahihan wahyu illahi sebagai satu sumber pengetahuan dan kebijaksanaan. Al-Qur'an mengemukakan model Ulū al-Albāb, "orang yang sempurna akalnya" sebagai ilmuan dan cendekiawan yang tiada tolak bandingnya yang menggabungkan pemahaman Kitab Alam dan Kitab Ilmu Wahyu, dan mengintegrasikan penakulan manusia dengan Ilmu Wahyu. Makalah ini diakhiri dengan cadangan supaya negara-negara Islam membangunkan institusi pembelajaran atau sistem pembelajaran yang menggabungkan ilmu duniawi dengan ilmu agama secara harmoni dan simbiotik.

Kata kunci: *Paradigma al-Qur'an, sistematik, Ulū al-Albāb, bersepadu, intelek*

The disappointing collapse of the Copenhagen U.N. Summit on Climate Change on December 18, 2009, much to the dismay of environmentalist organizations and the poor countries of the world, is yet another global symptom – in our humble observation – of the larger crisis of the contemporary secular world order and a secular humanistic civilization grounded in the ontology of materialism and the epistemology of autonomous reason. This historic failure of the Summit means that the poor and ‘scientifically-technologically less developing countries’ (henceforth STLDCs) will continue to be the most vulnerable to the future ravages of global warming as well as the turbulent consequences of economic and financial globalization constructed by the world capitalist system in the name of ‘development’, the ‘free market’ or ‘liberalization’. The chaotic outcome of the Summit which “did not set legally binding targets to reduce the emission of gases that scientists say are heating up the world’s atmosphere to dangerous levels” (*The Star*, 2009, December 25) also indicates that the unjust political and economic systems dominating the world today will continue to preserve their hegemonic interests at the expense of the STLDCs.

Looking back several decades, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s witnessed the rise and euphoria of a triumphant liberal capitalist world ideology. However, the signs of the internal crisis of soulless and greedy capitalism could already be seen in 2001 with the first Wall Street crash, followed in the next decade by a wave of Wall Street scandals which destroyed Enron Corp. and WorldCom. The soulless and immoral spirit of the

scheming financial wizards whose “breathing symbol of this economic sordidness” was personified in Bernie Madoff, who is now being punished with a 150-year jail sentence “for orchestrating the biggest Ponzi scheme in the history of humanity” (*Time*, 2009, December 7). With all the signs of broken dreams and collapsing structures characterizing the last decade, it is no wonder that *Time* magazine (2009, December 7) called it the “Decade from Hell.” The writer who analysed the current US economic crisis gave the following verdict:

Our economic narcissism was certainly the culprit in the devastation wrought by financial markets, which have subjected us to an increasingly frequent series of crashes, frauds and recessions. To a great degree, this was brought about by a lethal combination of irresponsible deregulation and accommodating monetary policies ... Bankers and financial engineers had an unsupervised free-market free-for-all just as the increased complexity of financial products – e.g., derivatives – screamed out for greater regulation... Enron, for instance, was a bastard child of a deregulated utilities industry and a mind-bending financial alchemy (Serwer, 2009).

Historic opportunity for alternative paradigms

The 2009 global economic and financial crisis, which has been considered as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s, appears to us – a Muslim analyst – as a major sign of the larger systemic moral decadence of an unjust (*zālim*) contemporary anthropocentric civilization: a civilization anchored in the European Enlightenment period and constructed upon the dominant worldview of secular humanism which has dethroned God and, instead, deified autonomous human reason. This acute civilizational crisis, which manifests the dismal failure of secular modernity and its reigning paradigm of human knowledge devoid of transcendent meaning, nevertheless, provides a historic opportunity for Muslim policy-makers, scholars, academic institutions and Islamic NGOs to come forward with more lasting solutions or, better still, with alternative paradigms of knowledge, systems, perspectives, approaches and ideas.

It should be pointed out that many conscientious Muslim thinkers, intellectuals, reformists and renewalists have expressed their

deep reservations and anxiety, during the period of Western imperialism and colonialism, regarding the negative aspects of secular or agnostic Western civilization and culture, and have argued that Islamic intellectual and cultural values offered more wholesome alternatives for modern man and society because they were grounded in a worldview of the inherent harmony and complementarity between Divine revelation and human reason. However, such Islamic reformist and renewalist discourse was arrogantly dismissed by the Western intellectual establishment as ‘apologetic,’ backward and anti-modern. With the exposure of the failure of secular modernity to deliver the promises of rationalism, positivism, humanism and scientism by Western post-modernist thinkers themselves in the 1970s and 80s, the moral hazard of secular democracy and globalizing capitalism reached threatening proportions with grave global consequences. In their frantic search for the panacea to the crisis of global depression, some Western economists and financial experts are now willing to allow the Islamic financial and banking system to play a more active role as one of the possible ways of alleviating the current ailments as a result of the highly speculative and exploitative free-market forces which created a crisis of deviant economics and enthroned what many analysts have described as the “religion” of “market idolatry” which has, in fact, plunged the world into “The Age of Turbulence” (Alan Greenspan, 2007).

