

ISLAM
KNOWLEDGE AND CIVILIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

This book is an outcome of efforts made to consolidate the main topics covered in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) university required course entitled 'Islam, Knowledge and Civilisation' (UNGS 2040). It is by no means exhaustive and has been written basically to acquaint the undergraduate students, majoring in different disciplines with the meaning, objectives, importance and necessity of learning the theme of knowledge and civilisation from the Western and Islamic perspectives.

The first chapter contributed by Bachir Soualhi deals with the definitions, and fundamental issues of knowledge, both from the Western and Islamic perspectives. How are these issues to be responded? How is knowledge to be searched? Is knowledge created? What is the purpose and importance of knowledge? These are only a few questions among others that the chapter answers succinctly and effectively. It has further dealt with concept, classification and sources of knowledge. There is also a brief description about *ijtihad*, an instrument of knowledge and creativity in Islam.

The second chapter authored by Munawar Haque attempts to clarify the theory and practice of research methodology from the Western and Islamic perspectives. It argues that the Western and Islamic approaches to methodology stem from their own particular worldviews. It highlights the pros and cons of both methodologies, and makes an effort to show that the Islamic methodology is more holistic in as much as it tries to understand the underlying reality through an integrative process of synthesis of revelation and reason. The paper also discusses the problems of the Muslim researcher and makes a few recommendations of overcoming those problems.

Kabuye Uthman Sulaiman in the third chapter discusses the emergence and distinctive characteristics of the Islamic civilisation. He begins with an overview of the Islamic conception of man. This, he argues, is vitally important because man alone is responsible for the rise and fall of civilisations; he alone among all other creatures on

earth and in the heavens, has the ability to form a civilisation; and also because different civilisations are founded upon different philosophical and religious conceptions of man. Thus, to understand a particular civilisation one needs to understand the conception of man upon which it is founded. One of the greatest civilisations in the human history is the Islamic civilisation. How did this civilisation emerge? What are its distinctive characteristics? What are the bases of its foundation? What are its aims and what does it want to achieve? These are the cardinal issues which this chapter addresses in a very vivid manner.

In the fourth chapter Munawar Haque touches briefly upon the contributions made by Muslim scholars to the sciences. It was basically from the eighth to the thirteenth century of the Common Era that humanity witnessed the flowering of the Islamic civilisation, especially in terms of the unsurpassed intellectual endeavour made by Muslims. The Qur'ān has repeatedly urged the Muslims to mediate over the creation of the universe, and to study how the heavens and earth have been made subservient to man. Therefore, there has never been a conflict between faith and reason in Islam, as in other faiths. Thus it is that the Muslims began very early an ever-progressive and serious study of the sciences. They did not merely attain political and intellectual supremacy and found extensive empires, but also surpassed all other nations in the field of knowledge. A very brief sketch of only a few of the Muslim scientists, thinkers and scholars among a whole galaxy of them has been made in this study by way of illustration, with a view to instil inspiration in readers and spur them to revitalise their efforts in strengthening the *Ummah*.

The fifth chapter also written by Munawar Haque traces the origin, basis and features of the Western civilisation. The Western civilisation originated in Ancient Greece, which was followed by pagans, and then Christian Rome. It is based on the Greek thought and worldview, which is inherently and purely rationalistic and polytheistic. Because of its own shortcomings, Christianity split up with the Reformation, and later the Church's attitude toward the spirit of enquiry led gradually but surely to the rise of secularism. As a reaction against the metaphysical philosophy of the Church, there

emerged into being a new and profoundly different major principle, according to which, only what we see, hear, smell and touch or otherwise perceive through our sensory organs is real and has value. Beyond such a sensory reality, either there is nothing, or, if there is something that we cannot sense, it is equivalent to unreal and non-existent and, therefore, it may be completely ignored. Any truth that cannot be verified such as moral or spiritual truth is “relative.” The basis of right and wrong becomes a function of individual opinion or group consensus, both of which are continually subject to change. This is in short the basis on which Western civilisation has been raised. What are some of the salient features of the Western civilisation and their negative and positive aspects? These are some of the issues dealt with in this chapter.

Syamsuddin Arif, the author of the sixth chapter explains the definition and meaning of ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ and indicates the subtle distinction between the two. Discussing the ancient culture and civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China, he argues that ancient, pre-Islamic civilisations flourished in North Africa and West as well as East Asia. Some of these early civilisations are still real foundations of contemporary civilisations, while some others now have little or no influence except on our imaginations and emotions when they are mentioned. The earliest known civilisations in history are believed to take place between 3500 and 500 BCE – that is, about 5500 years ago. Some very useful resources have been mentioned for further reading. A map of the sites of ancient civilisations is also furnished.

The Arabic terms in this study that do not normally have standard equivalent terms in the English language have been italicised, and their brief explanations have been provided either in the footnotes or in the text itself. Certain well-known words, proper names, and titles have been rendered in Westernised forms. No transliteration can express exactly the vocalic differences between two languages; nor can Roman characters give anything more than an approximate sound of the original Arabic words and phrases. To achieve the closest proximity to the original Arabic sounds, the book has followed the Library of Congress transliteration system. Dates are given for the

most part according to both the Muslim and Christian calendars, in that order, and separated by a stroke or slant.

In addition to the Bibliography, the initiated reader will find much food for thought and material for research in the works mentioned under the rubric 'Suggested Readings.' Teachers and students are most welcome to suggest improvements in the book that can be made in future editions *inshā'Allāh*.

May *Allāh*, *subhānahū wa ta'ālā* forgive me my lapses and make me consciously realise the enormity of the day when every soul will be individually summoned before Him to give an account of its sojourn on the earth. May peace and blessings of *Allāh* be upon His last Prophet Muḥammad, the paragon of virtues, and the only one worthy of being emulated unquestioningly.

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