

# The *Qur'anic* Worldview

A SPRINGBOARD FOR CULTURAL  
REFORM

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman

## THE QUR'ANIC WORLDVIEW

A Springboard For Cultural Reform



IIIT Books-In-Brief Series

The  
QUR'ANIC WORLDVIEW  
A Springboard for *Cultural Reform*

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman

Abridged by Alison Lake

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## IIIT Books-In-Brief Series

The IIIT Books-In-Brief Series is a valuable collection of the Institute's key publications written in condensed form designed to give readers a core understanding of the main contents of the original. Produced in a short, easy to read, time-saving format, these companion synopses offer a close, carefully written overview of the larger publication and it is hoped will stimulate readers into further exploration of the original.

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman's **The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform** was published in complete form in 2011 and forms the English translation of the author's Arabic original, *al-Ru'yah al-Kawniyyah al-Ḥaḍāriyyah*.

This well reasoned and reflective work tries to put forward an understanding of the deteriorating state of the Muslim world, of the forces that have led to a dilution of the Qur'anic worldview within the Muslim conscience, and how to reverse this decline. Few would disagree with the diagnosis. As AbuSulayman rightly points out, recovery of the Qur'anic worldview is essential for any real and lasting transformation. It was the strict internalization of this perspective and close adherence to the principles of the Qur'an as well as the prophetic Sunnah which, he notes, played a key role in galvanizing the early Muslim community to achieve the successes it once did, and the impact of which is felt to this day. Muslims have long tried to make sense of their predicament. The rebirth of Islamic identity through this Qur'anic worldview, insists the author, is the key requirement of our times and a prerequisite for any future viable development of the Ummah.

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### **Abridged Edition of AbdulHamid AbuSulayman's Original**

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AbdulHamid AbuSulayman

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## INTRODUCTION

This book aims to explore the reasons for the deteriorating state of the Muslim world and addresses one of the central questions facing Muslims today: how to reverse decline and recover the brilliance of Islam's once great civilization. The author presents a solution for the recovery of the Qur'anic worldview, which allowed the fledgling Muslim community to flourish and whose principles are still applicable. Today, the rebirth of Islamic identity through the Qur'anic worldview is the prerequisite for any future healthy and viable development of the Muslim world.

This worldview can provide more dynamism, positive energy, and creativity for a healthy human civilization. Through a penetrating, comprehensive review of the Muslim community's worldview and its stages over time, the book identifies one of the most fundamental reasons for the advancement of Muslim civilization in its early years. At the same time, it reveals important aspects of the distortion that has affected the Muslim community in subsequent centuries, and suggests solutions.

Despite the admiration of Islamic peoples for the West and conformity to Western habits in all aspects of life, their imitation has been superficial while their societies have fallen steadily into backwardness and neglect. Nothing will change unless Muslims develop a worldview that provides a genuine sense of meaning, purpose, and motivation for constructive action and reform.

Hopefully reform-minded thinkers and leaders will interact fruitfully with the subject of the Qur'anic worldview by studying it with the thoroughness it merits, and by instilling it, through child-rearing, education, and professional training, in the hearts and minds of the Muslim community's sons and daughters.

## Chapter One

### The Qur'anic Worldview and Human Culture

Every cultural system is associated with an underlying worldview that translates into action by a particular mindset. The clearer, more positive, comprehensive, and flexible such a way of thinking, and the more accurately it reflects its associated cultural system and worldview, the more effective and dynamic it will be.

The Qur'anic worldview contains a foundation for reform. It should be reflected in a cogent, coherent, scientific manner in the structure, applications, and outcomes of Islamic societies. Lack of awareness of the Islamic worldview's structure and content has caused a loss of vitality, resilience, relevance, and intellectual productivity. Islamic principles, concepts, and values lack influence despite the abundance of writings from Islamic heritage and methodological tools for understanding.

A clear, consistent, and realistic worldview will succeed as a doctrinal force that forms people's psychological, spiritual, and intellectual lives, moving them to principled action. A vague worldview that is removed from reality will have little effect on individuals' lives or on the state of society. Today, the Muslim community lacks enlightened awareness and concern to thoroughly examine the Islamic worldview. The result has been passivity, decline, and backwardness in the Muslim community over the last few centuries.

Muslim intellectuals' fascination with the scientific and material achievements of the Western model has caused them to adopt a Western mentality and its underlying worldview. Instead, Muslim thought patterns should be reformed through the critical study and examination of Muslim tradition. Such a study could address the reasons for the decline of Islamic thought, social structure, and cultural standing. Muslim intellectuals should overcome their blind infatuation with Western ways, and adopt objectivity and constructive criticism to view their own history and culture. The Islamic worldview contains the doctrinal foundation and the intellectual, psychological, and emotional impetus for the Muslim community to recover what it has lost.

The achievements during the days of the Prophet (ṢAAS)\* and the era of rightly guided caliphs were inspired by their vital, effective view of

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\* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*. 'May the peace and blessings of God be upon him.' Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

the world and culture. This worldview contained enterprising spirit, dynamism, and intellectual and emotional power. These people's historic feats endure even now in the conscience and consciousness of the Muslim community. We should understand the features of the worldview that informed and guided that earlier generation, and how this worldview evolved.

