

# URGENCY OF THE INTEGRATION OF RELIGION AND KNOWLEDGE

## FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM CHARACTER\*

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### Abstract

Almost, if not all, modern educational institutions of the west, and followed consciously or unconsciously by many of that of the east (including some Muslim countries such as Indonesia), strongly “believe” that religion and knowledge or science are two different entities that are mutually exclusive and can never meet each other, let alone be integrated or reconciled together. Religion, according to this “belief”, belongs to the domain of belief (which is irrational), whereas knowledge or science belongs to the domain of reason. As a result of this dichotomy, educational curricular, including that of teaching-learning religions and study of religions, at all educational levels have been designed to be religiously neutral. Indeed, the issue of relationship between religion and science or knowledge has drawn a lot of attentions from scholars and thinkers throughout the history. Theories have been introduced to meet this issue, which include, among the others, Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration. The question at this juncture is whether this dichotomous reasoning is plausible or epistemologically tenable. As such, this paper tries to discuss and analyze this issue with special reference to Islamic context.

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### Historical Background: A Personal Reflection

The modern era has been marked predominantly with secular culture. Secularism (some prefer to use the term “secularization”) has become the soul of the modern life replacing the religions proper. So much so that, to the secularist minds, it is almost unconceivable for a group or community or society or even a country to become modern without being secular.

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This acute ideology prevailed in the West not without reason. There is every reason for the West to subscribe to this believe. The most pressing reason is, perhaps, the given fact that its very history is strongly rooted in Greco-Judeo-Christian traditions, to which the modern Western civilization is proud of. In my essay, “Problem Agama dan Sains di Dunia Kristen dan Barat,” previously published in journal of *ISLAMIA*,<sup>1</sup> I have surveyed this history and found that each of these great traditions has evidently shown not only the continuity of a dichotomized worldview but also the increasing tensions between religion and knowledge or science culminating in the form of “inquisitions” that left the darkest pages in the history of medieval Christian church.

It is this bloody history of the Christian church that best serves the explanatory paradigm for the prevailing phenomenon of negative attitude, and to some extent, of enmity against religions among the secularist minds in the modern era. This phenomenon has been exacerbated with the fact that the Bible is full of self-contradictions and of informations inconsistent with the logic and at odd with the modern scientific discoveries. Studies on Biblical criticism by Muslims scholars prior to the modern era,<sup>2</sup> have evidently proven such critical problems in the Bible. Furthermore, modern scholars of the West have, in fact, had their share in such studies. One of the most striking examples of this is the book *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, published in 1875, in which its author, John William Draper, a professor at the University of New York, pointed out that science and religion are two apparently diverse disciplines that speak very differently about the same phenomena. He identified a lot of controversies and conflicts between religion and science in the Biblical tradition based upon

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<sup>1</sup> See for details on the historical background of Western dichotomy, Anis Malik Thoha, “Problem Agama dan Sains di Dunia Kristen dan Barat,” in *ISLAMIA*, Thn. II, No. 5 (April-June 2005), 21-6.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the work of Ibn Hazm (384-456 H) entitled *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1986), vol. 1 & 2.

scholarly arguments.<sup>3</sup> Another work of such kind entitled *The Warfare of Science with Theology* was published in April 14, 1894.<sup>4</sup>

These works coupled with the horrible institution of inquisition mentioned above helped forge tremendously far-reaching effects, in the West in special and the whole world in general, which are by and large at the expense of religion. Firstly, the dichotomization of the truth – religious truth *versus* scientific truth, in which the former (if anything at all) by and large being subservient and subordinated to the latter. Secondly, and actually as corollary of the previous point, the establishment of new sciences and/or approaches, such as hermeneutics, which serve the subservience, subordination, or even the total submission of religion to the supremacy of science or knowledge.

Meanwhile, the track record of religion (Christianity and Judaism) in the West was far remove from being encouraging. Religions' role in the Western societies was extremely deplorable as being the source of conflicts, tensions, disintegration, violence, and even civil war among the members and groups within the society. This situation, of course, tarnished farther the image of religion in the minds of Western societies that had, in turn, added another reason for their indifference at best, and negative attitude or enmity at worst, against religion.

