



Teaching and Learning Islam in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM): Some Aspects of Relevantization of Islamic Sciences

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Abstract

This article focuses on the experiment of teaching and learning Islam in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Although it devoted a considerable space for the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), yet the experiences of other Kulliyahs were not completely ignored. It argued that the new *ijtihad* in teaching and learning Islam, which has been developed in KIRKHS has its impact on other Kulliyahs. In this regard, the most significant feature has to do with both the definition of the religious phenomenon and the unit of analysis within which it has been evaluated. Obviously this methodic approach has a remarkable effect on the discipline of History of Religions. Because of this new orientation in the study of this discipline, one can say that IIUM's experiment in teaching and learning religion in general and Islam in particular is refreshingly different. More to the point, it changed significantly the way in which religious phenomenon has been approached in a university set-up

Keywords: *Islamic revealed knowledge, teaching experience, relevantization, IIUM.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada eksperimen pengajaran dan pembelajaran Islam di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). Walaupun ia diaplikasikan di Kulliyah Ilmu Wahyu dan Sains Kemanusiaan (KIRKHS), namun dalam Kulliyah lain juga tidak diabaikan. Ia berpendapat bahawa ijtihad yang baru dalam membangunkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran Islam di (KIRKHS) mempunyai impak ke atas Kulliyah lain. Dalam hal ini, ciri paling penting berkaitan dengan kedua-dua takrif fenomena keagamaan dan unit analisis telah dinilai. Pendekatan kaedah ini jelas mempunyai kesan yang luar biasa terhadap pentadbiran sejarah agama. Oleh kerana orientasi baru dalam bidang ini, seseorang itu boleh mengatakan bahawa percubaan UIAM dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran agama amnya dan Islam khususnya memberikan perbezaan. Lebih penting lagi, ia berubah dengan ketara terhadap pendekatan fenomena agama yang diaplikasikan dalam pembangunan sesebuah universiti.

Kata kunci: *Ilmu wahyu keislaman, pengalaman mengajar, kerelevanan, UIAM.*

Introduction

This article focuses on the experience of Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS). Although teaching and learning Islam is on the curriculum of all Kulliyahs of IIUM, yet KIRKHS is the particular position where new *Ijtihad* regarding development and reform of these sciences

is taking place. Throughout the years the KIRKHS assumed responsibility for this noble task. Because of this arrangement of disciplines in IIUM new ideas and trends in teaching and learning Islam is to be expected. Therefore, issues concerning Islamization of human knowledge and relevantization of Islamic sciences are likely to be developed, shared and sustained by KIRKHS. This, however, does not mean that this Kulliyah will have a monopoly on *Ijtihad* regarding new knowledge on Islamic sciences or their methods, but rather it points to the central position of the Kulliyah in this interdisciplinary effort that will allow all institutions of the University to participate for its continuous growth and developing meaningful results. The main thesis of this article is about

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Islamic sciences and the process of their relevantization. This is premised on the assertion that Islamic sciences and their relevantization have to be given priority in the hierarchical ranking of Islamization of human knowledge steps. More to the point, the experience of KIRKHS provides an evidence for such position on Islamization of human knowledge and its relationship with relevantization of Islamic sciences.

History of Teaching and Learning Islam in IIUM

The number of self-made historians who decided to reconstruct an historical account of IIUM has increased dramatically throughout the years. However, two important historical narratives maintained both credibility and genuine act of humility. This is because writing the history of IIUM, in general, or specific aspect of that history requires a high degree of detachment from events, people and the general political context. In this regard, both Hassan (2009) and Munuty (2011) contributed significantly to our understanding of this part of IIUM academic history. Both of them draw our attention to the pre-independence era of the Federation of Malaya and aspirations of Muslim intelligentsia for the establishment of an Islamic University. They argued that the dream has been realized in 1983, when the Malaysian Government established IIUM. Though Kamal Hassan developed a detailed account of the events and people who worked hard for the realization of this dream, Muhammad Nur Munuty focused more on the development of teaching and learning Islam in Malaysian universities. Although both of them emphasized the fact that IIUM is different in the way in which Islam is taught, yet it is not clear how this is the case. The programs of teaching and learning Islam in Universiti Malaya (UM) or Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) seem to be the same in terms of the general content, perhaps, the only difference is, largely due, to the fact that IIUM program does not follow the Orientalist nomenclature "Islamic Studies" instead it opted for Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (IRKH). At the beginning the difference was not more than a preference for naming an academic discipline. Then later, it showed that this is indeed a new set up for teaching and learning Islam within a university framework.