Given the radical changes reflected in our present situation, we should distinguish the vision that guided early generations of Muslims from today's burdensome inheritance of our latter-day ancestors. Today's worldview is a reactive theory whose rhetoric encourages oppression, defeat, passivity, and marginalization. On the other hand, the Qur'anic worldview succeeded in ages past because it fostered the realization and affirmation of the self in its various individual and communal ways. When people lived under the influence of the constructive Qur'anic worldview of the early days of Islam, their God-given spiritual nature responded with the values of justice, charity, brotherhood, and peace. God Almighty declares: "This [message] is no less than a reminder to all mankind – to everyone of you who wills to walk a straight way" (*sūrah al-Takwīr*, 81:27–28).

Ambiguity gradually settled over the Islamic worldview after the end of the Prophetic era and the days of the rightly guided caliphates. The community of the Prophet's Companions, nurtured on the words of the Holy Qur'an under the tutelage of the original bearer of the Islamic message, began to disappear. This was followed by the confrontation with corrupt aggressor empires of the age: the Persian and Byzantine Empires. Subsequently, rebelling desert Arab tribes defeated the Muslim state's military forces and undermined its political life. Desert Arabs, new to Islam, were still influenced by primitive racist tribal values and social traditions.

Regional conflicts, harsh desert life, and long-standing tribal conflicts over scarce natural resources hindered the absorption of the values of solidarity and metatribal thinking that underlie Islamic social institutions such as the family, citizenship, and the concepts of state and nation. The Qur'an illustrates the Bedouin tribes' barbarism and primitive way of thinking. Their negative influence on Islamic political life began with the collapse of the rightly guided caliphate and the establishment of the ruthless Umayyad dynasty. Their primitive ways of thinking and a racist approach to human relationships further obscured the Qur'anic worldview. Another significant detraction over time was the formalism



of Greek thought and logic and the mythical bent of its doctrine and philosophy.

These developments pushed an attitude of dependency into the public and political spheres, while blurring and distorting many aspects of the Islamic worldview. Religion thus came gradually to be employed in the service of political rulers and their devotees. Intellectual and doctrinal confusion worsened and produced even greater distortion in the Islamic worldview, along with further spiritual weakening in the Muslim community. These developments were clearly observable by the end of the Umayyad era, in the disintegration of the Islamic state's political system and retreat from Qur'anic fundamentals revealed for the renewal of civilization. These included the vision of a divinely granted stewardship, purposefulness of creation, the rule-governed quality of human nature, the ethical foundations of human conduct, and principles of justice, brotherhood, the oneness of God, consultation, freedom, responsibility, and constructive action.

Gone was the sense of purpose and motivation that had once driven the nation, and with it, progress, creativity, and constructive action. The resulting vacuum was filled by rhetoric of subjugation and intimidation, which further reinforced indifference and impotence. Conflict, fragmentation, backwardness, and institutional dysfunction ensued and tyrannical regimes ruled throughout the Islamic empire.

The purported conflict between revelation and reason for Muslim communities is an illusion with no foundation in human nature or objective reality. At question are the written texts of revelation and the reality of human nature and the laws of the universe. Reason's job is to verify that revelation describes the reality of human nature and the wider universe. Since revelation and universal laws derive from the same source, there is no discord between the actual meaning and guidance conveyed by divine revelation.

The Qur'an does not contain independent mention of 'reason' or 'the mind.' Concern regarding the mind, or reason, relates not to reason or its axioms – which are an unchanging aspect of human nature – but rather with how reason and its capacities are used.

The Qur'an speaks frequently of the processes of comprehending (*al-tadabbur*) – using one's reason (*al-'aql/al-ta'qqul*), reflection (*al-tafakkur*), and seeing (*al-ibṣār*). When scholars lacked sufficient

knowledge or information to identify errors in their analogies, they simply adopted interpretations that matched the overall spirit of Islamic law and which they saw as meeting the requirements of human welfare: they adhered to the practice of juristic preference (*istiḥsān*). This approach developed into the discipline of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher intents of Islamic law), which involves examining particulars in light of universals to fulfill the spirit of the Islamic law in tangible human situations. In this way, scholars were able to protect and uphold people's spiritual and material interests.

The proper understanding of revelation cannot possibly require coercion, compulsion, or a negation of human nature or laws of the cosmos. Divine revelation came to lead us to an understanding of our own true nature and creation as a whole: the only way to build a just, healthy, creative society. This revelation urges and guides human beings to activate and obey their will to do good. For example, the Qur'an's command to "Read" intends to guide us to use our human capacity for good, and is motivated by faith, wisdom, and a sense of ethical purposefulness. The Qur'anic worldview contains no possibility of genuine conflict between revelation and the facts of nature, human and cosmic. All a seeker requires to discover truth is to persevere in weighing and comparing available input.

If after the passing of the Prophet's Companions the Muslim community had continued to adhere to the Qur'anic worldview, we would have preserved our unity as a nation; led the way in the Islamic social sciences; and not have split into warring factions. Yet in the process truth and genuine human interests were lost and the community disintegrated. If Qur'anic concepts and understandings had continued to govern Islamic thought, it would have become evident that the Prophet's words to the desert Arab tribes were tailored to their specific needs, capacity, culture, and history. Over time, the Qur'an was viewed just as a means to acquire a blessing and a heavenly reward through recitation and memorization while *ijtihād* (attempts to grapple with its meanings in new and creative ways) was lacking.

