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THE CHALLENGE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM MIND: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE DISCOURSE OF ṬĀHĀ JĀBIR AL-‘ALWĀNĪ

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Abstract: This paper explores Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī’s (1935–2016) intellectual discourse, which identifies the contemporary crisis of the Muslim *Ummah* as a fundamental epistemological and methodological disorder, a “crisis of mind and thought.” It aims to analyse his vision on restoring the unity of knowledge by harmonizing revelation (waḥy) with reason (‘aql) and empirical observation within a *Tawḥīdic* framework. The study employs an analytical and systematic approach to examine al-‘Alwānī’s multi-dimensional framework for intellectual reform. It investigates his six discourses, which serve as a conceptual foundation for epistemological reconstruction, and his development of a *Qur’ānic* methodology (Manhaj Qur’ānī). The research also analyzes his principles for critical engagement with four primary knowledge domains: the *Qur’ān*, the *Sunnah*, Islamic intellectual heritage (turāth), and Western intellectual heritage. The study reveals that al-‘Alwānī’s IOK project is an epistemological reform movement rather than a political or cultural slogan. Al-‘Alwānī advocates for a shift from atomistic, descriptive readings of sacred texts to thematic and purposive (maqāṣid-oriented) interpretations. He distinguishes between principled emulation (ittibā‘) and blind imitation (taqlīd), urging the revival of *ijtihād* to address modern challenges like bioethics and

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environmental degradation. His discourse emphasizes methodological autonomy, liberating the Muslim mind from intellectual dependency on Western secular paradigms while maintaining a selective, constructive dialogue with them. Ultimately, the Islamization of Knowledge acts as a training ground to cultivate a disciplined, ethically conscious intellect capable of contributing to global human welfare through a unified vision of truth and morality.

Keywords: Al-‘Alwānī, Islamization of Knowledge, *Qur’ānic* Methodology, *Maqāṣid*-Oriented Interpretations.

Introduction

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, a leading proponent of the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) project, stands among the most influential revivalist Muslim thinkers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Rooted in the revivalist school of thought, al-‘Alwānī articulated a comprehensive vision of Islām as an all-encompassing worldview, one that integrates clear understanding based on knowledge, ethics, culture, and civilization into a coherent and dynamic whole. For him, Islām was not merely a set of rituals or theological doctrines, but a living epistemological and civilizational framework capable of guiding spiritual, moral, intellectual, and material development in an integrated manner.

Al-‘Alwānī’s intellectual project emerged from a careful diagnosis of the crises afflicting both humanities at large and the contemporary Muslim *Ummah* in particular. Drawing upon the *Qur’ān*, the *Sunnah*, the *Sīrah* of the prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), and the rich legacy of Islamic and human intellectual history, he identified the fragmentation of knowledge, moral disorientation, and educational decay as central causes of civilizational decline. Unlike approaches that uncritically adopted Western secular paradigms or romanticized a stagnant imitation of the Muslim past, al-‘Alwānī sought to revive the authentic Islamic intellectual tradition while engaging constructively with contemporary realities. His sources of insight were firmly grounded in revelation and the accumulated wisdom of Islamic scholarship, yet his method reflected a keen awareness of modern intellectual challenges.

In contrast to modernist and secularist trends that advocate reconciliation with dominant Western epistemologies under the banners of “reconstruction,” “reassessment,” or “reinterpretation,” al-‘Alwānī advanced a fundamentally different paradigm. He argued that genuine reform requires what may be termed the “right kind of thinking in the right direction for the right purpose.” This intellectual orientation, in his view, could only be achieved through a comprehensive transformation of the educational system. Education, for al-‘Alwānī, was not

a neutral process of information transfer; it was the primary vehicle for shaping worldview, cultivating moral responsibility, and restoring the unity of knowledge under the sovereignty of *at-Tawḥīd* [the Oneness of Allah (ﷻ)]. Without an educational framework rooted in *Tawḥīdic* epistemology, spiritual and ethical values, he maintained, neither the reform of the Muslim *ummah* nor the broader renewal of humanity could be realized.