When IIUM was established in 1983, teaching and learning Islam was meant to be the core knowledge that all students regardless of their specialization should acquire as *Fard 'Ayn* knowledge. This is because Islam is viewed as a way of life. In addition to that all academic programs in the university should be unified together to achieve the central objective of

the university of integrating knowledge with Islamic values and worldview. This resulted in the formation of the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge (CFK). The centre since its inception up until it has been transformed into the Department of IRKH offered 38 courses, only 14 of them were taught in Arabic. These courses were all service courses to students of Kulliyyah of Laws and Kulliyyah of Economics and Management. Moreover, the CFK organized both *halaqah* and *'Ibadah* Camps co-curricular activities.

Obviously, the initial model of IIUM regarding teaching and learning Islam focused on the objective that the Islamicity of the university student could be judged by the conduct of the graduate as a professional Muslim. This meant that CFK mould is used for casting professional Muslims in the law, economics and management professions. However, in 1990 the Second Rector of IIUM AbdulHamid AbuSulyman established the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. The main objective of this Kulliyyah is to cater for Islamization of human knowledge. For AbuSulyman integration of knowledge through institutional arrangement could be the most important strategic initiative for Islamization of human knowledge. Because of this, KIRKHS was established and students majoring in IRKH should take their minor in one of the human sciences discipline and vice versa. This modified model of IIUM, however, does not completely abandon the idea that CFK is the mould for casting professional Muslims in their respective jobs. The department of IRKH continued the task of CFK with the help of the Students Affairs Division (STAD). While the academic aspects of CFK activities were absorbed into IRKH curriculum, the co-curriculum tasks were given to STAD. It should be remembered that academic staff in this Kulliyyah, in general, regard themselves as *murabbis*. Thus, this active role by the academic staff in the life of students makes the teaching and learning of Islam as an act of *'Ibadah*. More to the point, the sole objective of this noble endeavor is to make Islam a way of life for both academic staff and students.

Although when CFK started it had only few academic staff and throughout its four years in existence it developed only 38 courses, the department of IRKH in addition to CFK courses developed specialization in Qur'an and *Sunnah*, *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh*, Islamic Thought and *Da'wah*. Moreover, it equally developed courses that covered areas such as comparative religion, Islamic movements and introductory courses on Islam and sociology, psychology, communication, political science and others. The volume of courses taught both

in Arabic and English increased significantly. It goes without saying that the number of academic staff in this Department, before it has been divided into three departments in 1996 was over 70 faculty members. It should be noted that the teaching and learning of Islam in IIUM was not suffering from a constant flux of change due to these developments between 1986 and 1996. Rather these changes were within a framework that retained the main objective of teaching and learning Islam. The new addition that modified the initial model of IIUM focused on Islamization of human knowledge instead of the limited objective of molding Muslim professionals. One could say that right from the beginning the concept paper which was endorsed by the Government of Malaysia and upon which the university was established has Islamization and integration of knowledge as the main objectives of teaching and learning Islam. The new development focused more into Islamization of human knowledge process. This required inclusion of Islamic sciences in a form of a degree programme. But then again this did not mean teaching and learning Islam to undergraduate students with a degree in "Islamic Studies" nor with a traditional degree in Islamic sciences. Clearly, the IRKH framework and the minor in one of human sciences discipline provide the graduate with the ability to redefine the market than being defined by its forces. In short, these students with these new skills and moral commitment are a rare breed. Most importantly, this new arrangement for teaching and learning Islam makes the university to have a noticeable share in the development of Islamic sciences. More significantly, this leads to both relevantization of Islamic sciences and a gradual development of a body of new knowledge.

At this juncture, one needs to answer the question why Kamal Hassan accepted the modified model of IIUM, when it was suggested by AbuSulyman while early on he advised the first Rector not to go ahead with the proposal of establishing Islamic studies degree programme at IIUM. Perhaps, the main reason behind this is due to the fact that AbuSulyman's proposal is in line with the objectives of the university; whereas the first Rector's concept of Islamic studies will turn IIUM into a traditional Islamic university. One can say that the modification of the initial model is in perfect harmony with the main purpose of establishing the university- and effective method to reform Islamic sciences at that. Therefore, the history of teaching and learning Islam in IIUM unlike other subjects is connected to the whole model of the university. Any changes in the objectives of teaching and learning Islam in the

university will certainly alter the basic framework of the institution. Furthermore, it means substituting the existing model with a new one.