Thorough study of the history of Islamic scholarship shows that tribal ways and thinking, together with the influx of non-Arab peoples into the Muslim community, exerted a major impact on the course of the Arab nation-state. Yet the Qur'an remains a constitution, an eternal message, a call, a law, and a worldview valid for all times and places. Its function is not to issue instructions or promulgate laws to manage

society in specific times and places; instead, it presents a timeless, divinely inspired worldview.

Further, as the Sunnah and Hadiths of the Prophet were passed down, conclusions of the Madinah School thinkers corresponded with the Prophet's thoughts and practices. On the other hand, the thought of Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, founder of the last Sunni school of jurisprudence, differed widely from Madinah and Islamic society in the Prophet's days. Ḥanbal's work contributed to the proliferation of Hadith compilations and encyclopedias not intended as resources of wisdom gleaned from the Prophet and Qur'anic teachings.

Most Muslim scholars focused on matters of personal piety, or what came to be termed *modes of worship* (*ʿibādāt*) – although every action the well-intentioned Muslim undertakes, public or private, is a form of worship. Similarly, scholars became immersed in personal status laws and regulations governing mundane transactions such as sales agreements. No time or energy remained for writing books dealing with management of government affairs and public interest. The Islamic worldview, with its balanced emphasis on the public and private spheres, was almost completely lost. What remained was rhetoric of threat and intimidation based on the assumption that the Muslim population at large was destined to remain ignorant.

The Prophet's message to his Companions was marked consistently by love, esteem, respect, and recognition of their noble qualities, accomplishments, and contributions. The Qur'anic worldview is an ethical, monotheistic, purposeful, positive perspective on the world and reflects the healthy, well-balanced human nature God created within us. Subsequently, a scientific, law-governed perspective supports responsible stewardship of the earth and its riches. A Muslim who has grasped the Qur'anic worldview will live in harmony with his or her God-given nature, which is essentially good. We as Muslims are called upon to instill in our children's minds and hearts a vision of love, dignity, and peace.

Despite the negative intellectual and cultural influences in our modern-day materialistic culture, socio-psychological studies should be undertaken that reflect the Qur'anic worldview and Muslims' central love for God. Such studies might take the form of literature dealing with parental and school-based educational materials. When addressing adult audiences, attention should be given to conscious reflection on

God's blessings and providential care, and how He has honored human beings.

We can begin to envision the implications of the Qur'anic worldview for our societal institutions by applying its concepts to various areas of life. Such concepts include mutual consultation, justice, charity, the doing of good, and purification. Opposing concepts are injustice, wrongdoing, aggression, and all that counters reason and human interests. We seek to establish a proper understanding of the Qur'an as the source of guidance and a constructive spiritual worldview for our lives and society. The Qur'an serves as a measuring rod for all proposed aims and purposes – as well as a set of criteria for evaluating the content of narratives and other texts.

Intellectual and cultural battles rage due to the efforts of some to obliterate or marginalize Muslim identity and culture, and destroy its ability to make creative, reformative contributions to modern materialistic culture. Women's rights and roles in the family and society provide a salient example. The institution of the family has historically been given special attention by Muslim scholars due to its vital connection to Islamic law. Consequently, the Muslim family has preserved its importance and moral strength despite the devastating atrophy and stagnation of Islamic thought. Unless we reform the family and work systems to reflect the wisdom of complementary gender roles within the family structure, we will further destroy the Muslim community and its members.

The complementary unity of the sexes harmonizes human existence and the physical, psychological, and social makeup of both the man and the woman. The two together form a complete, synchronized entity. Rather than base our thinking and behavior on the assumption that men and women are essentially alike, Muslims should operate on the assumption that, while they are similar in some respects, they are also distinct in important and complementary ways.

The materialistic worldview disregards or underplays these essential, organic psychological and social differences between men and women. We see the devastating effects of this nihilistic and unscientific view on Western societies, in the form of injustices against women and children. These injustices destroy the family institution and its constructive ethical foundations. Women bear burdens that prevent them from fulfilling their motherly instincts, or, when they fulfill this instinct, they bear

alone the material and psychological costs of this choice. Meanwhile, men have been exempted from responsibility.

Lack of awareness of the Qur'anic worldview, its social dimensions, and the structure of its cultural system has served those who engage in the cultural dispossession of the Muslim community. Complementarity can order social relationships between men and women and their resulting rights and responsibilities in light of their God-given natures and the Qur'anic concepts of love (*al-mawaddah*), compassion (*al-rahmah*), the doing of good (*al-ma'rūf*), and charity (*al-ihsān*).

This worldview needs to be understood more deeply as it relates to marital relationships and to a practical reformulation guaranteeing the rights of both men and women in the economic, political, social, and educational domains. Such a reformulation will allow these spheres to operate more harmoniously via Qur'anic concepts and principles, thereby forming integrated subsystems within the broader society.

The community or nation in the Qur'anic worldview should be understood as an inseparable part of human existence that is only complete when individuals and communities are symbiotic. The Qur'an is addressed to the individual, to the community, and to the human race as a whole: "God has promised those of you who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on earth" (*sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:55).

The Qur'an notes three foundations for successful human action: strength of certainty and faith; productivity of action; and effectiveness of action due to its righteousness. What governs the relationship between Self and Other in the Qur'anic view of the world? This human dimension of the Qur'anic perspective on the world and human life is vital. The Qur'an's monotheistic vision is universal and integrative. Therefore, the 'Other' is an integral part of the 'I,' just as the 'I' is understood to be an integral part of the 'Other.'