Redefining development and actualizing the *ummatic* vision

Driven by a different civilizational vision and sets of underlying assumptions about the true nature of mankind and knowledge, the reformist Islamic intellectual discourse on education, economics, politics, law, literature, architecture, psychology, sociology, science and technology, which was begun by the *işlāh-tajdīd* Islamic movements in the 1950s, paved the way for the construction of an alternative paradigm of contemporary knowledge based upon the values and norms from within the worldview of Islam. It is our duty to remind contemporary Muslim social scientists and natural scientists, including professionals and academics, that they carry upon their shoulders a civilizational, humanistic and religious duty to offer, among other things, an Islamic perspective of ‘development’ because the current conventional concept is part of the secular

Western paradigm of modernity and progress. The Muslim reinterpretation would have to be based upon the worldview of *Tawhīd* – the uncompromising Islamic monotheism based upon the absolute oneness of Allah as the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful, Omnipresent Master of the universe and the Living Ruler of all mankind, who has laid down the Divine Path for (a) the proper growth and well-being of human beings as His servants (*‘ibād al-Rahmān*), vicegerents (*khulafā’ fī al-ard*), believers (*al-mu’minūn*), and (b) the best form of social grouping, social solidarity and transnational community with the attribute of “the best community brought forth (by Allah (SWT) for mankind” (*khayra ummatin ukhrijat lil-Nās* (3:110) and the “justly balanced community to be a witness to all people” (*ummatan wasaṭan li-takūnū shuhadā’ ‘alā al-nās*) (2:143).

As the servants of the One True God, Allah (SWT), all human beings are supposed to live in peace with one another, in accordance with the revealed scheme of life of the Compassionate Creator and Ruler; to worship Him alone, to obey Him and to be grateful to Him for all the bounties He has provided for the mankind in the universe. Rebellion against His will is surely the worst form of ingratitude (*kufr al-ni’mah*) on the part of human beings who are the best of His creatures. As the vicegerents on Allah’s earth, all human beings – the ancients as well as the moderns – are entrusted with the responsibility of constructing life on earth or this-worldly existence (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) and a theocentric civilization as Allah’s trustees and trustworthy implementors of the Divinely-revealed code of life (*al-Sharī’ah*) which interacts harmoniously with the world of nature and with fellow human beings of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Vicegerents are duty-bound to utilise all the Allah-given bounties (*ni’mah, faḍl, rizq, barakah*) in man and in nature as Divine trusts (*amānah*), not as the absolute property of the trustees, in order to attain goodness in earthly existence (*ḥasanah fī al-dunyā*) and as a means of achieving goodness and felicity in the everlasting Hereafter (*ḥasanah fī al-ākhirah*). Vicegerents are supposed to be God’s workers for the attainment of ultimate well-being and success (*al-falāḥ*) as opposed to ultimate loss and misery (*al-khusrān*) but unfortunately many human beings are not aware nor conscious that they – whether Muslims or non-Muslims – are

divinely-appointed vicegerents. Many human beings of the modern era forget or deny their roles as servants of Allah (SWT) and His vicegerents on earth; consequently they behave as though they are completely independent of their Master to develop communities, societies, nations, paradigms, ideologies or theories, according to their own whims and fancies. Hence, the emergence of secular or materialistic notions of ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘modernisation’ to challenge the religious or spiritual perspectives of true human development.

Although vicegerency is an automatic status conferred by Allah (SWT) to all human beings by virtue of being human, the status and identity as ‘one who submits to Allah (SWT)’ – *al-muslim* – and one who truly has attained faith, *al-mu'min*, is not automatic. Human beings can – and many do – choose not to submit or to have true faith. Their choice of not submitting to the One True God or denial (*kufur*) of the creed of *Tawhīd* as conveyed by Allah’s Messengers constitutes a grave violation of man’s purpose of existence which incurs the displeasure or wrath (*ghaḍab*) of the Almighty Sovereign of mankind (*Rabb al-‘ālamīn* and *Malik al-nās*). Thus, their search for ‘the good society’, ‘progress’, ‘development’, ‘happiness’ or ‘prosperity’ often ends in failure, self-destruction or collective misery. At this juncture it may be appropriate to reflect on the meaning and implications of the following translation of Qur’ānic verses.

And never have We sent a Prophet unto any community without trying its people with severe misfortune and hardship, so that they might humble themselves; then We changed the evil for the good until they increased in number and in wealth, and they said to themselves, “Our forefathers too were afflicted with misfortune and hardship” whereupon We seized upon them all of a sudden, without them being aware of what was coming; Yet if the people of the town had believed and had the *taqwā* (of Allah SWT), certainly We indeed have opened for them blessings out of heaven and earth, but they belied (the message from Allah SWT), and so We took them to task (punish them) through what they had been doing. Can, then, the people of any community ever feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by night while they are asleep? Why, can the people of any community ever feel secure that Our punishment will not

come upon them in broad daylight, while they are engaged in worldly play? Can they, then, ever feel secure from Allah's stratagem? But none will feel secure from Allah's stratagem except those people who are already lost. Has it then not become obvious to those who have inherited the Earth from the former generations that, if We so willed, We could smite them too for their sins, and seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear (the truth) (7:94-100).

As for the true believers, they will always seek the guidance of Allah (SWT) as revealed to the Messengers and culminating in the final revelation to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in understanding the meaning of life and in constructing a holistic civilization which ensures the proper 'growth' and 'development' of human personality, culture, community, state and civilization. True believers perceive their whole life as part and parcel of the larger meaning of *'ibādah* (worship) and *'ubūdiyyah* (servitude) to Allah (SWT). Their economic, political, cultural, social, intellectual and spiritual lives and systems are therefore, constructed to be in accordance with the worldview of *Tawhīd*, a worldview which (a) integrates all worldly acts or activities with the value of true faith (*īmān*), constant mindfulness of the pleasure and displeasure of Allah (SWT) (*taqwā*) and goodness or acts of beneficence (*ihsān*); (b) makes the believers in Islam deeply conscious of the inevitability of the Day of Judgment and the final consequences in the Hereafter; and (c) defines the believers in Islam as constituting a universal and Global Community (*ummah*) committed to moral excellence, justice and the pursuit of goodness in this world and goodness in the Hereafter as defined by Allah (SWT). The *ummah*, based on the creed (*'aqīdah*) of *Tawhīd*, transcends all the geographical, cultural and nationalistic barriers and stands for the fulfillment of the Divine commandment of "enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil" (*al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar*). It is, at the same time, the embodiment of the spirit of *raḥmatan lil-'ālamīn* (mercy to all the worlds) which holds out the promise of true inner peace, harmonious co-existence with fellow human beings, justice and fairness for all creatures of Allah (SWT) and upholding the dignity of all human beings (*karāmah insāniyyah*), and mutual respect for the brotherhood of all mankind without compromising the fundamental beliefs and values. To the true believers who faithfully seek the Divine guidance