A more detailed account of the history of the Department of IRKH, will help to understand the complexity of this new experiment in teaching and learning Islam. Like all beginnings, when it started in 1990, it had one hundred students and less than ten lecturers and professors. The Kulliyyah was led by Professor Kamal Hassan as the Dean and Dato' Mohd. Mokhtar Shafi'i was an important figure of the Department of IRKH. The students were required to study thirty-three credit hours as shared courses before they select their area of concentration. These shared subjects were meant to be the foundation courses that would prepare the students for their specialization:

1. Sciences of the Qur'an I
2. Sciences of the Qur'an II
3. Sciences of *Hadith* I
4. Sciences of *Hadith* II
5. Biography of the Prophet
6. Islamic Da'wah
7. Islamic 'Aqidah
8. 'Ilm al-Kalam
9. Introduction to Fiqh
10. Introduction to Usul al-Fiqh
11. Research Methodology

In addition to these required common courses students were asked to take 5 courses from their concentration area, two courses from the list of concentration subjects, six supporting courses, 9 courses from their minor, and six courses as electives and 9-10 credit hours of English, Arabic and Malay language. This structure of the degree in Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage required the student to obtain a minimum of 127 credit hours. It was rather complicated but, nonetheless, it maintained the balance between the need for specialization and the requirements of integration of knowledge. The Department of IRKH started to take shape by the end of 1994. After four years in existence, it had 42 faculty members. Four of them are full Professors, 7 Associate Professors, 24 Assistant Professor and 7 Lecturers. It consisted of 31 international staff from different countries such as Turkey, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Bosnia and others and 11 local staff. It was truly international in nature representing different schools of teaching and learning Islam. This diversity was equally reflected in the curricula of the Department of IRKH.

At this point, one needs to have a cool look into the details of the subjects of IRKH curricula. Apparently,

the Department seems to be offering traditional subjects of Islamic sciences such as sciences of the Qur'an, sciences of *Hadith*, *Tafsir*, *Fiqh*, *Usul al-Fiqh* and others. But then again it does have altogether completely new type of subjects such as Foundation for Communication in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, Foundation for History in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and the likes for Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology and Philosophy. Moreover, a number of subjects on contemporary Islamic movements and contemporary Muslim thinkers have been added to the curricular. The significant difference between the curricula of the Department of IRKH and a traditional department is, largely, based on a set of new courses and a language policy. With regard to the new courses, part of them are meant to make available for the students Islamic foundations for social sciences based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The other part focuses on contemporary Islamic movements and the study of new trends in Islamic thought. All issues concerning language policy are dealt with in a way to maintain the situation that students will be fully conversant in both Arabic and English. Out of the 66 courses of the Department of IRKH 8 courses are meant to provide the students with Islamic foundations for social sciences and 12 courses are devoted to contemporary Islamic movements and new trends and issues in Islamic thought. In addition to that the traditional courses of Islamic sciences are developed within this new framework of Islamic revealed knowledge and its new sensibility. It must be noted that 10 courses are cross-listed with the departments of History, Philosophy, Communication and Political Science. This shows how the department is influenced by the principle of integration of knowledge. Furthermore, issues such as Islamization of knowledge, human rights, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and social justice appear in more than one course. Taken together these changes in the curricula of Islamic sciences make the Department of IRKH a prototype for new *ijtihad*.

Though the Department of IRKH prepared the ground for the establishment of the KIRKHS, it was a product of CFK. One should not assume that these were the outcome of a careful preparations neither they reflect an attitude of short-termism. It should be remembered that the change of academic leadership of the University led to these new arrangements. More significantly these changes reflected the essential vision of the University. When it was realized that CFK would not be able to mould students into Muslim professionals and reform the curricula of Islamic sciences, the initial model of teaching and learning Islam in IIUM had to be

modified to suit this important concern. Therefore, CFK has been transformed into IRKH. In return the Department of IRKH has to lead the process of integration of social sciences within the framework of Islamic worldview and values. To this end, it was the first to be established and it became the nexus of the IRKHS. Though between 1988 and 1990 the Department of IRKH went from CFK to a new set-up that required it to offer a degree program within an innovative framework. However, this new reform of Islamic sciences has drawn an increasing interest to this development, as witnessed by the publication of a number of books and articles on this experiment. It should be remembered that the framework of IRKH is both an academic arrangement of subjects in a new structure and a new perspective in teaching these subjects. In this regard, courses are developed for this objective and innovative academic structures are created to reflect this new agenda. Add to this, the excellent in-service training programs for academic staff and because of all this the experiment has rapidly developed from a small service centre for university required courses into a leading department of Islamic sciences that has the ultimate intellectual authority to reshape social sciences within the KIRKHS. This enormous academic and intellectual power and aspiration developing gradually around the IRKH is the hallmark of this new academic endeavor.