From the perspective of the Qur'anic worldview, relationships between Self and Other are interpenetrating circles, each with something beneficial to contribute to the other. Self and Other belong to 'peoples and tribes' in a variety of human social systems that represent diversity. "And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors: for in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge!" (*sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:22).

Diversity exists so people can strive to cooperate and to complement each other in united endeavors to responsibly use the planet and its resources, provide for their own and others' needs, and produce civilizations and cultures. Justice alone must govern the relationship between Self and Other even amid enmity and alienation. Similarly, the brotherly bond of common humanity requires that Self and Other avoid all injustice and aggression. The Qur'an refers to the act of repelling aggression as itself aggression: "Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you" (*sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:194). Conflict and warfare among brothers in humanity always involves the crossing of a red line of sorts, even when legitimate and necessary. In this way, the Qur'an alerts us to the seriousness of such an action. Yet without moderation there can be no justice; justice is simply a fruit of moderation in all things.

Islam came as a source of guidance and to inaugurate the universal, scientific phase of human civilization, and the Qur'an addressed humanity at large. The Qur'an is not a discourse of the supernatural and the miraculous, like revelations delivered to humanity in earlier periods of its development. It is the discourse of knowledge, reading, reflection, and contemplation; of reason, argument, and persuasion, and of guidance, brotherhood, justice, and peace. Islam is the final divine message to human beings, and the Qur'anic perspective on human existence and our God-given potential as stewards and vicegerents on earth. We each take from the values and teachings of Islam whatever we can and will absorb and apply. The Islamic worldview bases all relationships between Self and Others on the principle of justice and peace. We must be careful not to confuse the Islamic call to faith, or *da'wah*, with the Islamic state, or *dawlah*. The state is a political entity that exists for the purpose of human social organization.

The West enthusiastically adopted the scientific method without also accepting the monotheistic Islamic worldview. After the West abandoned religion, religion has almost come to be viewed as a superstition. On the other hand, the Qur'an conveys aims, values, and concepts that remain constant over time, and from one place to another. As the conditions of human life continually change and evolve, so must the applications of Islamic values and concepts also change and evolve.

Sound application of Islamic values and concepts within the context of particular times and places requires wisdom, knowledge, and discernment. The Qur'an, which is the word of God and His final message

to humankind, is also the source of valid guidance in the proper use of nature and the laws of the cosmos in all times and places. The role of the Prophetic Sunnah as a second source of the Islamic message provides wisdom for the application of values, principles, and concepts of this message.

The Qur'anic worldview and the life of the Prophet provide realistic messages capable of guiding people and enabling the forces of goodness in the human soul to overcome inclinations toward hedonism, evil, injustice, and self-interest. As a starting point, the Muslim community should recognize it has regressed, and that these developments have occurred for identifiable reasons that can be treated. The Muslim community must learn to ignore biased and unrealistic claims of Islam's requirements.

Muslim thinkers, reformers, and educators should identify and address the ills of present-day Islamic culture. Similarly, each subgroup within the wider Muslim community should recognize sources of malfunction or imbalance and methods of correction. Then the community will be able to regain its health and role as a cultural pioneer with a clear vision and optimism. The Qur'anic worldview will again serve as the basis for the community's way of life.

Islam is a lifeboat that will bring us safely to shore, a compass that will ensure our secure arrival at our journey's end. Islam is not: a form of racism that caters to human pride or base, aggressive instincts; a naive, enslaving, humiliating, monastic idealism; or a nihilistic materialism where only the fittest survive. Rather, Islam is a down-to-earth and spiritual idealism that is balanced and healthy. This vision of Islam provides a basis for meeting human needs in an atmosphere of safety, justice, and peace of mind.

## Chapter Two

### **The Principles Embodied in the Qur'anic Worldview**

These values and principles are the fundamental, essential building blocks of the Qur'anic worldview on the practical level. They guide the cultural progress of the society. Monotheism is the most fundamental

principle of this worldview, since it provides the most intuitively convincing, universal response to human spiritual need. It also represents the ‘ceiling’ of human logic in understanding the various dimensions of life and existence: “...there is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing” (*sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:11). The Qur’an’s instructions reflect the essential nature of human conscience with its purposeful, ethical, and spiritual inclinations.

The principle of divinely granted stewardship is reflected in God’s statement to the angels upon His creation of human beings. On the individual and communal levels, humans possess awareness and understanding. The principle of stewardship, which implies the ability to act in the world, bestows an honored position on human beings. This position entails the right to exercise freedom in the making of life decisions, and duties, responsibilities, and accountability for our actions on earth.

Justice is the central aim of all human action and interaction on all levels: material, spiritual, economic, social, and political. Without justice and moderation, all dimensions of human existence and stewardship are devoid of meaning and purpose: justice is the measuring rod for sound human conduct. The Qur’an helps us see the all-inclusiveness of justice in all aspects of life for the individual and the community.

Humans are distinguished from other creatures by their spirit and conscience, and by their desire to seek knowledge. This honor entails a responsibility that in turn requires that humans enjoy freedom to make meaningful choices. However, freedom does not justify chaos or hurting the rights and interests of other individuals, the community, or coming generations. Hence, no one may infringe upon this human right of stewardship in its individual and communal dimensions.

Subjective personal freedom is a freedom of conscience related to an individual’s convictions, doctrinal beliefs, and worldview. Second is the freedom to act within the social sphere. This freedom impacts society and has corresponding limits determined through mutual consultation. The community determines boundaries and controls and should strive for the proper balance between individual rights and freedoms, and the right of the community to ensure its well-being and survival.