Al-‘Alwānī’s commitment to this vision was institutionally expressed through his close association with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), one of the most prominent intellectual platforms advocating the Islamization or integration of knowledge (IOK). Through his leadership and scholarly contributions, IIIT became a central forum for developing methodologies to harmonise revealed knowledge with the human sciences. For Al-‘Alwānī, the Islamization of Knowledge was not a rejection of modern disciplines, but a critical engagement with them, removing their assumptions, purposes, and ethical orientations within an Islamic worldview.

His engagement was not limited to theoretical discourse. Al-‘Alwānī actively supported institutions that embodied this integrated educational philosophy, including the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He regarded IIUM as a practical model of an educational system striving to combine spiritual depth, moral integrity, and academic excellence. By providing the foundation of Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) to the cultivation of acquired knowledge, such institutions reflected his conviction that meaningful reform must begin with the farming of intellectually grounded, ethically conscious, and socially responsible individuals.

This article examines al-‘Alwānī’s intellectual legacy within the broader discourse of Islamic revivalism and the Islamization of Knowledge movement. It explores his diagnosis of civilizational crisis, his epistemological foundations, and his educational prescriptions, arguing that his thought represents a systematic and principled attempt to restore the unity of knowledge and the moral purpose of education in the contemporary Muslim world.

Ṭāhā Jābir ‘Alwānī’s Diagnosis of Muslim Ills

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī approached the contemporary crises of the Muslim *Ummah* and of humanity at large with a deep awareness of their historical, intellectual, and civilizational dimensions. He did not interpret the challenges facing Muslims merely as political decline or economic underdevelopment; rather, he traced them to a profound epistemological imbalance that had reshaped Muslim consciousness over the past two centuries. In his analysis, the encounter with modern Western education and its underlying philosophical currents, such as

the Renaissance and Enlightenment legacies, empiricism, positivism, scientism, and secular rationalism, had fundamentally altered the intellectual orientation of Muslim societies.

Al-‘Alwānī argued that these intellectual movements, while contributing to scientific and technological advancement, were grounded in assumptions that separated knowledge from revelation, spirituality, and morality, fact from value, and reason from moral responsibility. As these paradigms were adopted often uncritically within Muslim educational institutions, they generated a dualistic mindset: one sphere governed by religious ritual and inherited tradition, and another shaped by secular methodologies and materialist assumptions. The result, in his view, was not genuine intellectual innovation but imitative and fragmented. The Muslim mind, he contended, had become reactive rather than creative, imitative rather than critical, and divided rather than integrated.¹

Central to al-‘Alwānī’s critique was the conviction that the prevailing educational systems in many Muslim societies had failed to cultivate what he termed “proper thinking.” By this, he did not mean mere technical reasoning or procedural rationality, but a holistic mode of thought rooted in the reality and truthfulness of *Tawhīd*, moral consciousness, and civilizational responsibility. He maintained that the *Qur’ān* itself offers a comprehensive methodology of thinking, encouraging reflection (*tafakkur*), deep understanding (*tadabbur*), critical discernment (*furqān*), and the pursuit of wisdom (*ḥikmah*). The *Qur’ānic* discourse repeatedly calls upon humanity to observe, compare, analyse, and draw lessons from history and nature, thereby nurturing an energetic, dynamic, and ethically grounded intellect.

However, al-‘Alwānī observed that the *Tawhīdic* epistemology had not been systematically integrated into contemporary curricula. While the *Qur’ān* might be memorized or recited, its methodological guidance for structuring thought and knowledge production remained largely absent from educational practice and epistemological exercise. Consequently, generations of Muslims were educated either within traditional frameworks disconnected from contemporary realities or within secular frameworks detached from revelation, spirituality, and morality.² In both cases, the unity of knowledge, a hallmark of classical Islamic civilization was disrupted.

As a strategic response, al-‘Alwānī proposed a twofold process. The first step was the intellectual liberation of the Muslim mind from uncritical subservience to dominant Western paradigms. This did not entail isolationism or rejection of modern knowledge, but rather a

¹ Al-‘Alwānī, *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), p.28.

² Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Maqasid al-Qur’an: A Methodology for Approaching The Qur’an*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), p.13.

critical re-examination of its philosophical underpinnings. Liberation, in his conception, meant freeing Muslim intellectual inquiry from epistemological dependency and restoring confidence in the Islamic worldview as a viable and universal framework.