For the students of IRKH, the principle that governed the details and the structure of their degree is to allow them to take courses from different concentration areas in the department. This is in line with the principle of unity of knowledge in general and in Islamic sciences in particular. With this comprehensive perspective towards Islamic sciences and knowledge enterprise in general, it is quite obvious that integration of knowledge as both a principle of understanding and evaluation of systems of knowledge on one side and as an academic arrangement will be highly regarded by the students. This will ultimately develop a sensibility or a mindset that does not accept the demarcation between religious and secular sciences. To this end, the curricula and the extra-curricular activities will nurture deeply embedded epistemic and metaphysical stands in the minds and behavioral attitudes of the students.

Though the principle of integration of knowledge was highly regarded and it became the main focus of the whole process of IOHK, yet a number of criticisms were leveled against it by both Islamic sciences and social sciences professors. Obviously there was a general consensus among nearly all the faculty members of the KIRKHS about the dire need

for attempting to reform Islamic education. However, it should be noted that these criticisms were mainly about the implementation of the concept of integration of knowledge in the curricula of the different departments. This implementation process made some Professors to voice concerns about the structure of the academic degrees, which were offered by these departments. Some concerns were directed against the number of credit hours left for specialization whether they are adequate or not, others were about the need for recognition by academic institutions. This is because integration of knowledge is based on a formula for blending different disciplines into one whole that is based on Islamic worldview and values. In view of this, the requirements of integration of knowledge will certainly occupy a considerable space. In addition to this, students cannot be overloaded with information outside their specialization or prolong their period for the first degree. Clearly much of the criticism is not leveled against the principle of integration, but rather towards the practical considerations, the consequences of its adoptions and pragmatics of education.

Because of these concerns and others, the administration of the Kulliyah decided to review the curricula and the structure of the Department of IRKH. Though the decision was made prior to the graduation of the first batch of the students in August 1993, it was anticipated that criticisms and observations would be made regarding the nomenclature of the degree and its structure. For these reasons, five academic committees were established:

1. Usul al-Din and Contemporary Islamic Thought
2. Al-Qur'an and al-Tafsir
3. Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh
4. Al-Hadith
5. Comparative Religion

It should be noted that these academic committees were entrusted with the task of internal assessment of the programme and were equally encouraged to revisit the academic structure of the Department of IRKH. Clearly, the criticism behind the grouping and classification of Islamic sciences along these committees is not in keeping with what is known in traditional Islamic universities. Though it combines Fiqh with Usul al-Fiqh and refocused Usul al-Din by adding to it contemporary Islamic thought, it equally separates between sciences of the Qur'an and Hadith. More significantly, it separates Comparative Religion from Usul al-Din. However, after one year of intensive discussion within each committee and joined discussion and consultation among the

different committees, it has been realized that the suggested reform should include the structure of the degree, teaching materials and the rationale behind teaching Islamic sciences. The last suggestion is, perhaps, the most significant one. It requires a development of Islamic methodology based on Qur'anic and Sunnah principles. This will lead to the reconstruction of the whole heritage under the guidance of these principles. Obviously, the criteria of Islamic Revealed Knowledge is emphasized in the discussion in such a way that reinforced the need for Islamic methodology within the framework of IRK as an academic structure. As a result of these deliberations four units within the Department of IRKH were established:

1. Contemporary Islamic Thought and Civilization
2. Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion
3. Qur'anic and Sunnah Studies
4. Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh

These units were instructed by the Rector to develop three degrees within the framework of IRK and to design a set of university required courses. Each unit was headed by a coordinator and the faculty members of the Department of IRKH were divided into these units. Three units - Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, Qur'anic and Sunnah Studies, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh- were supposed to design curricula for separate disciplines within the framework of IRKH. With the exception of the Contemporary Islamic Thought and Civilization, these units were entrusted with the task of developing three degrees in IRKH and three postgraduate programmes at the level of Master and Ph.D. These postgraduate programmes were meant to replace the general postgraduate programme of the Department of IRKH. However, the postgraduate curriculums for the three departments of IRKH were meant to be equally developed within the IRKH framework. By August 1994 the four units submitted their reports to the Kulliyah administration with a strong recommendation for the establishment of four departments within the framework of IRKH. Though the University management found it, at that time, unrealistic to establish four departments instead of the Department of IRKH, it opted for the appointment of four deputies of the Head Department of IRKH. The Deputies were given the task to refine the structure and to develop course descriptions of the suggested four departments. Evidently, it was inconceivable to seek the views of external assessors for these programmes. This is because the whole experiment is completely new and its main objective is to reform Islamic education and to create new parameters for

teaching and learning Islam within this new paradigm of *ijtihad*. Despite that Shaykh Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, Abdul Majid al-Najjar and other learned scholars of Islamic sciences were invited as visiting professors to comment, advice and participate in the on-going discussion of developing new curricula for Islamic sciences within the framework of IRKH. However, their assessment of the department cannot be considered as a regular academic task of evaluation. They were rather redefined their role and became part of the experiment.