in the Qur'ān and draw lessons from the normative Prophetic tradition (Sunnah) of Islamic civilization, the proper way to attain *al-falāḥ* is to follow the holistic and integralist model of human 'development' which fulfils all the material and non-material needs of human beings, families, communities, societies, states, nations, and the eco-system. Based on a theocentric world view and the Prophetic normative precedents, the Islamic believers' conception of 'development' as well as 'the good society' is necessarily different from the secular, atheistic or liberal democratic conceptions of models of development or 'the good society'.

Islamic religious scholars since the time of al-Ghazālī (d.1111) until today have emphasized the fact that Allah's Divine Way which constitutes a Divinely constructed scheme of life for human beings was aimed at fulfilling certain fundamental objectives which they called the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (objectives of the Divine Way). These are the protection and preservation of Tawḥīd, religion, sound intellect, life, legitimate property, lineage, human dignity and legitimate rights. Later scholars such as Dr. Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī (1996) expanded the objectives to embrace a larger cluster of legitimate and abiding human concerns endorsed by Islam. A holistic and integrated human and sustainable development from the Islamic perspective would have to include the above objectives, including one of the fundamental missions of the Messengers of Allah (SWT), namely, "the purification and advancement of the human self" (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) through the application of the ethics of *Tawḥīd* and the Prophetic education (*ta'līm, tarbiyah* and *tazkiyah*) (91:9; 3:164; 62:2).

Unfortunately, many of the existing Muslim nation-states and the ruling political elites, decision-makers and leadership of Muslim countries do not portray the attributes of holistic excellence of the universal *ummah* or the model of *tazkiyah* or *taqwā*-driven growth. The overriding concerns of governments tend to be the preservation and protection of vested, national or group interest, and sometimes because of the need to curry favour with the powerful and rich nations of the Western world. Their conception of 'development' is, therefore, to a large extent adopted from the secular paradigm of development as when they accept without reservation the Western classification of countries and nations into 'developed',

‘developing,’ ‘less developed,’ ‘least developed’ and ‘underdeveloped,’ whereas the primary criteria implied in the above classification are primarily economic, physical and technological – in short, they represent predominantly materialistic and tangible criteria which do not do justice to the holistic notion of human spiritual purification and advancement, based upon the worldview of unity of material and spiritual dimensions as well as the unity of well-being in this world and well-being in the Hereafter.

Failures of the secular paradigm of development

Realizing the shortcomings and failures of the dominant secular paradigms of development, either in economics, politics, culture or education, Muslim scholars and intellectuals have come up with alternative models of ‘development.’ The writings of Khurshid Ahmad (1979; 1980), Aidit Ghazali (1990), Ataul Huq et al. (2006) and Muhammad Syukri Salleh (2003) in Malaysia are some of the examples of the attempt by contemporary Muslim scholars who disagree with both the liberal capitalist as well as the socialist-Marxist models of ‘development.’ The latest writing on the Islamic perspective of development that we would strongly recommend is by Muhammad Umer Chapra with the title *The Islamic Vision of Development in the Light of the Maqâṣid al-Sharī‘ah* (2008). Besides the Muslim critiques, there are also useful critical analyses by some Western dissenters of the conventional and mainstream viewpoints, as contained in Gilbert Rist’s book, *The History of Development from Western Origins to Global Faith* (1997). To him the “strength of ‘development’ discourse comes from its power to seduce, in every sense of the term: to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming, but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive” (1997, p.1).

We are aware that the discourse on development has evolved from the purely economic focus in the 1950s to what was called ‘human development’ (see UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1991) in the 1970s, and later in the 1980s and 90s to ‘sustainable development,’ culminating in the worldwide Millennium Development Goals by which countries agreed that between 1990 and 2015, they would “halve income poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality; reduce under-

five mortality by two-thirds, cut maternal mortality by three-quarters; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; ensure environmental sustainability, and build a global partnership for development” (UNDP, 1991). These goals are commendable in themselves but they do not address the issues of moral development of human beings or the moral decadence of modern politics, economics, culture, art, media, ICT and global entertainment sub-cultures championed by the powerful gambling, film, drug and liquor industries throughout the world.

Going back to the book of Gilbert Rist, we wish to highlight his critiques of the inadequacies of the definitions of ‘development’ which he considers as “an element of the religion of modernity” and “a result of Western arrogance” (Rist, 1997, p.21). In his judgment, ‘development’ is always presented as a solution, whereas in actual fact it is “a problem (as well as creating problems)” (1997, p.46). The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has come up with several declarations since the Earth Summit in Rio Janeiro in 1992, the international conventions on climate change, on biodiversity, on the forest and Agenda 21 (for the twenty-first century) which consists of 800 pages and is considered as the “bible of sustainable development” (1997, pp.188-190). He seriously doubts the successful implementation of those grandiose plans and noble declarations because of the “deliberate ambiguity” in their interpretations, and that the ultimate aim is still that of the economic growth which benefits the North more than the South (1997, pp.192-193).

Notwithstanding the misgivings and serious critique against the Western development paradigm, there are those who honestly believe the only way to survive in the near future is to create a ‘sustainable society’ by making people really conscious of its necessity. They believe that people need to have the right vision and implement ‘social learning’ as the major avenue to social change. One such intellectual is Lester W. Milbrath of the State University of New York, who wrote his *Envisioning a Sustainable Society: Learning Our Way Out* (1989).