It was under these conditions that modern Western countries, such as the United States and France, were established. Therefore, it was absolutely no surprise to notice the strong opposition to religion in public sphere and affairs being stated perpetually in their respective constitution,

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<sup>3</sup> See for the details John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875 [reprinted by Gregg International Publishers Limited, Westmead, 1970]).

<sup>4</sup> See Andrew Dickson White, *The Warfare of Science with Theology* (St. Petersburg, April 14, 1894).

statutes and policies. Religion Clauses of the First Amendment<sup>5</sup> to the U.S. Constitution, for instance, reads “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...*” This clause has ever since proven the most decisive, effective and conclusive constitutional ground for the guaranty of maintaining all aspects of the national life sterile from religion. For absolutely this statute being translated into different programmes and projects and, at the same time, being disseminated to the citizens through all types and levels of national education. Just to cite an example, in 1999 First Amendment Center from Nashville, TN, the United States, published a simple yet comprehensive guidelines for teaching *about* religion in the public schools entitled *A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*. Two of the points in this guidelines are of paramount important to cite here. The first is pertaining to the question of “How should I teach about religion?” The guidelines points out that:

Encouraged by the new consensus, public schools are now beginning to include more teaching about religion in the curriculum. In the social studies especially, the question is no longer “Should I teach about religion?” but rather “How should I do it?”

The answer to the “how” question begins with a clear understanding of the crucial difference between the teaching *of* religion (religious education or indoctrination) and teaching *about* religion. “Religion in the Public School Curriculum,” the guidelines issued by 17 religious and educational organizations, summarizes the distinction this way:

- The school’s approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.
- The school strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student *acceptance* of any religion.
- The school sponsors *study* about religion, not the *practice* of religion.
- The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
- The school *educates* about all religions; it does not *promote* or *denigrate* religion.
- The school *informs* students about various beliefs; it does not seek to *conform* students to any particular belief.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The First Amendment (along with the rest of the [Bill of Rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution)) was submitted to the states for ratification on September 25, 1789, and adopted on December 15, 1791. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution)

<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Haynes. *A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools* (Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center, 1999), 3. Originally the author has included this guidelines (along with other recommendations related to teaching *about* religion) in the part III of his earlier book, *Religion in American History: What to Teach and How* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990), 134-8.

The second is the question of “what is the relationship between religion and character education?” Here the guidelines reads:

As discussed previously, the First Amendment prohibits public-school teachers from either inculcating or inhibiting religion. Teachers must remain neutral concerning religion, neutral among religions and neutral between religion and non-religion. *But this does not mean that teachers should be neutral concerning civic virtue or moral character.*

Teachers should teach the personal and civic virtues widely held in our society, such as honesty, caring, fairness, and integrity. They must do so without either invoking religious authority or denigrating the religious or philosophical commitments of students and parents.<sup>7</sup>

In a nutshell, it has been made it crystal clear that “religion is not to encroach the civic domain or moral character”. That’s what secularism (secularization) *is* all about!

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### **The Paradox of Secularism: Secular Ethics**

The foregoing analysis has somehow shown an emerging and challenging idea of the morality without, or independent of, religion. Religions have been marginalized, and their authority as *the* source of morality have been bitterly questioned, challenged and even denied. This is particularly true, given the fact that religions not only condone, but also command and sanction killings, Inquisition and such a horrendous crime. All these have left the modern minds with a deep disheartening and disgust *vis-a-vis* all religions, without exception. They resorted, instead, to human faculty or logic freely and independently to provide them with norms, values and standards of what is good and bad, wright and wrong, in order to guide, appropriate, and make sense of, their individual as well as collective lives. Hence, the modern theories of ethics and morality such as Hobbesian egoism, utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and of John Stuart Mill,

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<sup>7</sup> Charles C. Haynes. *A Teacher’s Guide*, 6. (italics are mine).

pragmatism, Kantian teleological imperative and so on and so forth, each of which has made no reference to religion what-so-ever.