In November 1996, the Senate of IIUM endorsed the proposal for the establishment of four departments within the Division of IRKH. A coordinator of IRKH was assigned to link these departments together and coordinate their relationship with the Human Sciences Division. After a while the post was upgraded to a Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs (IRKH). Though it appeared that the integration is between IRKH Division and Human Sciences Division instead of the Departments of IRKH and the rest of the Human Sciences departments, yet on a close look the new arrangement created new dynamics for integration such as the close academic co-operation between the Department of *Fiqh* and Political Science and the possibility of creating new inter-disciplinary programs. Still the shared matrix of the IRKH held together the Departments of the Division of IRKH, but it equally allowed other departments of Human Sciences to be part of this new structure through the major/minor arrangement.

It should be remarked that prior to the establishment of the four departments of IRKH, the University decided to close down the Department of Philosophy. Some of its courses were added to the curricula of the Department of IRKH and became part of *Usul al-Din* concentration. When the Department of *Usul al-Din* and Comparative Religion was established in 1996, these courses constructed a sub-division within the Department. This made the department of *Usul al-Din* and Comparative Religion having three sub-divisions unlike Department of *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh* or *Qur’anic* and Sunnah Studies. Apart from this each one of the Departments shared the required courses for the Division of IRKH and contributed two foundation courses representing the two main sub-divisions in each department. Moreover, each sub-division consisted of 7 specialization courses and one shared course on Research Methodology.

An example of this complex structure for integration of these departments within the framework of IRKH can be seen in the structure of the degree in the Department of *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh*. Now the

shared courses for the three departments are the following subjects:

1. Islamic Ethics
2. Methods of *Da’wah*
3. Islamic ‘*Aqadah*
4. *Qur’an* and Sunnah as source of knowledge
5. Sciences of the *Qur’an*
6. Sciences of the *Hadith*
7. *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh*
8. Study of the *Qur’an*
9. Introduction to *Fiqh*
10. Introduction to *Usul al-Fiqh*
11. Introduction to Research Methodology
12. History of Islamic Civilization

In addition to these required courses the student is asked to make a choice between having concentration on either *Fiqh* or *Usul al-Fiqh*. Whichever choice the student makes, he has to take another three subjects from the other concentration. The following are the *Fiqh* courses:

1. *Fiqh al-‘Ibadat*
2. *Fiqh al-Usrah*
3. *Fiqh al-Mu‘amalat*
4. *Fiqh al-Jinayat*
5. *Dirasat Fiqhiyyah Mu‘asirah*
6. *Al- Qaw‘id al-Fiqhiyyah*
7. *Fiqh al-Siyar*
8. Research Methodology in *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh*

The courses for *Usul al-Fiqh* Courses:

1. *Mabahith al-Hukum*
2. *Turiq Istinbat al-Ahkam*
3. *Adillat al-Ahkam*
4. *Maqasid al-Shari‘ah*
5. *Dirasat fi Masadir al-Usul*
6. *Qira’at fi Usul al-Fiqh I*
7. *Qira’at fi Usul al-Fiqh II*
8. Research Methodology in *Fiqh* and *Usul al-Fiqh*.

During the ten years after the establishment of the four departments within the Division of IRKH, the structure of the three degrees remained intact. However, slight changes were made to comply with the Malaysian Qualification Agency requirements. The current Study Plan Book (2012) for IRKH students made a major shift in the major/ minor arrangement, where students of IRKH departments can opt for a single major and avoid taking courses from Human Sciences departments. The only courses the student, in this case, is required to take are the five

compulsory introductory courses of Human Sciences programs.

This complex and remarkable endurance of hard work and innovation reflected both intellectual zeal and emotional commitment to this new *ijtihad*. Now the numbers of students registered for IRKH department are around 900 undergraduates and around 600 postgraduate students. One can say that these programs, especially at the postgraduate level, acquired a reputation as first class academic programs. This is reflected in the growing and diversified number of international students. It should be remarked that the majority of the postgraduate students are not local students. This steady growth of the programs and the development of a reliable and creative mass of Professors give us all the more reason for optimism that this new experiment in teaching and learning Islam is the only hope for Islamic educational reform.