The second and more constructive step involved the rightful training and proper orientation of the Muslim mind through an educational system grounded in the *Qur’ānic* methodology. Such training would cultivate balanced reasoning, ethical sensitivity, and civilizational awareness. It would integrate revelation and reason, spiritual values and empirical inquiry, and individual development with collective responsibility. For al-‘Alwānī, only through this comprehensive intellectual reform could the Muslim *Ummah* overcome its crisis of identity and contribute meaningfully to global civilization.³

This emphasis on epistemological reform underscores al-‘Alwānī’s broader intellectual project: the renewal of Islamic thought through the proper construction of its methodological foundations. By centring education as the primary arena of transformation, he located the path to revival not in rhetoric or reaction, but in the disciplined cultivation of minds capable of thinking critically, faithfully, and creatively within the framework of divine guidance.

Proper Training of the Muslim Mind for Sound Thinking

Debates surrounding the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) movement have often generated significant misunderstanding, both within and outside Muslim intellectual circles. In some quarters, according to Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, IOK has been interpreted as a strategic instrument of Islamic revivalism, an attempt to reshape culture, academia, and the world of ideas to consolidate political power. According to this reading, al-‘Alwānī argued, the project was viewed less as a scholarly enterprise and more as an ideological program designed to advance a particular political agenda. Such interpretations, however, obscure the epistemological depth and methodological sophistication that thinkers such as Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī consistently emphasized.

Al-‘Alwānī firmly rejected the reduction of IOK to a political movement. For him, the Islamization of Knowledge was not about capturing the state, monopolizing academic authority, or subordinating intellectual inquiry to partisan interests. Rather, it was a response to a profound epistemic crisis that had fragmented knowledge, severed the relationship between revelation and reason, and eroded the moral foundations of scholarship. The movement sought to address methodological orientation in a proper way, not to impose ideological uniformity. Its primary arena

3 Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *The Qur’ān and the Sunnah: The Time-Space Factor*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005), p.23.

was not the corridors of political power, but the classrooms, research institutions, and intellectual frameworks through which knowledge is produced and transmitted.⁴

At the same time, critics influenced by contemporary Western academic paradigms often regarded IOK with suspicion. Convinced of the neutrality, objectivity, and universal applicability of modern Western knowledge systems, they interpreted IOK as an expression of intellectual defensiveness or even as a denial of the “other.” From this perspective, the very act of subjecting modern disciplines to critical evaluation from within an Islamic worldview appeared as an attempt to retreat into exclusivism. Al-‘Alwānī, however, challenged the assumption that modern knowledge is philosophically neutral. He argued that every knowledge tradition operates within a worldview shaped by metaphysical, ethical, and anthropological presuppositions. Therefore, critically engaging modern disciplines from within the Islamic intellectual tradition was not an act of rejection, but of intellectual responsibility.

For al-‘Alwānī, Islamization did not imply the dismissal of empirical sciences or the wholesale rejection of Western intellectual contributions. Rather, it involved properly examining the philosophical foundations, aims, and ethical implications of various fields of knowledge. He maintained that disciplines such as the social sciences and humanities are particularly shaped by value-laden assumptions about human nature, society, and progress. Without critical scrutiny, the uncritical importation of these assumptions into Muslim societies would perpetuate epistemological dependency and civilizational imbalance. Thus, IOK sought to benefit from the beneficial insights of contemporary scholarship while orienting them within a framework rooted in *Tawḥīd* and moral accountability.

Some observers, said al-‘Alwānī, further perceived IOK as an attempt by Islamists to dominate state and society by bringing all domains, including secular knowledge, under religious control.⁵ Such a characterization, however, overlooks the ethical and methodological core of the project. In articulating his vision, al-‘Alwānī often echoed broader Islamic intellectual principles, including those articulated by Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attās, who defined education through the concept of *adab*. For al-Attās, *adab* signifies the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of things within a coherent order of existence, culminating in justice.⁶ In this sense, Islamization is not about control, but about restoring balance, placing revelation, reason, empirical inquiry, and ethical values in their appropriate relationships.

⁴ Al-Faruqī, I. R., *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*, (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982), p.13.