At the first glance, the modern minds seem to have successfully liberated themselves from religion or religious tautology. This reminds me to a question raised by Dr. Siegel, a professor from Miami University, right after I had just finished presenting my paper in a session at the *International Congress on Philosophy of Education: Philosophical Dimension of Educational Problems in Globalization Process*, organized by Egitim Bir Sen in Ankara, Turkey, from 6-8 March 2009. The Professor wonderingly and argumentatively asked me: “I am an atheist. Am I religious?” Then I replied: “I would say ‘yes’, Prof.”<sup>8</sup> This question was in response against my submission that the essence of religion is simply “*a set of value*” believed to be the ultimate “*truth*”. It seemed that to him, and the secularist minds like him, once a person has denied the existence of god or has become an atheist, he/she is no longer in a religious state. But it is noticeable that this does not necessarily mean at all that that is really detaching from all religions, so that the person is in the state of “religious detachment”, or that which Paul Tillich calls “religious indifference”. Because this state, in the final analysis, is but a “transitory stage”. As a matter of fact, it does not last longer than the moment the traditional religions have lost meaning and trust of their follower, while the new alternative has not consciously arisen yet. So, this state is conceivably very short, as Paul Tillich puts it:

...in the depth of technical creativity, as well as in the structure of the secular mind, there are religious elements which have come to the fore when the traditional religions have lost their power. Such elements are the desire for liberation from authoritarian bondage, passion for justice, scientific honesty, striving for a more fully developed humanity, and hope in a progressive transformation of society in a positive direction. Out of these elements which point back to older

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<sup>8</sup> It seemed that Professor Harvey Siegel was not satisfied with my answer, and the friendly discussion was continued after the session and even until midnight. Luckily, I was not alone to have such a contention. In fact, Prof. Oliver Leaman, among the participants of the conference, was of the same contention as mine, so the discussion was very interesting and lively that it was a memorable moment.

traditions the new quasi-religious systems have arisen and given new answers to the question of the meaning of life.<sup>9</sup>

Actually, this is what has been observed and emphasized also by many scholars. Winston L. King, for instance, in his article, “religion”, stated: “Yet it also seems that as soon as one form of religion disappears, another rises to take its place.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, “religious detachment” or “religious indifference” is a religious state that happens unexpectedly to a person when he/she gives up his/her religion on the conviction or semi-conviction of its failure to respond the fundamental questions pertaining to the meaning of life in general. Then he/she assumes in this particular moment that he/she has detached from the religion totally. But that is not really the case as evidently proven above. Rather, what is really the case is, *when a person quits his/her religion, he/she actually does this out of a conviction or semi-conviction*. And this conviction, in turn, does not come out of nothing or *in vacuum*. Instead, it has been preceded by a new belief or (world)view overriding that of the original belief or (world)view. This new belief or (world)view is made possible only through either revelation from a religion (among the existing traditional religions) or revelation from an entirely new ideology. At any rate, this (world)view remains a religious (world)view absolutely although in some of its forms there seems to be devoid of (or against) any concept of god that is so characteristic in religious (world)view. It remains a religious (world)view absolutely as it is set up based on basic religious postulations and questions. In addition, any statement pertaining to religious question is automatically considered a religious statement regardless of whether there is or not at all a mention about the word “religion” explicitly or implicitly, and irrespective of whether there is or not at all a mention about the word “god” explicitly or implicitly, especially if the concept of religion and god is to

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 9. (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> Winston L. King. “Religion.” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 12: 292.

be understood in Tillichian definition, i.e., the ultimate concern: “Religion is the state of being grasped by an *ultimate concern*, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the ultimate concern as the essence of religion and the concept of god is what has been alluded and underlined in the Qur’an, *sūrah al-Furqān*: 43, and *sūrah al-Jāthiyah*: 23, “Have you (O Muhammad) seen him who has taken as his god his own desire?” So, according to the Qur’an, the concept of god is simply referring to the worshiped or the adored or the ultimate concern in general, including *al-hawā* (vain desire or whim). The Qur’an has, therefore, enlarged the concept of god and religion thus far as to include all kinds of the worshiped and of the ultimate concern, and to include, in turn, all kinds of religions – religions proper, theistic and non-theistic religions or religions without god,<sup>12</sup> quasi-religions or semi-religions, new age spirituality, etc.