Relevantization of Islamic Sciences

In 1994 the Department of IRKH carefully articulated its objectives within the University's new direction for teaching and learning Islam. It stated in The Handbook of the Department of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (1994, pp.5-6) two overly ambitious objectives; however the first objective is directly related to relevantization; "To produce a new generation of scholars with an understanding not only of Islam and its sciences ('*Ulum*) but also of contemporary social realities, in order to find Islamic solution for contemporary problems of the *Ummah* and of the humanity". The term relevantization as a structurizing principle was not coined yet; its meaning was clearly explained in this objective. The urgent need for connecting Islamic sciences with contemporary social realities bears testimony to the presence of relevantization agenda at an early stage of the existence of the program of IRKH. More significantly, the mere understanding of Islamic sciences is no longer sufficient for developing viable solutions to the *Ummah's* problems. Furthermore, these problems are part of a larger context that includes humanity as a unit of analysis. This new line of thinking about Islamic sciences will certainly develop a curricula based on synthetic propositions. In this regard, textual understanding of Islamic sciences is a necessary step but not sufficient for developing solutions for contemporary problems. Moreover, the emphasis on whole humanity and the inclusion of the *Ummah* within that perspective highlights both unity of knowledge and the interconnectedness of disciplines based on a universal sense of rationality. Because of this line of argument

in formulating the objective of IRKH program, it is inconceivable that Islamic sciences will advance normative or descriptive statements. Rather it will place special emphasis on synthetic propositions. Where the ought-to-be dimension of these sciences will be an integral part of what there is and what is done in a specific situation. All this needs to be realized within a universal framework of rationality.

In addition to this the synthetic propositions that combine the normative aspects of Islamic sciences and the empirical facts of the contemporary social realities all are in dire need for both theoretical ideal principles and valuational hierarchy. This requires an understanding of Islamic worldview and its axiological foundations. To this end, courses on Islamic '*Aqidah* and ethics are specifically desired for providing students with the parameters of Islamic worldview (theoretical ideals) and axiological foundations (valuational hierarchy). These two courses are made compulsory for all students in IRKH program regardless of their area of concentration. It is understood that the type of synthetic propositions will invariably depend on the design of the syllabus and the teaching method of these courses.

What has been achieved, so far, is a new structure for teaching and learning Islam. The criterion of Islamic revealed knowledge provides the new curriculum design with a structurizing principle. Although it creates a new nomenclature for this new *ijtihad*, it equally raises great hopes for making Islamic sciences relevant to contemporary problems. This shift of emphasis from teaching traditional Islamic sciences to developing an understanding of these sciences in relation to contemporary social realities certainly created an inevitable amount of confusion. It is a matter of time that this misunderstanding of the new framework will gradually disappear and this reform of Islamic education will pave the way for the *Ummah* to assume its leading role in the intellectual arena.

At this juncture, I will come straight to the point: relevantization of Islamic sciences is the foundation stone for IOHK. The essence of this endeavor is based on both Islamic worldview and values. While the former provides us with a system of theoretical ideals and principles, the latter furnishes us with the valuational system. Both the theoretical ideal and the valuational systems are based on the principles of transcendence of God and universality of ethics. Perhaps, this is the only viable discourse that maintains both unity of knowledge and universal rationality. In this regard, one can say that the longtermism project of IOHK is essentially based on relevantization of Islamic sciences with all the

complex structure of Islamic educational reform. One may inquire about how to achieve the goal of developing a meaningful and sustainable mode of educating Muslim professionals. A simple answer to this was given by the curricula of CFK. But now when we realize that what is required is a more complex structure of academic reform of Islamic education, then, relevantization of Islamic sciences will be at the core of IOHK project. Though, in essence, IOHK is the distant goal, yet it will not be achieved without relevantization of Islamic sciences. This fundamental initiative redefines the very idea of Islamic university. Therefore, a direct answer to the question of how to go about this longtermism initiative of IOHK will be to work consistently on the Islamic paradigm of knowledge. As it has been argued by the intellectual leaders of IOHK, like Shaykh Taha Jabir al-*Alw* (1995) and others that this paradigm of knowledge has to be based on the Qur'anic methodology of the combination of the two readings of the universe and revelation in one unified reading. This position will be the epistemic foundation for synthetic propositions.