The Qur’an assures us that God’s enduring reward shall be given to those “...who respond to [the call of] their Sustainer and are constant



in prayer; and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves..." (*sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:38). Consultation's purpose is to provide guidance for the ordering and management of society as a whole without infringing on individual rights and freedoms.

People are led both rationally and intuitively to the conviction that, within the limits of their abilities and circumstances, they are free to make meaningful choices for which they are responsible. The Qur'anic worldview sees human life as a serious, meaningful venture of fundamental goodness. It sees the fruit of all we accomplish in this life by way of reform, creativity, and service as extending into the spiritual realm of eternity. Our inborn spiritual perception is the foundation for the religious and moral sense. By bringing such aspirations into the center of our awareness, the Qur'anic worldview becomes our focus and source of inspiration.

One becomes better able to make conscious, well-informed, and responsible decisions about one's direction in life. The worldview intensifies our awareness of our responsibility and moral accountability, which are inseparable parts of our God-given human nature and among the features that qualify us to fulfill the role of God's stewards on earth.

By virtue of their growing knowledge, human beings have been given the ability to make use of the earth's resources and to build cultures and civilizations. They have also been granted freedom, the ability to choose, and a capacity for spiritual and moral perception that leads them to live purposefully and to seek goodness and rectitude, and an awareness of their accountability before their Maker.

Mutual consultation (*al-shūrā*) is not subject to the whims or interests of individuals with influence and power but, rather, is open to the participation of the wider community. This practice protects the legitimate rights of all to act on the basis of their convictions without hindrance or restriction, thereby fulfilling the purpose of human existence and serving their shared goals of development, reform, and security. Mutual consultation is thus essential for the well-being of the individual, community, and human race.

Careful examination of the Qur'an pertaining to the concept of mutual consultation and its vital link to stewardship-related, ethical,

and developmental aims reveals the true meaning of rightly-guided freedom exercised in a spirit of fairness, dignity and tolerance. Mutual consultation protects the community from the evils of tyranny, authoritarianism, injustice, and corruption. Freedom and mutual consultation (or the lack thereof) play a significant role in the rise and fall of civilizations. Freedom and consultation are necessary conditions for the survival of human civilization.

As Muslim communities undergo the phase of revival and the recovery of their cultural vitality, they need to appreciate the interdependence that exists between freedom and mutual consultation on one hand, and the rise and fall of civilizations on the other. Human civilization today suffers from the supremacy of materialism and racism (the self that incites to evil), sham democracy and its claims, so-called freedoms that are nothing more than a facade for nihilistic anarchy, the media's misleading talking heads, and phony research centers controlled by the influential, moneyed class.

Advanced materialistic societies have despoiled other nations' material and human resources in an attempt to escape the effects of their own waywardness, the inflexibility of their political, social, and economic systems, their corrupt, classist, racist practices, and the deteriorating morality of their peoples and social systems. The price of this sophisticated despoliation is paid, of course, by weaker, less advanced nations through the loss of their most enlightened minds, their material and human resources, and their dignity.

The gap between the masses of common people and the feudalistic (monopolistic) minority represented by the techno-capitalist intelligentsia widens. Social rigidity and economic, social, and political struggles will continue to worsen and spread throughout the entire world. For historical reasons related to its environment and lack of cultural sophistication, the Muslim community has failed to realize the importance of institutions.

Today, however, if we truly wish to be of service to ourselves and the human community, we have no excuse for failing to build the best institutions we possibly can. As we are reminded by the Qur'an: "...If God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth: but God is limitless in His bounty unto all the worlds" (*sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:251). The wealth now possessed by some tyrannical or corrupt Islamic states actually

threatens to thwart initiatives to move the Muslim community along the path of renewal.

There is a real danger that the first signs of an awakening on the part of the Muslim community will be nipped in the bud before they have the chance to flourish and bear fruit. Given the earnest efforts of thinkers, reformers, and educators, together with mothers' and fathers' concern and sacrifices on behalf of their children, the Muslim community possesses everything it needs to accomplish these goals despite the obstacles.

Illustrious judge and jurist Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) contributed to the establishment of systematic, causal, scientific investigation and a systematic, causal approach to the social sciences. He noted that for revelation and its various messages to be recognized truly as revelation and enter the realm of human knowledge, each messenger's claims and message must first be weighed in the balance of human reason and measured by the criteria of sound logic. Causality and responsible stewardship are inseparable. Without causality, life would be reduced to chaos, and there would be no basis for responsible action or accountability. The task of being God's stewards involves the will; it entails responsibility and the capacity for action based on monotheism, purposefulness, and morality.

God-given stewardship of the earth would thus be impossible without recognition of causality in human life. In the proper relationship between revelation (that which is written, or *al-maṣṭūr*), the laws of human nature and the cosmos (that which is observed, or *al-manẓūr*), and reason (the balance or scale, or *al-mīzān*) – the laws of human nature and the cosmos are the subject of the revelation, while the fundamentals of reason and logic are how we understand the guidance of revelation. If the Muslim way of thinking had not diverted under the influence of Greek thought, Muslims would have been the first to discover the social sciences. By virtue of their early adoption of a law-governed perspective and a comprehensive, scientific approach, they could have achieved far more than other nations.