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that human being can never live without relying, consciously or unconsciously, on certain “religious conviction” rooted in either religions proper or quasi-religions. Thus, in the case of the Professor mentioned above, apparently he was not cognizant of his own state of being. Because an atheist is also a human being who, exactly like the other common human being, thinks and acts in accordance with the configuration and framework of value or a set of values in which he/she believes. If it is not based on religions *proper*, it is nevertheless based on the substitutes of religion (quasi-religions). Furthermore

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich. *Christianity and the Encounter*, 3. (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> Some writers classified the religions with reference to the concept of god into two broad categories: theistic religions and non-theistic religions or religions without god, then they included Buddhism, Chinese religions, atheism, communism, fascism, etc., under the category of non-theistic religions or religions without god. [see for example, Ray Billington. *Religion without God* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002)]. But apparently this classification is not accurate, for in reality, as evidently seen above, no religion without a concept of god. Further, the philosophers of religion agreed to include atheism (no-god-ism) in the topic of concept of god. [see for example: John Hick. *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988)].



he/she is, to paraphrase Tillich words, “always an inside participant with a part of his being, for he also has confessed or concealed answers to the questions which underlie every form of religion. If does not profess a religion proper, he nevertheless belongs to a quasi-religion, and as consequence he also selects, judges, and evaluates.”<sup>13</sup>

Here subtly arises the paradox. On the one hand, the secularists claim that they have liberated themselves from religion leaving aside disparagingly everything religious, but on the other, they let themselves unconsciously be immersed in religion-like agenda and systems (quasi-religion). And because of this subtlety many, if not most, of the people have failed to recognize it. At any rate, what is going on really in the battlefield is an encounter between religions proper on the one side, and the quasi-religions on the other. Tillich puts it in this way, “The dramatic character of the present encounter of the world religions is produced by *the attack of the quasi-religions on the religions proper*, both theistic and non-theistic.”<sup>14</sup> That is why to Harvey Cox, secularism is the murderer of religions.<sup>15</sup>

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### **Myth of Secularism (Secularization)**

The modern history has created its own myth (both in its popular and technical meanings), viz. secularism. It is the myth that only secularism will bring forth modernity, deliverance and prosperity to the modern societies. So, the more secular is a society, the more modern, delivered and prosperous it would be. Since secularization, according to Max Weber, is “the disenchantment of the world”, which means the desacralization of the world from superstitions,

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich. *Christianity and the Encounter*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. (emphasis added)

<sup>15</sup> Harvey Cox. “The Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rise and Fall of ‘Secularization’.” *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*. Ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Orbis Book, 1999), 136.

magic, animism, totemism, pantheism, and various forms of irrational emotional attachment to persons and things in the world which are regarded as sacred and *taboo* (that is, the description of religion according to the West), throughout the twentieth century students of large-scale social change used to see religion and modernization within a kind of zero-sum equation: the more modernization, the less religion, and vice-versa.<sup>16</sup>

In no period of human history is the secularization process more manifest than the modern era. The Western countries have been leading in the process, and followed by some Eastern countries, including some Muslim countries. However, by the turn of the twenty-first century, many have questioned the plausibility of this zero-sum construction. For example, Paul C. Vitz, Professor of Psychology/Senior Scholar at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences and Professor of Psychology Emeritus at New York University, observes that in recent decades he sees three major modern ideals that now show clear signs of completion and exhaustion. The **first is secularism.** Further he said:

In my graduate student day's secularism was riding high. Religion was seen as a thing of the past, which would soon finish withering and disappear, to be replaced by the modern, rational humanistic secular world. Many psychologists and other social scientists interpreted their disciplines as part of this emerging secular triumph. For Christianity, Harvey Cox's *Secular City* (1965) is a good representative of this confident assumption. It is now roughly forty years later and much of that secular confidence has evaporated. This has happened in part because of the remarkable and unexpected growth of religion in America and in much of the world. Indeed in the United States Evangelical Protestantism was beginning to emerge at the very moment when Harvey Cox was writing his book. Since then in the United States we have seen a resurgence of Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism to the extent that today the future of Judaism is generally understood to be the future of its orthodox expressions. There are now clear signs of a broad based grass roots revival of traditional Catholicism in the United States, a revival largely unobserved by the media. And, of course, Islam has shown much growth in many places. There are still other examples of this religious growth ranging from Hinduism to Mormonism to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 135.