⁵ Al- ‘Alwānī, T. J., *Islāmization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989), p.12.

⁶ Al-Attās, S. M. N., *The Concept of Education in Islām: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1980), p.18.

Al-‘Alwānī similarly understood IOK as a project of intellectual authentic ordering. It aimed to overcome the dualism that separated religious and secular sciences, sacred and profane knowledge, and moral values from academic disciplines. By restoring the unity of knowledge under the sovereignty of divine guidance, IOK sought to cultivate scholars capable of integrating rigorous academic inquiry with ethical consciousness and spiritual awareness. Justice, in this framework, is not merely a political ideal but an epistemological one: knowledge must be situated within its proper metaphysical and moral context.

Moreover, al-‘Alwānī consistently emphasized that the success of IOK depended on methodological rigour, scholarly excellence, and openness to dialogue. He envisioned collaboration across disciplines and civilizations, provided that engagement was grounded in intellectual integrity and critical awareness. Far from denying the “other,” the project encouraged constructive interaction, while resisting epistemological subordination.⁷

It is remarked that reducing the Islamization of Knowledge to a political strategy reflects a misunderstanding of its fundamental objectives. As articulated by Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, IOK represents a comprehensive epistemological and methodological reform movement. Its goal is neither domination nor exclusion, but the restoration of intellectual justice, an ordering of knowledge that harmonizes revelation and reason, integrates ethics with scholarship, and establishes properly the moral purpose of education within the broader project of civilizational renewal.⁸

IOK: An Epistemological and Methodological Movement

For Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) was never conceived as a slogan, nor as a reactive ideological posture. Rather, he consistently articulated it as a comprehensive epistemological and methodological reform movement whose primary objective was the rightful constitution of the Muslim mind. In his analysis, the crisis of the Muslim *Ummah* was fundamentally a crisis of mind and thought (*azmat al-fikr*), a disorder in the processes by which knowledge is acquired, evaluated, and applied. Consequently, any meaningful revival had to begin not with political restructuring or institutional expansion, but with intellectual and genuine construction.⁹

Al-‘Alwānī argued that IOK aims to cultivate the capacity to think for the right purpose, to orient intellectual activity toward the right direction, and ultimately to serve the right ends.

⁷ *Maqāṣid al-Qur’ān: A Methodology for Approaching the Qur’ān*, p.43.

⁸ *Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, p.5.

⁹ Al-Faruqi, I. R., *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982), p.12.

These “right” orientations, in his framework, are defined by the ethical and metaphysical foundations of the Islamic worldview above all, *Tawhīd*, accountability, justice, and human vicegerency. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be value-neutral; it must be anchored in a moral vision that directs human action toward the common good. Reforming the Muslim mind meant restoring this teleological consciousness to intellectual life.

He maintained that Muslim societies suffer from a dual crisis. On the one hand, there is an internal crisis of knowledge characterized by stagnation, imitation (*taqlīd*), and the separation of revealed and acquired sciences. On the other hand, there is an external global crisis of thought, visible in moral relativism, ecological destruction, social inequality, and the instrumentalization of science and technology. Al-‘Alwānī believed that a correct but *Tawhīdic* epistemology could address both dimensions. By resolving its own crisis of knowledge and education, the Muslim *Ummah* would not only regain intellectual vitality but also contribute constructively to global civilization.¹⁰

In this sense, IOK was envisioned by him as an intellectual and cultural project with universal implications. It aspired to correct the processes of proper thinking within Muslim societies so that they could move beyond defensive postures and actively engage in shaping a more balanced and humane world order. Al-‘Alwānī rejected isolationism; instead, he called for confident participation in global intellectual discourse participation grounded in a clear methodological framework derived from revelation yet open to empirical realities.

Central to his methodological vision was the unity of revelation (*waḥy*), reason (*‘aql*), and empirical observation. He firmly opposed both uncritical rationalism and anti-intellectual literalism. The *Qur’ān*, in his reading, repeatedly calls upon human beings to reflect, observe, analyse, and draw conclusions from the natural and social worlds. Thus, reason and the senses are not antagonists of correct understanding of (faith); they are divinely endowed faculties meant to operate within the moral and metaphysical guidance of revelation. When disciplined by the *Qur’ānic* principles, rational inquiry becomes a means of uncovering signs (*āyāt*) in creation and history.

Al-‘Alwānī further emphasized that methodological reform requires practical engagement and experiential learning. Knowledge must not remain abstract or speculative; it must interact with lived realities. Empirical investigation, historical analysis, and social research are indispensable tools in understanding contemporary challenges.¹¹ However, these tools must be guided by an overarching ethical framework to prevent their misuse or reduction

¹⁰ *Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, p.8.

¹¹ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, pp.46-48.

to purely material ends. In this integration of revelation, rationality, and empirical experience, he saw the revival of the dynamic spirit that once characterized Islamic civilization.

Moreover, he called for the development of a new generation of scholars trained in both the Islamic intellectual tradition and contemporary disciplines. Such scholars would possess methodological competence, critical awareness, and moral commitment. They would be capable of examining properly inherited juristic and theological formulations in the light of present realities without severing their connection to foundational sources. For al-‘Alwānī, methodological renewal (*tajdīd al-manhaj*) was inseparable from civilizational renewal.¹²

Thus, IOK, as conceived by al-‘Alwānī, represents a disciplined effort to restore coherence to the structure of knowledge, purpose to intellectual activity, and justice to human civilization. It seeks to reform the Muslim mind not for self-enclosure or domination, but for responsible participation in addressing the shared crises of humanity. By harmonizing revelation, reason, and empirical inquiry, the movement aspires to cultivate balanced thinkers who can navigate complexity with intellectual rigor, ethical clarity, and spiritual consciousness.

Undertaking IOK: The Six Discourses – Conceptual Framework

For Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, the foundational objective of the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) project was the establishment of a *Tawhīdic*-based epistemological and methodological unity between revelation (*waḥy*) and the real-existential order (*al-wāqī‘*). He perceived one of the defining features of modernity to be the estrangement between values and knowledge, between facts and meaning, and between technical expertise and moral responsibility. Modern epistemology, shaped by secular and positivist assumptions, had progressively marginalized metaphysical and ethical considerations, reducing knowledge to what is measurable, observable, and materially verifiable. This fragmentation, in his view, not only impoverished intellectual inquiry but also generated profound moral and civilizational crises.

Al-‘Alwānī’s response was neither a retreat into fideism nor an uncritical embrace of modern scientific rationality. Rather, he proposed a comprehensive epistemological reconstruction rooted in *Tawhīdic*, the affirmation of the Oneness of Allah (ﷻ) as the ultimate source of truth, coherence, and purpose.¹³ *Tawhīd*, for him, was not merely a theological doctrine but an organizing principle of knowledge and truth and reality of this world. It establishes unity between the Creator and creation, between revelation and reason, and between

¹² Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., “The Islamization of Methodology of Behavioural Sciences.” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, (1988):43.

¹³ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.23.

spiritual and material dimensions of existence. Through this unifying vision, he sought to overcome the artificial dichotomies that had come to dominate contemporary thought. To operationalize this objective, al-‘Alwānī elaborated a series of interconnected discourses which, if systematically developed and applied, could address the crisis of the *Ummah* and contribute to the broader renewal of humanity.

1. Articulating the *Tawhīdīc* Episteme

Al-‘Alwānī called for the clear articulation of an Islamic paradigm of knowledge grounded in *Tawhīd*. This paradigm recognizes revelation as a primary and authoritative source of knowledge while affirming the validity of reason and empirical inquiry within its ethical and metaphysical framework. The *Tawhīdīc* episteme affirms the unity of truth and rejects epistemological dualism. Knowledge derived from nature, society, and history must ultimately be harmonized with the guidance of revelation. In this framework, intellectual activity is an act of worship and a form of fulfilling humanity’s vicegerency (*khilāfah*) on earth.¹⁴

2. Faith as the Epistemological Foundation of Understanding

For al-‘Alwānī, true and correct understanding (*faith-īmān*) is not a private sentiment detached from intellectual life; it functions as a foundational epistemic orientation. Correct understanding of (*faith*) shapes perception, interpretation, and evaluation. He argued that the articles of (*faith belief in God*), revelation, prophethood, the Hereafter, and moral accountability provide the ontological and teleological premises upon which coherent knowledge production depends. When true understanding (*faith*) is conceptually activated, it informs methodological choices, research priorities, and normative judgments.¹⁵

3. Faith as the Basis of Worldview and Methodology

Al-‘Alwānī insisted that a true worldview precedes methodology. Every correct and truthful intellectual system operates based on True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge (TAUK), generally known as Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) about reality and purpose. In the Islamic framework, true understanding (*faith*) determines the worldview that, in turn, shapes methodology and intellectual production. This does not negate critical reasoning; rather, it

¹⁴ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), p.25.