His well-argued and well-documented thesis is that the **present trajectory of secular modern society is not sustainable** (1989, p.xi).

He says that modern society has learned too well how to dominate and if it fails to “learn how to control our exuberance... [then] our ‘success’ will lead to our extinction.” (1989, p.3). He concludes that “we have built a society, and economic system, that cannot sustain its trajectory” (1989, p.4). He says further:

Devastation from climate change will be exacerbated by other global biospheric effects: loss of the ozone layer, acid rain, and poisonous red tides of algae, toxic pollution of soils, water, and air, species extinction. Nature may have many additional unpleasant surprises in store for us. When these effects are combined with resource shortages, we may well wonder how we can continue to support even the 5 billion people already living, much less the additional billions that are destined to arrive (even if we strive vigorously to limit population growth).

Today our power to dominate and injure nature is awesome. We can move mountains, fly to the moon, obliterate cities, slash down jungles, poison large water bodies, and create new species. Our ability to control the power we have gained is not well-developed. The industrial disasters at Bhopal and Chernobyl signal that we can expect many more such disasters. A nuclear war followed by a nuclear winter could obliterate nearly all life from planet earth.

The people living 100 years ago could hardly have imagined the changes that this brief span of time would bring. Nearly everyone today expects the pace of change to accelerate. If nanotechnologies, which I discuss in Chapter 12, were developed, they would accelerate our thrust for power and change 1,000 times. We are told that this is progress and that is good. Labeling an activity as progress implies that we know where we are going and that we can measure our speed on getting there. Actually, we do not know where we are going and we do not know where we wish to go. *Progress* is a meaningless term without this knowledge. We also forget to ask, “Can we sustain what we are building?” (1989, pp.4-5).

Lester Milbarth also discusses what he considers as the “Technological Imperialism of the Developed Countries,” “The Imperialism of Large Technology-Based Systems” and “Structural Wastefulness” (1989, pp.225-260) and offers examples of structures

and technology that enhance sustainability. The reality according to him is that we “humans live in one biosphere but our world is fragmented” and the policies of the rich and powerful nations are not geared to sincerely help the poor and technologically underdeveloped societies and countries of the South (see also Krugman, 2009, June 30; Nagara, 2009, July 12; Martin Khor, 2009, March 16). Recently Jacques Diou, the Director of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the U.N., revealed that as a result of the current global financial crisis, the number of the hungry people in the world has reached a record 1.02 billion, an 11 percent increase compared to the figure of 915 million in 2008 (*Mingguan Malaysia*, 2009, June 21).

In light of the world-threatening multiple but interrelated global crises affecting all countries of the world, in particular the poor and weak states as well as Muslim countries, it is imperative that the alternative Qur’ānic paradigm of holistic and fully-integrated development be studied, understood, disseminated and finally implemented by Muslim leaders, first in Muslim countries and later as a model to be shared or appreciated by other communities across the globe. Closely related to the issue of the crisis of development is the issue of the meaning and purpose of education. In this respect, the globalization of capitalism and secular democracy has also led to the growth of another ‘cancer’ of advanced capitalism, namely, the commodification and commercialization of higher education. In the process, many universities are being regarded by nationalist leaders as ‘factories’ producing goods for the market and generators of national wealth. The next section will discuss the implications of that ‘cancer’ and the Qur’ānic model of the integrated intellectual *par excellence*.

The Qur’ānic paradigm of united and integrated knowledge

This era of globalization has offered a materialistic rationale for the commercialization of higher education, an issue that has engaged the attention of several Western critics (Postman, 1995; Readings 1997). In this regard, we should be grateful to Harry Lewis, a Harvard dean of 32 years, who decided to expose the other side of Harvard in his book *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (Lewis, 2006). Since this phenomenon

of the corruption of higher education is not confined to the famous universities in the West but has spread to Asian countries, it is only proper and commendable that Muslim leaders and Muslim educationists pay more urgent and serious attention to the Qur'ān's paradigms of true human development and of integrated knowledge. As the Qur'ān is the primary source for Muslims to seek Divine knowledge, which reveals absolute truths concerning the true nature of man, the correct methodology of holistic human development, as well as the epistemology and ethics of *Tawhīd*, a sincere and deep study of the Holy Book is more urgently needed today than ever before, especially by the Muslim elites and policy-makers in Muslim countries, Malaysia included. At a time when humanity as a whole is witnessing not only the failures of modern education (Chomsky, 2004) but what Immanuel Wallerstein, the eminent American sociologist, describes as "The End of the World as We Know it: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century" (Wallerstein, 1999) or "The End of Certainty" as described by the Nobel laureate in chemistry in 1977, Ilya Prigogine (Wallerstein, 1999). Muslim countries – beset with their own internal crises and chronic ailments – cannot afford to continue on the path of modernization modeled upon the secular paradigm of development or perpetuate the system of national education in which religious education and worldly education are still in the dualistic or dichotomistic mode.

Under these circumstances the development of the holistic personality of "the possessors of sound intellect," the *ULŪ AL-ALBĀB* as the Qur'ān calls it, in Muslim institutions of higher learning should receive urgent attention by Muslim intellectuals, scholars and educationists who are sincerely striving to erect the human pillars of an alternative development model and sustainable civilization – a civilization based upon the servitude and gratitude of human beings to their compassionate living Creator, the beneficent, omniscient and omnipotent Master, the just and caring Ruler of the cosmos and all that exists.

The production and growth of more Islamicised intellectuals, scholars, scientists, professionals, political leaders and educated classes who combine or unify scientific and worldly knowledge with religious values, thinking and contemplation (*fikr* and *tafakkur*) with spiritual remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah (SWT), worldly means with

otherworldly ends, reason with Divine revelation, professionalism with *taqwā* (that deep ethical consciousness of the pleasure and displeasure of Allah [SWT]), and are not afflicted with the diseases of the spiritual heart which al-Ghazālī called *al-muhlikāt* (destructive elements). These holistic and God-fearing human resources and intellectual capital are the need of the hour to transform the ailing Muslim nations and communities, and to help reconstruct the contemporary human civilization that is mired in the moral crises of secular modernity.

Since the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Makkah al-Mukarramah in 1977, the serious and sincere efforts of Muslim leaders, scholars, intellectuals, Islamic movements and organizations to actualize the Islamic vision of holistic and integrated education have led to the establishment of many educational institutions – from kindergartens to universities – which aspire to realize the goals of Islamic education, i.e., to make the whole of human life a service and worship (*‘ibādah*) and to attain well-being in this world and well-being in the Hereafter. There are now several private schools and colleges in Turkey (based on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s model of integration) and elsewhere, in the Arab world, Indonesia, Pakistan and in some Western countries, which are inspired by the holistic vision of the *Ulū al-Albāb*.

In Malaysia the school systems of ABIM (the Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia), the Dar al-Hikmah as well as of JIM (the Malaysian Society of Islamic Reform) are among the foremost in pursuing this vision, while a few religious schools and Islamic educational institutions in Terengganu and Selangor are trying to produce Muslim science-stream students who are at the same time memorizers of the Qur’ān. The latest institution to reorient its educational objectives in line with the *Ulū al-Albāb* vision is the Mara Science College of Besut, based upon the three components of its Ulul Albab Programme, namely, the Qur’ānic, the Encyclopedic and the Ijtihadic components (*Mingguan Malaysia*, 2009, December 6). This holistic and integral vision of Islamic education is, of course, the common vision of many Malaysian Muslim scientists, engineers, doctors, professionals and academics in the Malaysian universities – including the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM.) and the new Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM.) – and

Islamic professional organizations, such as the Islamic Academy of Science (ASASI). It is the vision which underlies the Islamic paradigm shift from a secular and purely rationalistic epistemology to the *Tawhīdic* epistemology and ethics – a shift that is expressed in the IIUM. through the university’s mission of Islamicisation and integration of human knowledge (IIUM Memorandum and Articles of Association, 3-5). We expect more educational institutions in the Muslim world and in the West in the coming decades to shift from the secular, dualistic models and adopt the integrated model of Islam as the solution to the educational, intellectual and moral malaise of the Muslim *ummah*. Since the Islamic model is based upon the integration of reason and revelation, it is important to understand the Islamic conception of the ‘people endowed with sound reason’ or ‘possessors of sound intellect’ according to the Qur’ānic worldview.

In the next section, the meaning and implications of the Qur’ānic term *Ulū al-Albāb* is briefly explained, in order to better comprehend the nature of the mind of God-fearing intellectuals, scholars and professionals – as people who use their intellect in the proper way – to bring about the necessary changes in contemporary society and culture.

The definitions of *Ulū al-Albāb* (henceforth UA)

Before going into the definitions of UA, it should be mentioned that the term is used 16 times in the Qur’ān as a favourable metaphor of the integrated mind and personality of the true believer, whose intellect, knowledge and skills are utilized in accordance with revealed Divine guidance and norms.

The word *albāb* in Arabic is the plural of *lubb* which means ‘*aql* (intellect or reason) or the purest and best part of any substance. The expression “*lubb al-rajul*” (the purest part of a man) means “the intellect that is set in his heart” (*mā ju’ila fī qalbihī min al-‘aql*) (Ibn Manẓūr, 1968, vol.1, p.729; al-Ṭabarī, 2001, p.120). The ‘*aql* is the quintessence of a human being (*khulāṣat al-insān*), and when it is cleansed of the influence of desire or passion (*hawā*), or negative imagination, it becomes the most special part of the intellect, the *lubb* (al-Zabīdī, 1965, p.475; al-Qurṭubī, 2006).

The commentators of the Qur'ān are generally unanimous in defining UA briefly as 'possessors of intellect' or 'people of intelligence'. Al-Ṭabarī says in his commentary (p.470) that UA means "the possessors of great minds" (*aṣḥāb al-'uqūl al-kabīrah*). Al-Zamakhsharī says that UA, among other things, means "those who acted in accordance with the dictates of their intellects, then they observed and reflected" (*al-Kashshāf*, n.d., p.494). Al-Rāzī (1981) observes that the term UA is an expression of praise and appreciation (*al-madh wa-al-thanā'*) which Allah (SWT) applies to those who use their intellects in the best possible way. To him the UA can be understood briefly as "the possessors of intellects" (*ulū al-'uqūl*), or to be more precise as "those who possess complete and consummate intellects" (*dhū al-'uqūl al-kāmilah*) (pp.145, 155). The expression, according to him, reflects great honour (*al-sharaf al-'azīm*) and high esteem (*al-martabah al-'āliyah*) conferred upon those who possess sound intellects.

An interesting and insightful interpretation is given by al-Rāzī when he compares verse 164 of Sūrat al-Baqarah which ends with the expression "*li-qawmin ya'qilūn*" (for people who use their reason) with verse 190 of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān. Both verses contain a similar message, although the former is more elaborate, in the sense that the expression "people who use their reason" is also the fundamental attribute of the UA mentioned in the latter. He explains that the term UA is used in verse 190 of Āl 'Imrān although the theme is the same because the intellect has two aspects – an outward (*zāhir*) dimension and an inner dimension which is the *lubb*. He opines that the human act of reasoning at the initial stage is ordinary intellection (*'aqlan*) while at a more perfect stage it becomes profound intellection (*lubban*). However, his humility and intellectual modesty make him say, with caution, "this is what comes to my mind, while Allah knows better the secrets of His great, munificent and wise Words" (*fahādhā mā khaṭar bi-al-bāl wallāh a'lam bi-asrār kalāmihi al-'azīm al-karīm al-ḥakīm*, p.110).

Ibn Kathīr in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* explains the meaning of *albāb* as "pure and consummate intellects (*al-'uqūl al-tāmmah al-zakiyyah*) which comprehend things and their realities in the clearest way" (*allatī tudriku al-ashyā' bi-ḥaqāihā 'alā jaliyyātihā*) (Ibn Kathīr, 2000). He elaborates that "those who understand, reason,

and ponder over the meanings of things in their true nature are only those who possess sound intellects and correct understandings (*al-'uqūl al-salīmah wa al-fuhūm al-mustaqīmah*).”

Al-Alūsī says in his *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* (1926) that UA are “those who possess unadulterated intellects (*al-'uqūl al-khālīṣah*) which are freed from any kinds of blemished sentiments or imaginations”.

Al-Shawkānī (2003) defines UA as “those who have sound intellects which are freed from defects of deficiency” (*al-'uqūl al-ṣaḥīḥah al-khālīṣah 'an shawā'ib al-naqs*). In another paragraph he defines *albāb* as “intellects which are pure (or uncontaminated).”

Ibn 'Ashūr (1984) in his *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa-al-Tanwīr* uses the expression “perfect minds” (*al-'uqūl al-kāmilah*).

Sayyid Quṭb in his *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (1971) describes UA as “those who possess sound comprehension” (*ulū al-idrāk al-ṣaḥīḥ*) (vol. 2, p.188).

Hamka (1992), the well-known Indonesian scholar, translates UA at various places in his *Tafsir al-Azhar* as:

- a) “*orang-orang yang mempunyai inti fikiran*” (people who possess insight)
- b) “*orang-orang yang mempunyai fikiran dalam*”(people who possess deep thought)
- c) “*orang-orang yang berfikir*” (people who think)
- d) “*orang-orang yang berakal*”(people who use their reason)
- e) “*orang-orang yang berfikiran dalam*” (people who think deeply)

Shaikh Abdullah Basmih (1983), the Malaysian translator of the Qur'ān, *Pimpinan al-Rahman* gives more or less the same meanings as Hamka:

- a) “*orang-orang yang menggunakan akal fikiran*” (people who use their mind)

- b) “*orang-orang yang berfikiran*” (people who think)
- c) “*orang-orang yang berakal fikiran*” (people of reason)
- d) “*orang-orang yang berakal (yang dapat memikir dan memahaminya)* (people of reason who could think and understand)

In English commentaries of the Qur’ān, UA is translated as “men of understanding” by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (*The Holy Qur’an*, 1983), Marmaduke Pickthall (*Holy Qur’an*, 1930), Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi, (*Towards Understanding the Quran*, 2001) and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (*The Noble Qur’an*), while Muhammad Asad (*The Message of the Qur’an*, 1980) is the only one who translates UA as “the ones endowed with understanding”. In the author’s opinion the translation of UA as ‘men of understanding’ may not be quite acceptable nowadays given the prevalent gender preferences. Thus ‘people of understanding’ is more acceptable.

A brief summary of the characteristics of the fully integrated minds of UA

From a study of the 16 verses in which the term UA is used in the Qur’ān, it is possible to summarize the quality of the character and the mind of the UA – the mind which manifests the Qur’anic paradigm of the truly integrated knowledge and integrated intellectuals – as follows:

1. In looking back at the life struggles of Prophets and Messengers of Allah (SWT), the UA seek to draw moral and spiritual lessons for them to internalize (12:111).
2. In dealing with verses of the Qur’ān which are regarded as allegorical (*mutashābihāt*) or open to several interpretations, the UA’s attitude is one of unquestioning acceptance of the Qur’ān as a whole as the words of Allah (SWT) and not allowing their base desires, intellectual arrogance or satanic impulses to influence them negatively with regard to any injunctions of Allah (SWT). The true Islamic intellectuals also adopt the attitude of the UA *vis-à-vis* the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) (3:7, 2:269, 14:52).

3. The UA believe, know and are always cognizant of the fact that whatever was taught or enjoined by the Prophet (SAW) was the truth that came from Divine revelation (13:19, 38:29, 39:9).
4. In responding to advice, views or opinions coming from external quarters, the UA weigh carefully and sincerely those ideas or propositions; anything that comes from Allah (SWT) or is in conformity with Allah's injunctions or norms will be chosen and followed by them (39:18).
5. The stories relating the sufferings of Allah's Prophets (such as Ayyub [AS] and others) will be given serious thought by the UA in order to derive useful lessons and wisdom in facing the tribulations of life in this world (38:43).
6. The history of the struggle between Moses (AS) and the Pharaoh which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the latter, because of his arrogance, over-confidence, selfishness, injustices and denial of the sovereignty of Allah (SWT) becomes a source of guidance (*hudā*) and reminder (*dhikrā*) to the UA (40:54).
7. The UA keenly observe the natural life cycle of vegetation beginning with the initial growth leading eventually to lifeless rubble on earth, and understand this process of rise and fall in the natural world as conveying deep lessons and wisdom for them and for mankind as a whole (39:21).
8. The intellect that is pure and uncontaminated, as in the minds of the UA, is ever in need of consciousness of *taqwā* to Allah (SWT) – the deep consciousness of the presence and sovereignty of Allah (SWT) such that the believer is always mindful lest any of his/her actions, thoughts or behaviour might incur His displeasure or wrath. It is this spirit of *taqwā* that will lead the believers as well as UA to *al-falāḥ* (real success in this world and in the Hereafter). *Taqwā* then becomes the **necessary** ingredient in the formation of the mind of Islamic intellectuals, leaders, scholars, professionals and the ordinary believers. It should be reiterated that in the Islamic worldview, the principle of *taqwā* becomes the

common spiritual core value in the proper development of the life of the individual, family, institutions, community, nation, and civilization (5:100, 10:65). Scholars, leaders, intellectuals and professionals in this “Age of Turbulence” (Greenspan, 2007), global crises and rampant corruption are, in my humble opinion, in greater need of *taqwā* than ever before.