To right the course of Islamic thought and culture today, Muslim thinkers and reformers should reclaim a comprehensive, scientific point of view. Then, based on the solid foundation of the Qur'anic worldview, they can reform the Muslim community's approach to culture, education, and child rearing, which form the basis for the community's

thought, academic institutions, and training. Such reform would unify the Islamic perspective on various fields of knowledge. Such reform would facilitate creation of curricula for a variety of academic specializations to be offered alongside Qur'an-based doctrinal instruction reflecting the Islamic worldview.

A genuinely Islamic worldview is comprehensive, law-governed, and disciplined. Unfortunately the predominant worldview among Muslims, which purports falsely to be 'Islamic,' is theoretical, atomistic, passive, and selective. For the Muslim community to recover the Qur'anic worldview and rebuild a system of rightly guided Islamic thought, we should recognize that sound instincts, universal laws, and realities of time and place, and revelation are the sources of Islamic knowledge.

The senses serve as tools of reason, which is the measure of human thought. Based on logic and the fundamentals of reason and common sense, we make observations and comparisons that enable us to form judgments about the world. The will serves as the basis for one's choices and decisions, either in pursuit of righteousness, justice, and reform on earth – or in satisfaction of selfish ends. As individuals and as a society, Muslims can repair what is broken in their way of thinking and the thinking of future generations.

Globalism is the feature of the phase where all stages of human development merge. All the religions that preceded Islam were messages to particular peoples, who lived a primitive existence in relative isolation from each other. Moreover, the means through which these religions reached the peoples for whom they were intended was largely that of miracles. Islam came as a message for people all over the world, to all the descendents of Adam. As a consequence, its discourse is addressed to all of humanity, and the means by which it reaches its hearers is a law-governed, scientific understanding of the universe and human beings' place in it. Its aims were justice and peace. Without justice there is neither peace nor globalism. Globalism and globalization are polar opposites. Globalism produces communication, peace among individuals and societies, brotherhood, compassion, and the fair sharing of benefits and resources. Globalization, by contrast, arises from, and gives rise to control, exploitation, and corruption. Together with the growth of the communication movement, the globalistic, scientific phase of human development, which commenced with the message through the Prophet, has moved people closer to becoming a single

global community. Communication, mutual recognition, and shared interests among the world's nations and peoples will propel them toward the formation of a single human community.

The alternative to globalization is globalism – that is, the establishment of a global community, order, and government on the basis of the principles of brotherhood, justice, cooperation, solidarity, security, peace, and a responsible, constructive use of freedom. The Muslim community has the responsibility to regain its vision and base its consultative system on a perspective whose point of departure is the fundamental unity of humankind. “...God invites [man] unto the abode of peace, and guides him that wills [to be guided] onto a straight way” (*sūrah Yūnus*, 10:25).

## Chapter Three

### **The Qur’anic Worldview: The Foundation, Starting Point, and Inspiration for Reform and Construction**

For Muslims to recover our Qur’anic worldview, we need to become more fully aware of our history as a nation, and in particular, the era spanning the lifetime of the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphs. We should appreciate the effect of the worldview on that enlightened era, on Islamic heritage, and on the course of subsequent eras, which in turn marked human civilization, culminating in the current phase of scientific, cosmic awareness. In light of what we know about the spiritual worldview founded on justice and brotherhood of all, and the other materialistic worldview founded on racism and aggression, we can begin to discern the true features of modern civilization.

The features we observe in modern civilization are, in reality, concrete expressions of the law of the jungle and the evil propensities of the self. As the foundational structures of such societies grow increasingly rigid and fragile, the societies themselves begin to weaken and disintegrate. Neither ethics nor rights have any meaning or place in the world of the jungle. Hence, this civilization will not be able to survive because the ongoing conflicts that arise inevitably from the foundations on which it stands are like a blazing fire, which if it finds nothing else to consume, will consume itself: “And, indeed, after having

exhorted [man], We laid it down in all the books of divine wisdom that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth: herein, behold, there is a message for people who [truly] worship God” (*sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, 21:105–106).

The conscientious spirituality upheld by the Qur’an, which embodies a commitment to justice, tolerance, and ethical purposefulness, is the polar opposite of such degenerate materialism. Despite its overall rejection of the guidance of revelation, modern materialistic civilization has achieved great things thanks to its commitment to the systematic, law-governed method of scientific inquiry, which constitutes one of the requirements for the task of being God’s stewards and representatives on earth.

The worldly propensities of modern civilization need still another requirement of true stewardship: the conscientious spirituality inherent in sound, rightly guided human nature, *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the accusing voice of man’s own conscience). For without it, there will be no way to confront the perilous spiritual and social ills from which the members of modern society suffer.

Once Islam is correctly understood and communicated to others in an appropriate manner, once our understanding of the Qur’anic worldview is purged of distortions, and once sound educational practices are followed, we will be equipped to offer deliverance to modern-day materialists from the conflicts, injustices, and dangers that imperil their existence. The task of reform belongs to Muslim thinkers and pioneers who, in order to overcome cultural restraints and rigid, backward thinking, will need a generous dose of objectivity, patience, and courage.

## Chapter Four

### **The Islamic Worldview and Humanitarian Ethical Concepts**

Muslim thinking is dominated by an atavistic attachment to traditions, practices, and applications of the past, while the mentality of individual Muslims is marked by a passivity and apathy that have deepened the rift between values and ideals embodied in the Islamic tradition, and

the reality of Muslims' lives and relationships. Values and concepts are clearly the tools for concrete action.