Buddhism to New Age spirituality but I think the point is clear, religion has revived very strongly.<sup>17</sup>

Even Harvey Cox who was, then, so confident with the secular triumph, now has to revise his earlier thesis of the Secular City. He is greatly perplexed with the fact that, as he rightly observes, “religion has not only survived, it has even thrived in some of the most modernized areas of the world. There is every indication that in many places it has even continued to stimulate the modernization process.” He is so wondering “How are we to explain the dramatic failure of the secularization thesis as an explanatory paradigm for religion, culture, and politics in the twentieth century? Where does that leave us as theologians of culture at the beginning of twenty-first?”<sup>18</sup>

In addition to inadequacy and implausibility of the secularization thesis as an explanatory paradigm for religion and cultural change, scholars have also started deploring the proliferation of maladies of affluence – such as drug dependence, obesity, loneliness, and psychological disorders ranging from depression, anxiety, and compulsive behaviours to a widespread but ill-defined anomaly.<sup>19</sup> If affluence, which is the direct effect of economic growth resulting from the modernization and secularization, has only proliferated those maladies, that means that the psychological wellbeing of citizens in the rich countries is in decline. In short, the affluence has failed to improve the wellbeing of society, which means, if anything, there is something wrong somewhere in the modern Western social system.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Paul C. Vitz. “Excellence without a Soul: A Response to the Problem of the Modern University.” (15- minute talk given on Oct. 30, 2006 at Harvard University). ([http://christianpsych.org/wp\\_scp/2009/08/24/excellence-without-a-soul-a-response-to-the-problem-of-the-modern-university/](http://christianpsych.org/wp_scp/2009/08/24/excellence-without-a-soul-a-response-to-the-problem-of-the-modern-university/))

<sup>18</sup> Harvey Cox. “The Myth of the Twentieth Century,” 136.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Clive Hamilton. *Freedom Paradox: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics* (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2011), Chapter 1.

<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, see Rene Guenon, *Crisis of the Modern World* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, [1942] 1981); and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, [1988] 2nd impression 1994).

In *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*, a book which many regard as the most important work on education written in the beginning of twenty-first century, Professor Harry R. Lewis, former dean of Harvard College, tries to identify that the root of all these maladies lies in the Western educational system, which, according to him, is “soulless” education. It has been designed primarily for human resource development as a means of achieving the goals of national development in its strictest sense, i.e., economic growth, ignoring totally the moral duty of education to educate student to be good human.<sup>21</sup> In fact, such a self-criticism is easily to be found also in much earlier works by some Western scholars, like *The Crisis in the University* by Sir Walter Moberly published in 1949; and *The Crisis of Western Education* by Christopher Dawson in 1961.

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### **Strike a Balance!**

Although secularization maybe really badly needed in Judaeo-Christian societies (as a response to their particular history and religious teachings!), its implementation in their real lives has evidently ended up in the bankruptcy of human morality as a whole. As clearly seen in the preceding sections, many have spelt out the necessity of the way-out from this perplexing stalemate. In brief, this way-out is to be achieved by reverting the cause, that is, since the problem was caused by the process of “secularization”, the solution must be “desecularization”.

While this idea is worth crediting, “desecularization” is simply ambiguous and misnomer. For it would mean different thing to different people. At least, there are three competing theories at

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<sup>21</sup> Harry R. Lewis. *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).

hand to provide explanation for it: (i) perennialism; (ii) postmodernism; and (iii) integralism.<sup>22</sup> Each of them endeavours to offer “a sort of integration”, but all of them will finally advocate religious pluralism, which is itself yet another problem.

In light of this, I would submit, we are left only with the Islamic way of *tawazun* and *wasatiyyah* – a way that in the character-building is represented perfectly and beautifully in the concept of *akhlaq*. This submission that I made may sound apologetic, yet this Islamic concept of ethics is the only one in the repository of human culture which is built-in and integral in its own central teaching and worldview. Consider the concept of *akhlaq* in Islam how built-in and integral it is. *Akhlaq* (moral character) would not be conceivable without its relationship with *al-Khaliq* (the Creator) and *al-makhlūq* (creature).<sup>23</sup> This is the balance that, if observed consequently, will ensure the equilibrium in the development of individuals and society as a whole.

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<sup>22</sup> See Frank Visser. “Perennialism, Postmodernism, Integralism.” (June 2004).

<sup>23</sup> See further S.M.N. Al-Atas. *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC).