

THE CHALLENGE FACING THE WORLD OF ISLAM FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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"A nation's pre-eminence and prestige are usually determined by the quality of its intellectuals and the excellence of its institutions. Competent and creative scientists and scholars constitute an invaluable national resource. Their combined vision and wisdom, expertise and know-how are of critical importance to the process of development and advancement of the nation. It is well known that the quality of intellectual and professional talent brought into any system sets the ultimate limits for its attainment. A highly motivated and committed intellectual community is an asset for any country in the pathway of development."

"In redefining the priorities for the future, Muslim intellectuals have great responsibility because it is only through the power and potential of knowledge, wisdom and skill and by no other method or means that they would be able to regain the right for Muslim community to live as a self-reliant, equal and truly sovereign people, masters of their resources and destiny."

There are over 500 references in the Holy Qurán which invite man to observe, consider, analyze, think deliberate and reflect on the natural phenomena and all that it offers. Therefore he is all the time eager to know the realities of his surrounding, purpose of his creation, his place in the Universe and what he is expected to do or not to do? In his search to find answers to these questions, he tries to advance his knowledge further and further through continuous observation, thinking, experimentation and verification. If he is a believer this continuous thinking and discovering the signs of Allah (SWT) become an element of faith with him. He simply cannot ignore it. It is the essence and the main purpose of his creation.

The Qurán says that it is only the learned who understand Allah's similitude (29:43). Only those who think are those who discover. In fact it is the thinking mind that reflects and brings to surface many facts about natural phenomena which otherwise remain obscure and hidden to mankind. The Qurán further says:

"Truly in the creation of the Heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day there are indeed signs for men of understanding those who remember Allah while standing sitting and lying on their sides and ponder over the creation of Heavens and the earth" (3:190-191).

This continuous submission, involvement and think-

ing by the learned and talented help maintain the steady flow, growth and advancement of knowledge in the world.

From the 8th to the 12th century AD. was the period of Islamic glory. It was a period of phenomenal rise and remarkable achievement in Muslim thinking and understanding. During this period Muslims developed a great thirst for learning and knowledge. They traveled to all parts of the world in the search of knowledge and took to the study of natural phenomena with religious fever and commitment, observed nature carefully and undertook extensive experimentation to gain insight and understanding of the nature of things. Islamic civilization then reached its zenith and the Muslims became world leaders in philosophical and scientific thought.

Unfortunately we witness, today an increasing evidence of crises of knowledge and intellect in the Islamic World. There is very little creativity and imagination in our present day social system. There is growing tendency towards anti-intellectualism. We are neither inventing much nor innovating enough. We are prone to falling back on old clichés and worn out rhetorics. We still continue to emulate colonial practices and traditions. There is no meaningful or aggressive intellectual movement in the Ummah that can check these trends and reverse the course of events.

History has proved beyond any doubt that technological development always follows the cultural, intellectual and ideological advancement of the society. The 8th century ideological motivation and passion for knowledge eventually culminated in a massive thrust of Islamic science and technology in the world. The cultural upsurge and the intellectual revolution of the 18th century in U.K. and the 19th century in USA were responsible for the phenomenal technological resurgence in the world during the present century. Therefore what we need in the Islamic World, is also an intellectual revolution and its leaders and torch bearers will have to be the scholars and scientist of the Ummah. They must remember that they are the inheritors of a culture which has contributed so richly to the development of human civilization. They are the heirs of one of

the oldest and most cultured intellectual traditions in the history of mankind. They have the gateway to the eternal reservoir of knowledge, the world of God in the Qurán and the tradition of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

The Prophet of Islam (SAW) is reported to have said that "Scholars are the heirs of the prophets" and further that "the ink of scholar is more holy than the blood of martyr". Such is the value and worth of scholar in the eyes of God, the Almighty and His Prophet (SAW).

Therefore, in Islam the responsibilities of a person who knows and who can observe and think for himself have been laid down to be greater than some one who does not know and who cannot contemplate. History is witness to the fact that Muslim intellectuals, scholars and scientists have served mankind with greater zeal and devotion and contributed abundantly to the preservation of peace and harmony in the society. Unfortunately, we have lost this heritage and have now relegated ourselves to the receiving end.

It appears that the Muslim intellectual has lost now his motivation and dynamism. He feels indifferent, withdrawn and frustrated. He must remember that in this period of expansion and growth on the one, and excellence and competition on the other his reactions and responses to new and emerging situations should be realistic, pragmatic and deliberate. He should not allow himself to follow the events, blindly, indifferently and helplessly. He must equip himself to face the emerging realities with courage and commitment in the coming twenty-first century which is round the corner. He should aim at a new vision of future and keep his eyes open. He cannot afford to remain unconcerned and isolated. He must provide fresh ideas and fresh thoughts to Ummah in its march towards progress and development. He must think globally even if he is called upon to act locally. He is the only one who could do it and he must accept the challenge, with a sense of urgency.