In addition to this one may equally ask what will be the wider implications for teaching and learning Islam in this new context? Perhaps, according to the previous analysis, one may suggest the following principles:

1. There must be a clear definition of the religious phenomenon. This has to do with the nature of the phenomenon itself. Obviously, one will not be able to study or teach a subject-matter if he is clueless about its nature. A relevant perspective of understanding *Din* or religion is the phenomenological method. In this regard, religion is perceived or taught as a life-fact. The data concerning religion from this perspective can yield up a rich and deep synthetic propositions about who we are and the meaning of life. The way to go about and understand the life-fact datum is to-live-with-it- a while. Though this is the only possible way to fathom the depth of the religious phenomenon, it is equally paradoxical that it seemingly endangers the canon of rationality. This can be a serious blow to the very idea of objectivity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the alternative to this is either relativism or cynicism in understanding metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics. Evidently, for a meaningful conversation about religion the definition of the religious phenomenon as a life-fact and the methodic stand it requires are the only credible parameters of objectivity. Therefore, teaching and learning Islam or any other religion as suggested by al-Faruqi (1967) will be meaningful and allow us to understand both the descriptive and

evaluative aspects of religion. This is exactly was the position of Makkah Conference 1977, regarding teaching and learning of Islam. Clearly, then, this is the antithesis of the discipline of History of Religions, which largely emphasizes the descriptive aspect of the religious phenomenon, and completely disregard the normative aspect.

2. Though the previous analysis strikes a careful balance between the requirements of objectivity and the need for a refreshingly meaningful conversation about religion that includes the inner and outer parts of the religious phenomenon, yet the issue of objectivity will, always and almost, in this type of discussion begs the question as to whose objectivity we must follow. This leads us to investigate and search for a foundation to universality of rationality. Of course, this line of enquiry will allow us to look for critical principles rather than a set of dogmatic assertions. Obviously, it will urge us to be critical of whatever stand we have taken and make us open to the counter evidence. The accumulation of the human wisdom is certainly a good test of validity for what can be accepted or rejected in the ongoing research for these principles and theoretical ideals. As a result, one has to maintain a position that keep in view the interconnectedness of disciplines of knowledge and the need for a shared matrix of rationality that cuts across these disciplines. Undoubtedly this stand is premised on the principle of unity of knowledge. Furthermore, it draws our attention to the importance of universal rationality for a meaningful human interconnectedness.

3. Finally, understanding the nature of religious phenomenon and accepting a specific methodic stand based on a set of theoretical ideals and principles lead us to acquire a plausible valuational principle. These principles are considerably important for the process of systematization of values. The very act of teaching and learning Islam or any other religion is based on a valuational scheme. In Islamic sciences the systematization of values is essentially based on *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. It should be remembered that this *Maqasidic* approach has been postulated on universality of ethics and relationality of values to human beings. Thus, discovering values is not a monopoly of a specific religion. Rather by the very fact that we are all humans, then we are capable of seeing more or less values in a specific human act. The realization of more or less value is reflected in doing more or less of what ought-to be done. All of which is certainly premised in the way we teach and learn religion.

Beyond the Discipline of History of Religions

By this time it is no longer possible to teach Islamic sciences without developing a systematic response to the discipline of History of Religions. This does not mean to exclude that discipline nor to develop a set of polemical strategies against its tenets. What is needed is to develop an objective approach to the study of religion in such a way that does not ignore the essence of religious sensibility. It might seem paradoxical that the essence of religion includes an element of subjectivity that made scholars of History of Religions to be skeptical about including it in their discussion. By doing so they felt this is the only way to ward off polemical and apologetically accounts on the subject matter.

It should be remembered that for the comparativists the study of religions necessitates, to begin with, a learned definition of the phenomenon itself. This is because a narrow and restrictive definition will have a negative impact on both the boundaries of the discipline and its methodic tools. Obviously, the external aspects of the religious phenomenon represent the most visible and less subject elements of the phenomenon. It is true that the controversy surrounding the internal aspects of the phenomenon is enormously big. More to the point the attempts to evaluate the religious phenomenon by someone who adheres to a religion other than the religion under discussion will certainly get a rise out of those who adhere to that religion. Therefore, the study of religion as an academic discipline needs to address all these issues, otherwise there will not be an objective method to both understand and evaluate the religious phenomenon. As a result, the definition of the phenomenon has to include both the external and internal aspects of religion. Though this comprehensive definition of the phenomenon is difficult to capture it is undoubtedly a necessary step for the establishment of the discipline. Let us take al-Faruqi's definition (al-Faruqi, 1967, p.4) that religious phenomenon is a life-fact and sees what are the methodic implications of this definition.