Islamic values, principles, and concepts are traceable back to the Muslim community's foundational vision. Today, we will need to instill these concepts educationally in the minds and hearts of individual Muslims and apply them on the level of integrated, interactive social, political, and economic institutions. In this way, we can produce a vital, positive, effective Muslim community prepared to build civilizations and make history. We need to help the Muslim community's academics, reformers, educators, and parents to become aware of their responsibilities and carry out their assigned roles, thereby enabling both themselves and their progeny to fulfill their God-given tendency to spiritual longing.

The Qur'anic worldview presents a realistic vision of existence in all areas, while providing guidance for how we conduct ourselves in relation to both the laws of the cosmos and our own human nature. This vision starts with the concept of the absolute unity of the Divine Self and the corresponding principle of the unity and complementarity of the cosmos and its multitudinous components. It follows from this principle that an awareness of the brotherhood of all humanity is ingrained within each of us; we have a human and social responsibility to live purposefully, morally, and constructively; and the structure of both human life and the universe as a whole rests on a foundation of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity.

We need an earnest, objective, critical reexamination of this community's heritage and history so we can distinguish the good from the bad, the useful from the useless. If we purge our intellectual, educational, and social spheres of weaknesses, prejudices, and distortions, we will be able to nurture an objective, Qur'anically grounded, global perspective that derives its inspiration from the wisdom embodied in the life of the Prophet and the ways he applied the teachings of the Qur'an to real-life situations.

Knowledge and understanding are, first and foremost, the craft of thinkers, scholars, academicians, and intellectuals, as well as that of schools and teachers. The parents' tasks are, first and foremost, child-rearing and the education and refinement of their children's spirit and conscience, and guidance in their children developing proper conduct. Thinkers, educators, and reformers need to pay particular attention to

writings and institutions that concern themselves with research on education from a cultural, scientific perspective, and then provide such research to parents by whatever means possible, particularly now that we live in the age of electronic communication and the Internet.

Our religious, social, and educational institutions are headed exclusively by those who have exhibited poor performance in their respective fields; meanwhile, we reserve our resources and recognition for those fields that we expect to be lucrative and prestigious, such as medicine and engineering. However, given the poor performance of our social system, we eventually lose those professionals to other countries. It is time for us to purify and rebuild our culture and provide our children with the proper spiritual, intellectual, and cultural foundation.

There has been a good deal of controversy and confusion over the true nature of 'the Islamization of knowledge' and the way in which it is to be achieved. One of the most important reasons for this is the lack of clarity with which the issue of developing the Islamic social sciences is presented, as well as the failure to clarify the nature of their content and purpose and how they are related to the Islamic heritage, Islamic thought, and the Western social sciences, respectively. The Islamization of knowledge and the Islamization of the social sciences are two sides of a single coin, and until we can clarify the link between them, as well as the link between them and the traditional Islamic sciences or disciplines and the social sciences, confusion will continue to reign.

Currently, the juristic (legal) aspect of the Islamic tradition receives the greatest emphasis in Islamic thought as it pertains to the life of the Muslim community. Islamic jurisprudence has, from its inception, derived its thought and content from the examples set by the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphs. The precedents established by the Prophet, his Companions, and the rightly guided caliphs constituted the most important source of scholastic Islamic thought. The ongoing ideational and political isolation and powerlessness suffered by students of the Islamic legal sciences led, over time, to a worsening intellectual rigidity and inertia that manifested itself in the practice of relying on literalistic rules, regulations, and precepts derived from practices, arrangements, and conditions many of which were no longer relevant to later Islamic societies.

Many Islamic laws, regulations, rulings, and legal decisions are tailored to conditions and challenges other than those that are relevant to the



age in which we live. It is vital that the unchanging principles and values of the Islamic worldview be recognized and preserved. By allowing ourselves to benefit from the undying wisdom of Islamic values, we generate new dynamism within the sphere of Islamic thought, and are better able to perceive what concrete steps are needed. The link between modern Western social sciences and the Islamization of knowledge lies at the heart of the Islamic social sciences and relates to both content and method.

The social role and function of the social sciences differ from those of law, jurisprudence, and legal rulings and decisions. In an Islamic society in particular, the social sciences provide the ideational content from which law and juristic research derive the rules and regulations that order relations. The function of jurisprudence and the law is, first and foremost, formal in nature, while the function of the social sciences is primarily intellectual or ideational. They complement one another by working together to promote the progress of the Muslim community and its civilization.

It is important to draw a distinction between Western thought generated by sociological research and study, and the methodology employed in the Western social sciences. Based on such a distinction, we see that the development of the Islamic social sciences is not opposed to past tradition. On the contrary, such development can draw on the experience, expertise, and achievements of the past, while at the same time drawing on the methodology and achievements of the Western social sciences.

The ideational content of the Western social sciences is influenced by two factors. The first factor is the subjective, ideological element that manifests itself in the Western worldview. Religion no longer plays any appreciable part in the vision, dealings, or social relations of Western peoples, many of whose members look upon themselves as agnostics. The second factor is the objective element represented by the research methods employed in the Western social sciences. The objective aspect of the ideational content of the Western social sciences, which has yielded numerous creative tools, systems, and institutions, can be used in the development of the Islamic social sciences.

