

Workshops and Conferences

Workshop on Islamization of Knowledge

A workshop on the Islamization of knowledge, organised by the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, was held in Port Dickson, Malaysia, from 7th to 11th June, 1996. Workshops and seminars of this sort usually focus on the nature, characteristics and rationale for the Islamization of knowledge. This workshop, however, was different in that it dealt with the question of methodology. Given the fact that Islamization is an intellectual and methodological framework, the workshop's emphasis on methodology is understandable.

Clearly, the workshop was not for the uninitiated, nor for new recruits. It was meant for those who not only have been associated with the movement for Islamization of knowledge but, more importantly, for those who have the potential to make some contribution towards its realization. A total of 31 participants from eleven disciplines in Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences took part. The workshop, as pointed out by Dr. Louay M. Safi, was an occasion to scrutinize in minute details the parameters of the Islamization of knowledge, to critically appreciate the contributions made by leading luminaries and to seriously tackle questions pertaining to methodology. The Workshop was divided into three interrelated segments: lecture sessions, group discussions, and plenary sessions.

Lecture Sessions: There were altogether eleven lecture sessions. Four of these dealt with "Islamization of Knowledge: A General Framework"; "The Qur'ān as a Source of Knowledge"; "Dealing with *Sunnah*: A Methodological Approach"; and "Dealing with Muslim Scholarly Heritage." All four presentations were made by Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani. Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, the Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, made two presentations entitled: "Islamic Revealed Knowledge: From

Performance to Method" and "*Sunnah* as a Source of Knowledge: A Social Scientist's Perspective." As the sub-title indicates, Dr. AbdulHamid drew extensively from his vast experience in conducting research on Islamization of the social sciences. Dr. Nizar S. Alani presented a paper on "A Critical Review of the Islamization of Knowledge" while Dr. Abdullahi Hasan Zaroug and Dr. Ibrahim Ragab presented two papers on "Dealing with Western Knowledge." Drs. Nizar, Ragab and Zaroug had their papers written and distributed before the workshop began, and hence precipitating lively discussion.

The Workshop was originally planned to have nine sessions. During the last two days, however, four scholars from overseas joined the workshop and hence, it was thought desirable to benefit from their presence. Consequently, two panel discussion sessions were added on to allow the guest scholars to present their views on "Western Methodology and Islam" and "Islam and the Intellectual Climate in the West." The panel discussions were lively and elicited an enthusiastic response from the participants. The last lecture session was devoted to assessment and a discussion of the future prospects of Islamization of Knowledge at the International Islamic University Malaysia. The presentation was made by Dr. Mohammad Kamal Hassan, the Deputy Rector (Academic Affairs) of the IIUM. His presentation was very comprehensive, contained up-to-date statistics, and touched upon the vision and mission of the university, curriculum design, and research output.

Group Discussions: It was thought that the participants, being engaged in research on various facets of Islamization of Knowledge, would benefit most if they were given extensive opportunities to interact with each other in small group settings. Accordingly, the participants were divided into four groups to deliberate upon issues raised in the presentations made during the lecture sessions. Five group discussion sessions were held which according to the participants, were extremely beneficial.

Plenary Sessions: Two Plenary Sessions were held for exchange of views among the group members. The four group facilitators were requested to present the outcome of their deliberation; this was followed by open-floor discussion. The participants discussed the objective, the rationale, the parameters, and the challenges and prospects of the Islamization of Knowledge. The written reports presented in the last plenary session contained the ideas presented

in the lecture sessions as well as the reactions of group members.

The Outcome: The facilitators' reports touched upon four areas: the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, Muslim Scholarly heritage, and Western knowledge. The conclusion reached was that a positive attitude towards creative and critical thinking, a mind open to the ideas and experiences of others, and an emphasis on the need to combine the reading of revelation (*Kitāb Mastūr*) with that of creation (*Kitāb al-Manzūr*) constitute the parameters of Islamization of Knowledge.

The workshop observed that the Qur'ān, the absolute and eternal truth, forms the core of the Islamization process. It transcends time and is a document attesting to the subservience of nature to man, and to humanity's role as vicegerent of God. Its proper understanding necessitates a thorough knowledge of Arabic. The *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAS) should be studied as the method that relates Qur'anic universals to social realities.

The workshop suggested that Islamic heritage should not be viewed as something holy, as equivalent to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. It is a human creation and should be evaluated as such. In evaluating the heritage, one should consider the time-space factor (the circumstances under which they were produced), and avoid passing general judgments. Evaluation should be objective and free from bias.

Finally, it was advised that Muslims scholars adopt a creative engagement approach towards Western knowledge. It was argued that the *Ummah* cannot simply ignore Western scholarship to which Muslims have contributed significantly in the past. In engaging with Western knowledge, however, Muslim scholars have to be very much aware of the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which it is based. This engagement should involve a process of sifting, sorting and refinement of Western concepts and categories to make them conform to the Islamic perspective. This process should not be conceived of as a simple-minded exercise of addition or subtraction, but as a serious, creative effort of integration, and of synthesis at a higher plane.

In the end, it was recommended, among others, that IIUM should:

1. Introduce an advanced course on Qur'anic methodology for all students of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences;

2. Introduce courses on Islamization of the discipline to be taught in the respective departments, and that these courses be periodically reviewed;
3. Establish a specialised centre in the university for “Studies in Islamic Heritage”;
4. Establish an “Academic Staff Development Centre” and equip it with the facilities required to train the staff in terms of knowledge modules needed to actively and fully participate in the Islamization effort;
5. Establish a “Centre for Occidental Studies.” This centre would facilitate scholarly work on Western thought, its roots, and the context in which it developed towards what it is today. It should help in systematic critical analysis of major trends from an Islamic perspective. It could also help in compiling, cataloguing and analysing Western scholarship on Islam and the Muslim World.

The Closing Session: The closing session was graced by the Deputy Prime Minister, Dato’ Sri Anwar Ibrahim who was accompanied by the Chief Minister of Negeri Sembilan, Tan Sri Mohd Isa. The closing address was delivered by Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani who desired, among other things, to see Malaysia holding the flag of the *Ummah*; and by Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman who urged the participants to face the challenge of Islamization of Knowledge with a resolute will, solid determination and adequate preparation. In his closing address, Dato’ Seri Anwar Ibrahim appreciated the efforts of the University in upholding the cause of the *Ummah*. However, he said that he expects more from the University in terms of equipping the students with the skills and scholarship necessary to face the new global order, and to live in peace with the world in conformity with the dictates of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*.

Evaluation: The workshop was much appreciated by the participants. They enjoyed the eloquence and scholarship of Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani and benefited greatly from his five-day presence. The two presentations made by Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman were very provocative and inspiring. His emphasis upon paying not much attention to the procedure, taking life seriously and following the nature and the like were well received. The overall response was encouraging and the participants hoped for more of such workshops

in the future. They expressed great appreciation of the Kulliyah management for this successful workshop and congratulated the Acting Dean, Dr. Jamal Barzinji, his deputies, Dr. Khaliq Kazi and Dr. Nizar S. Alani, and the entire organizing committee for a job well done.

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