9. The mind or intellect of the Islamicised intellectuals derive their knowledge of the One True God and of His power, wisdom, mercy and presence not from one source, i.e., the written book of Allah (SWT) but from two sources, the other being the unwritten and observable book of the cosmos and the world of nature. In several places the Qur’ān urges the “people who use their reason” to study and contemplate on the multitude of Allah’s creation in nature, on the wonders in nature and on their usefulness and indispensability for the physical sustenance and well-being of human life, with the condition that human beings show their gratitude and acknowledge their dependency on the infinite grace and blessings of the One Living Lord and Sustainer (Compare 2:164 and 3:190).

Educational implications of the integrated approach

Following from the above point 9, we shall now focus on the resultant mindset and behaviour of the Islamic intellectuals who are exposed to the wonders of Allah’s creation in the cosmos and the truths revealed by Him in the Qur’ān. Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī has studied this issue in his book *al-‘Aql wa-al-‘Ilm fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Reason and Knowledge in the Noble Qur’an, 1996) in the chapter on “*Ishādat al-Qur’ān bi-ulī al-albāb wa-al-nuhā*”. He refers several times to the interpretation of al-Biqā’ī of UA as “*al-‘uqūl al-ṣāfiyah wa-al-afhām al-nayyirah al-khāliṣah*” (the unadulterated intellects and understandings which are illuminated and pure) (1996, p.23).

The UA, according to him, deserve to be given wisdom (*ḥikmah*) by Allah (SWT) because “they know where to put things in their proper places and to give everything their rights” (1996, p.24). After studying and analyzing all the meanings in the 16 verses in which

the term UA is mentioned, al-Qaraḍāwī arrives at the following important conclusion:

Those verses show very clearly the intellectuality of this Qur'ān and the intellectuality of its message (*'aqlāniyyat hādihā al-Qur'ān wa-'aqlāniyyat risālatih*). Similarly the meaning of *ulū al-nuhā* (20:53, 54, 128) is the same as UA and it is used in the context of interaction with the world of nature and drawing benefits from the natural resources of the earth, water and domesticated animals (1996, pp.28-29).

The most frequently quoted verse which refers to the UA is the following:

“Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are indeed signs for the *ulū al-Albāb*, who remember Allah when they stand, and when they sit, and when they lie down to sleep, and thus reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: ‘O our Sustainer! You have not created all this without meaning and purpose. Limitless are You in Your Glory! Keep us safe, then from suffering in Hell! O our Sustainer! Whomsoever You shall commit to the fire, verily will You have brought him to disgrace, and such evildoers will have none to succor them. O our Sustainer! Behold, we heard a voice calling us unto faith, ‘Believe in your Sustainer! And so we believed. O our Sustainer! Forgive us, then our sins, and efface our bad deeds, and let us die the death of the truly virtuous! O our Sustainer! Grant us that which You have promised us through Your Messengers and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection! Verily You never failed to fulfil Your promise!” (3:191-194).

It is clear that the above verse of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān reflect the God-centered and *taqwā*-rooted attributes of the UA. They show that the uncontaminated mind or intellect *à la* UA integrates in a harmonious way the attitude and habit of *dhikr Allāh* (remembrance of Allah) which is present in all situations and activities of the people of sound reason. This includes the activity of deep thinking, research, scientific investigation and empirical analysis of the secrets of nature in the heavens and on earth. The attitude expressed in the four verses – 191, 192, 193, 194 – testifies to the recognition of the

existence of Divine purpose in the whole of this wondrous cosmos. The deep study and analysis of the workings and intricacies of the world of nature together with faith in the One Creator and Sustainer lead the sincere and humble intellects to the awareness of the ultimate End and the continuity of human life in the eternal abode of the Hereafter, the knowledge of which is given by the Prophet (SAW) to mankind and the believers. This implies that believing scientists who are imbued with the spiritual-moral consciousness of *taqwā* realize that if they were to misuse the knowledge of the workings of nature which constitute great benefits for human beings, or if they were negligent, ungrateful to the Creator, or strive with the blessings they obtained from their mastery of natural resources to cause injustice, suffering, oppression, imbalances and to dominate over others in order to perpetuate their economic or political hegemony over weaker or poorer people, they would surely meet the wrath of their Master in the Hereafter, and that would be the height of ignominy and shame (*khizy*) for these intellectual and intelligent servants of Allah (SWT).

Al-Qaraḍāwī explains at great length that the Qur’ān wants human beings to master a variety of knowledge, and that it is erroneous to assume that the branch of knowledge that is lauded in the Holy Book is only religious knowledge. The verses in 6:97, 30:22, 29:43, 35:27-28, 10:5, 27:50-52, 7:28 &32 and others point to this assertion. Even the term ‘*al-‘ulamā*’ which occurs in verse 35:7-28 does not imply only the scholars of religious knowledge. Al-Qaraḍāwī asserts along with Sayyid Quṭb that the ‘scholars’ or people of knowledge referred to in the verse are “not scholars of religion and experts of Divine Law, although they possess great virtues and important position”. The content and the context of the verses point to those who study the signs (*āyāt*) of Allah (SWT) as contained in the natural phenomena. This requires the specialised knowledge of geology, astronomy, mathematics, biology, chemistry, earth sciences, life sciences, anthropology and others (1996, p.151).

This interpretation becomes all the more persuasive when the above verses are compared with many other verses of the Qur’ān which refer to various aspects of the natural phenomena, including the human body, as representing the signs of the One True God. The following verse which contains the same basic meaning as 3:

191 and may even be considered as an expanded version of the verse should be cited here:

“Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and in the succession of night and day; and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man; and in the waters which Allah sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and causing all manner of living creatures to multiply thereon; and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: in all these there are signs indeed for people who use their reason (*qawm ya ‘qilūn*)” (2: 164).