Muslim students and researchers need to do the following: free themselves from the habit of imitation and mental subordination, arming themselves with a creative, comprehensive, critical, scientific,

and analytical way of thinking; develop a good understanding of the Qur'anic perspective on human beings and the world around them, with its unchanging values and principles; equip themselves with a thorough knowledge of the scientific method of studying human nature and the laws and patterns of the material universe, as well as human societies and their potentials and strengths within the context of their particular temporal and geographic contexts; and benefit from both the Islamic heritage and the scientific achievements of modern Western society.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has taken many significant steps in the area of academic research to offer a model for scholars in the areas of Islamic studies, social studies, and methodological studies, as well a model for academic research centers and universities. By studying, emulating, and developing this model, we may help to shift the focus of current efforts from mere outward forms and rhetorical one-upmanship to the service of what genuinely matters – the Islamic worldview with its unchanging values and concepts.

## Chapter Five

### **The IIIT's Plan For the Development of University Curricula**

The IIIT has contributed to the reform of university curricula through a model being implemented at the International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM). This model consists of a double major – or a major specialization and a minor specialization in the faculties of Islamic revelation and the humanities respectively. One of a student's two specializations will be in Islamic studies. This successful system is producing graduates who are highly competent in their respective areas of specialization, who have a clear sense of their Muslim identity, and exhibit considerable maturity, and an understanding and appreciation of the Islamic worldview and the Muslim community's role in the progress of human civilization. A comprehensive reform plan has been produced for the university curriculum.

The backbone of this plan is a general course of study in Islamic studies that consists of two parts. The first part (approximately thirty credit hours) provides the student with what a Muslim needs to know about his or her religion. This part constitutes a required minor specialization

for every student majoring in religious studies, social studies, or the humanities. As for the second part (also around thirty credit hours), its aim is to impart general knowledge of the history of the Muslim community, the life of the Prophet, the Islamic civilization, and the traditional religious (Islamic) sciences.

In addition to this general curriculum in Islamic studies, there are two other types of courses. The first of these are courses in social sciences and the humanities, and the second type consists of specialized courses in the religious sciences. The latter courses include Islamic law and jurisprudence, doctrine and philosophy (*‘ilm uṣūl al-dīn*), the Hadith sciences (*‘ilm al-ḥadīth*), Qur’anic exegesis (*‘ilm al-tafsīr*), the biography of the Prophet (*‘ilm al-sīrah*), Arabic grammar (*‘ilm al-naḥw*), and rhetoric (*‘ilm al-balāghah*). Each student’s degree program will consist of two specializations, the first part of which is the Islamic studies curriculum (the backbone).

Every student’s bachelor’s program will be one of the following:

- 30 hours of Islamic studies + 60 hours of major subjects + 30 hours of auxiliary coursework = a 120–130 hour degree program in one of the social sciences, humanities, or religious specializations.
- 60 hours of Islamic studies + 30 hours of minor subjects + 30 hours of auxiliary coursework = a 120 hour degree program in Islamic studies.
- 60 hours of Islamic studies + 30 hours of a specialization in education + 30 hours of auxiliary coursework = a 120–130 hour degree program in Islamic studies, which qualifies one to teach the fundamentals of Islam on the primary and secondary educational levels.

If a student completes a minor specialization in such a way that it becomes a major specialization, the graduate will, in effect, have two bachelor’s degrees: one of them in Islamic studies, and the other in his or her other area of specialization.

The details of these curricula were finalized during the 2008–2009 academic year, and it is hoped that they will be a source of benefit to other programs of higher education throughout the Islamic world. Such a program should contain auxiliary coursework on the philosophy of Islam as it pertains to these sciences and the aims that guide their use

in real-life, practical situations. This plan is highly flexible, and can therefore be adapted to a variety of university plans and to the requirements of different specializations.

Hopefully the efforts of Muslim thinkers, reformers, academicians, and other concerned specialists will be coordinated in such a way that they give the Muslim community both a clear vision and a guide to action so that it can correct its way of thinking, revitalize its institutions, make good use of its potentials, and give free rein to its creative energies.

**The Author**

ABDULHAMID ABUSULAYMAN is President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) USA; President of the Child Development Foundation, USA; and former Rector of the International Islamic University, Malaysia. He is also the author of numerous works including: *The Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (1987); *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (1987); *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (2003); *Revitalizing Higher Education in the Muslim World* (2007) as well as several books and papers in Arabic. AbuSulayman has also delivered numerous papers and lectures and has been instrumental in organizing many international symposia, conferences and seminars.

**IIIT Books-In-Brief Series** is a valuable collection of the Institute's key publications written in condensed form to give readers a core understanding of the main contents of the original.

The central tenet of this work, which explores the reasons behind the Muslim world's colossal decline, is that without reinstatement of an ethical, monotheistic, and purposeful perspective on the world and those within it, that is a Qur'anic worldview, genuine and viable revival cannot take place.

Of greater importance than the standard admiration of Islam's 'golden' civilization is an assessment of its dormant potential which is what this work attempts to do. Our faith will only be complete when we have become utterly sincere in our love for God, and His Prophet ﷺ, a love expressed in a pure, passionate love for goodness and truth in this world.

It was the strict internalization of this perspective and close adherence to the principles of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah which, contends AbuSulayman, played a key factor in galvanizing the intensely God-conscious followers of early Islam. They adhered to the moral code with a passion and conviction which modern Muslims have lost, shaping their destiny with a boldness of vision that could only have come about because of it. The rebirth of Islamic identity through this Qur'anic worldview is the key requirement of our times and what will bring this disastrous state of affairs finally to an end.