First of all the definition will require the application of phenomenological method in the study of religions. Second to this it necessitates a development of synthetic propositions rather than a set of separate descriptive propositions or normative statements about the religious phenomenon. Finally, there should be a set of meta-religious principles that govern the evaluation of the religious phenomenon within the human religious experience. Within this framework, the study of religion will systematically move from a careful consideration of the religious phenomenon as

a life-fact to the position that allows us to determine life-value in a universal hierarchy of values.

Evidently, the study of religions must reclaim its leading role in understanding who we are and answering the existential and foundation questions of humanity. This is by no means a new strategy for polemics and apologetic approaches it is rather a responsible endeavor for an integrated approach to social sciences and humanities. In this new scheme the study of religions will provide us with the data of the realization of values in the human history. Most importantly, the different articulations of these values in the respective religious texts will be studied within the human religious experience. All these will inform the social scientists about who we are. Obviously, the systematization of values will be the task of the students of the history of religions as an academic discipline. This new position of the discipline will refocus its main parameters and makes its subject matter the human religious experience in its totality. By doing so this academic discipline will lay the foundation for an integrated approach to social sciences and humanities. It is no longer the position of relativism in values that will dominate the minds of scholars but rather a sober understanding of values as relational to humans. Once again, this new approach is, certainly, does not mean to substitute the dogmatism of secular humanism with a religious one. In this regard, one has to say that the assumption on which the definition of the religious phenomenon is based is descriptive in nature. It can only be rejected by a more accurate description of the phenomenon. In addition to that the inclusion of all the human religious experience can only be criticized as being overly ambiguous. But as a unit of analysis, it should be the proper way to transcend the inherent polemics and apologetic approaches in the study of religious phenomenon.

To this end, one can say that Muslim scholars like Ibn Hazm had the sense that the study of religions should be the source for systematization of values. Because of this, he suggested that a proper reading of his intellectual and scholarly writings should take his book on logic as the starting point. Then next to it should be his work on the study of religions of the world and Muslim sects. Only after these the systematization of values that governs the human act can be given in his works on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic jurisprudence. This tells us that human rationality can provide us with the necessary tools to understand and evaluate the human religious experience. The outcome of this intellectual exercise is a set of principles that governs our systematization of the human values. Therefore, the

study of both social and individual needs to be, at least, informed about a meaningful systematization of values. The valuational scale of is, certainly, not given in the individual acts nor it is there within the social sphere. It is indeed beyond them and requires an understanding of both the historical realization of the data of human experience regarding values and their articulations throughout that history. Time and again, it should be noted that this process of integrating social sciences and humanities within a framework guided by the principles of the academic discipline of the study of religions should not be taken dogmatically and most important of all it should not be seen as an intellectual weapon against its opponents. Obviously, it is a new approach that meant to reform the discipline of the history of religious and makes it more inclusive.

Needless to say, the discipline of the study of religions is an important academic enterprise. It should be taken as a necessary and sufficient discipline for a genuine integration of knowledge. But before that the discipline has to move from a mere descriptive and historical approach to the evaluative approach within the whole human religious experience. With this new orientation for the discipline one can say it is a major step forward in the process of a meaningful integration of social sciences and values. Where the empirical aspects of these sciences will be part of the human endeavor to investigate the external world, the valuational aspect is given in the religious experience of humanity, which will be the main focus of the discipline of history of religions. Evidently, the development of a set of principles of meta-religion is vital to the success of this major academic undertaking. Indeed it is not the work of one group of academics who adhere to specific religion but rather it is the collective effort of all those who are committed to this new orientation in the discipline of history of religion.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it should be noted that the initial model of IIUM in teaching and learning Islam was replaced by an all-comprehensive model, which is based on the sensibility of reforming Islamic education through IOHK. It was realized that the foundation for this is the relevantization of Islamic sciences. Moreover, the concerns of the First Rector of IIUM which have been voiced in his autobiography (2012) is based on al-Azhar traditional understanding of Islamic sciences. However, the Second Rector, vehemently, argues for the importance of IOHK project in order to reform Islamic education. To this end, he established the KIRKHS. At the core of this

new Kulliyah is the IRKH framework for teaching and learning Islam. Finally, this new framework will ultimately create new knowledge based on synthetic propositions about who we are and the meaning of life. Above all, this will certainly achieve and sustain the goal of nurturing the potential *Khalifah* in each and every student and academic staff in IIUM. The realization of the *Khalifah* in every human being is an open-ended process. It is a moral capacity of being a trustworthy of the existential *amanah*, which requires an enormous sense of responsibility and continuous spiritual renewal of our relationship with the Creator. To this end, the current Rector of IIUM repeatedly in her speeches reminds us that the main objective of this university is nurturing the *Khalifah*.

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