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national resource. Their combined vision and wisdom, expertise and know-how are of critical importance to the process of development and advancement of the nation. It is well known that the quality of intellectual and professional talent brought into any system sets the ultimate limits for its attainment. A highly motivated and committed intellectual community is an asset for any country in the pathway of development.

In fact, progressive societies are those which believe in creativity, challenge, innovation, invention, new methodologies and new adoption and external assistance for solutions of their problems. They make their own efforts and in doing so, they no doubt, use the available knowledge and know-how to equip their societies fully to meet the challenges of the future.

In redefining the priorities for the future, Muslim intellectuals have great responsibility because it is only through the power and potential of knowledge, wisdom and skill and by no other method or means that they would be able to regain the right for Muslim community to live as a self-reliant, equal and truly sovereign people, masters of their resources and destiny.

To achieve this end the leaders of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Conference thought that along with the attainment of Islamic solidarity it was essential to make a sustained effort to achieve solidarity in Scientific Research and Technological Development also for the common good and progress of the Ummah. They thought that the Islamic World must recover from the present slumber urgently and regain its lost glory in science and technology which was their privilege for many centuries in history. For this purpose it was therefore considered necessary to provide a forum for the Muslim scientists, scholars and intellectuals to deliberate on the issues confronting the Muslim Ummah and to suggest practical solutions to the policy formulators and decision makers in the member states. This thought gave birth to the Islamic Academy of Sciences.

The Islamic Academy of Sciences was established in 1986 as a consequence of the decision of the Fourth Islamic Summit held in Casablanca, Kingdom of

Morocco in 1984 on the recommendations of COM-STECH, the OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation. The Academy was conceived as an intellectual forum of eminent Muslim scientists to serve as a 'Brain Trust' or 'Think Thank' in the all important field of sciences and technology for the Ummah. It was envisaged that the Academy, in the course of time, will emerge as the main reservoir of knowledge and scholarship for the Islamic World. The Academy is constituted as a non-political, non-governmental and non-profit making body made up of distinguished Fellows who are elected in their own right from among the eminent Muslim scientists from all parts of the world. It is a prestigious body and functions as an independent, fully autonomous and self-governing institution of Muslim scientists and scholars.

Although it is only eight years that the Islamic Academy of Sciences has come into being, its founding was the dream of many generations of Muslim scientists and scientific communities in the Islamic World. The Academy is mandated to deliberate on a continuing basis on the problems of the Islamic World requiring scientific solutions. The Academy has presently 62 fellows. It has its headquarters in Amman, Jordan.

The Academy has prepared an elaborate program of action which conceptually addresses itself to the revival of Islamic thought process in the Muslim world and practically focuses on the main problems of the Ummah requiring urgent solutions. Special emphasis is placed upon strategic, long term planning issues which can help Muslim states to respond more appropriately to their science and technology needs and meet the desired objective of building a combined capability and a collective strength for the Muslim Ummah in the field of science and technology.

The Academy has organized seven international conferences so far, on certain major problems confronting the Islamic World, namely, 'Food technologies and Development' at Kuwait 1989, 'Transfer of technology at Antalya', 1990, 'Man power Development' at Amman in 1991, 'Environmental Management' at Kuala Lumpur.

The Academy is publishing a bimonthly Journal presenting primarily research reports conducted anywhere in the world has already finished its sixth year of Publication. The Academy also maintains data bases at its Headquarters on subjects that are important to the Muslim countries. Besides Academy has plans to institute Excellence Awards and medals for the talented young Muslim scientists, giving research grants for work in the critical areas of scientific research and development for the Muslim countries, arranging Seminars, Workshops and courses on important topics of interest to Ummah and producing monographs, status reports and scientometric futuristic studies of relevance to Muslim world. Furthermore the academy has also plans to associate and affiliate national academies and other learned bodies in the Muslim countries to interact with each other. Some of the activities have not been initiated due to constraints of funds but it is hoped that adequate funds will be found soon to embark upon these initiatives.

The Islamic Academy of Sciences has also been decided to attend to two other important historical facts which have raised misgivings in the minds of many Western writers and scholars. One finds in the European writings numerous errors of omissions and commissions wherein many of western scientists are credited with numerous discoveries originally made by

Muslim scientists. This misplaced assertion must be sorted out once for all. Another basic question concerns the impression sedulously cultivated by western scholars that the role of Muslim scientists had been primarily one of the mechanical 'conveyors' of Greek science back to Europe. Science in the Muslim Ummah is represented by them as a linear extension of Greek science, with modern science as an exponential growth from the point where the Muslim left off. This concept is also manifestly misplaced. It will be the endeavor of the Academy to pursue research, dig out original sources and reveal the truth by providing historical evidence for future generations. This is a stupendous task but Islamic Academy is determined to do it.

The Academy has progressed steadily and assuredly towards the realization of its objectives. It is no doubt destined to play an important role for the Ummah in the future.

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