Verses of this nature have convinced several Muslim scholars since the last century that the cosmos and nature constituted another ‘book’ of Allah (SWT) to be studied by human beings to derive useful scientific and technological knowledge necessary for the servants and vicegerents of God to play the active civilizational role on earth, while at the same time being guided by the Book of Divine revelation as represented by the Divine scriptures which culminated in the Qur’ān. Thus the most desirable form of Muslim education is one which combines the “readings of the two books” (*al-jam‘ bayn al-qirā’atayn*): the “Open Book” of nature as Sayyid Quṭb calls it and the “Book that is Read” namely, the Qur’ān. The mind of the UA, being fully integrated and uncontaminated, is most capable of integrating the knowledge acquired from the scientific study of the natural phenomena with the knowledge, wisdom and norms acquired through Divine revelation.

The Muslim scholar *par excellence* then is not to be evaluated based purely on his or her field of specialization – religious or worldly – but on the dominant attitude of his/her personality *vis-à-vis* the Sustainer, i.e., on what the Qur’ān calls *khashyat Allāh* (the profound awe of God’s omnipotence). Thus, the term “*al-‘ulamā’*” in verse 35:28 has been interpreted by Sayyid Quṭb as “scholars (or experts) who know how to ‘read’ the natural phenomena deeply – they are the ones who truly fear the wrath of Allah” (1971, vol.6, p.698), because the complexities, intricacies and systematic order in the cosmos “could not be comprehended except by those who are truly knowledgeable of this Book” (*lā yudrikuhā illā al-‘ulamā’*

bi-hādhā al-kitāb). In interpreting verse 35: 28, al-Qaradāwī says it quite confidently that “from what is clear in the context of the verse, [the word] ‘*al-‘ulamā*’ does not mean scholars of religious sciences or scholars of Divine law, although they do possess important merit and position” (1996, p.151). To al-Qaradāwī, the scholars of geology, astronomy, biology, physics and the like are the people who are capable of knowing deeply Allah’s secrets in the natural phenomena.

The Muslim scientists, physicists, astronomers, engineers, architects, chemists and mathematicians of the glorious period of Islamic civilization, from Baghdad to Spain in the West and to Central Asia and India in the East were well-known for their scientific studies and discoveries of the secrets of nature and the human body but unlike the secular-minded scientists or social scientist of the modern era, they were people who were staunch believers in the religion of *Tawhīd*. They integrated *Tawhīdic* values and norms in their lives and their intellectual works. Many of them could be considered the embodiments of the intellectual model of UA lauded in the Qur’ān. Today the new generation of Muslim scientists and intellectuals, in both the natural sciences and social sciences, could also represent the model of UA if they decide to pursue, develop, construct and disseminate their scientific or intellectual products based on the epistemology of *Tawhīd* and the axiology of true believers, while the Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals, on their part, could appreciate more profoundly the Divine knowledge and wisdom embedded in the cosmos, nature, society and the human body through the disciplines of biology, anatomy, astronomy, physics, mathematics, medicine, etc. Informed and illuminated by some degree of familiarity – if not proper grounding – in modern scientific knowledge, minus the biases of secularism, materialism or naturalism, the Muslim religious teachers, scholars and leaders would have a far more positive impact on moral and religious education of the younger generation of Muslims as well as the educated classes. To be able to harmoniously blend the understanding of the two ‘books’ of Allah requires, however, the holistic development of the human personality which integrates the physical, rational, emotional, spiritual and intuitive faculties of the human self in accordance with the first principles of the unity of God, the unity of the human self and the unity of knowledge (al-Fārūqī, 1982).

In the world today, Muslim communities have been and are being exposed to at least four major systems of education:

1. The completely secular system as in many non-Muslim countries, where only the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities are taught, to the exclusion of religion.
2. The predominantly religious educational system where few subjects of worldly knowledge are taught without any reference to religion or metaphysical perspectives.
3. The predominantly worldly educational system where some aspects of religious knowledge are taught but are also isolated, marginalized or compartmentalized, as if religious knowledge has no relevance to the knowledge of the world of nature, society or culture.
4. The system which offers both the religious and the worldly sciences but these merely coexist; there is no real interpenetration between the two spheres of knowledge. Religious knowledge is therefore not enriched by or made relevant to worldly knowledge, or reformed to be kept abreast with contemporary changes, while the worldly knowledge is not constructed in accordance with the world view of *Tawhīd*. The dominant paradigm of knowledge is still the secular and the conventional.

The fourth system comes closest to the fully integrated model of education – the fifth system – in which the two streams are brought into meaningful and dynamic interaction with one another to enrich and complement each other and produce at the end of the educational process: (a) the religiously-informed and God-fearing natural scientist, engineers, doctors and social scientists on the one hand, and (b) the scientifically-informed religious knowledge specialists who understand the contemporary realities and changes, and know how those changes impinge on moral, ethical, theological and spiritual values and norms. This system will be able to produce the so-called ‘intellectual-*ulama*’ and the ‘*ulama*’-intellectual’ as they say in Indonesia. With all the serious moral and environmental crises threatening the sustainability of contemporary civilization, we believe

that the Muslim community urgently needs experts in natural and applied sciences or technology and social scientists who are people of deep faith, of high moral integrity and *taqwā*, as well as experts in religious disciplines who are also knowledgeable in some branches or aspects of scientific knowledge. Further studies and research into the contemporary significance and applicability of the UA model of integrated knowledge and education are required to enhance the collective transnational efforts among Muslims to produce more institutions, groups and individuals imbued with the world view, mindset, attitudes and habits of the *ulū al-Albāb* as the best model of educational and intellectual excellence.

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