¹⁵ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989), p.15.

provides the moral and metaphysical compass that directs it. Thus, scholarship becomes purposeful, oriented toward justice (‘adl), human dignity, and social balance, rather than toward mere utility or domination.

4. Reconstructing Knowledge through the Unseen and Moral Order

A crucial dimension of al-‘Alwānī’s project was the proper construction of contemporary disciplines in the light of the Islamic understanding of the unseen (al-ghayb), creation, divine purpose, and moral order. Modern knowledge systems often exclude metaphysical realities from their explanatory models, confining themselves to material causality. Al-‘Alwānī argued that such exclusion distorts the human understanding of existence. An Islamic reconstruction of knowledge would integrate properly the metaphysical awareness with empirical analysis; integration ensures that scientific and social inquiry remain ethically accountable.¹⁶

5. Critical Engagement with Historical Islamic Thought

Al-‘Alwānī also emphasized the need for critical engagement with the Islamic intellectual heritage. He rejected both uncritical glorification of the past and wholesale dismissal of it. Historical Islamic paradigms must be examined in the light of their civilizational achievements and limitations. Such engagement enables contemporary scholars to distinguish between enduring principles and context-bound formulations. By reassessing the juristic, theological, and philosophical legacies of earlier scholars, the *Ummah* can recover methodological strengths while avoiding stagnation and rigid imitation (taqlīd).

6. Integrating Revelation with Lived Reality (al-Wāqī‘)

Underlying all these discourses is the methodological imperative to relate revelation dynamically to contemporary reality. Al-‘Alwānī maintained that authentic understanding of the Qur’ān requires awareness of context, circumstance, and human experience. Conversely, accurate reading of reality demands guidance from revelation. This reciprocal relationship prevents both textual literalisms divorced from context and empiricism detached from moral guidance. Through this integration, knowledge becomes both principled and practical.¹⁷

Collectively, these discourses constitute a comprehensive program for epistemological renewal. Al-‘Alwānī envisioned a scholarly community capable of unifying revelation, rational

¹⁶ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.29.

¹⁷ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), p.32.

analysis, and empirical observation within a coherent *Tawhīdīc* framework. By restoring the unity of knowledge and connecting values with intellectual inquiry, he understood that the Muslim *Ummah* could overcome its internal fragmentation and offer constructive contributions to addressing global challenges.

Thus, the foundational objective of al-‘Alwānī’s thought is not merely theoretical coherence, but civilizational revival. Through a *Tawhīdīc*-based epistemology of *Wahy* and *al-Wāqī‘*, he sought to cultivate an intellectually rigorous, ethically grounded, and socially responsible mode of knowledge production, one capable of bridging the divide between true understanding (faith) and reason, tradition and rational understanding, and values and contemporary knowledge systems.

Toward a *Qur’ānic* Methodology (Manhaj Qur’ānī)

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī consistently maintained that no genuine revival of Islamic thought could occur without the development of a coherent and systematic *Qur’ānic* methodology. In his view, the *Qur’ān* is not merely a source of spiritual guidance or legal injunctions; it is also a source of methodological direction. Without extracting and operationalizing its epistemological principles, Muslim intellectual activity would remain fragmented, reactive, and derivative. He asserted that the absence of a *Qur’ānic* methodological framework has been one of the central causes of intellectual stagnation within the *Ummah*. Only by developing such a methodology, he argued, can Muslims produce thought that is authentic in its sources, rigorous in its method, and universal in its relevance, finally, beneficial not only for the *Ummah* but for humanity.

Reconstructing the Muslim Intellectual Method through *Tawhīdīc* Epistemology

Al-‘Alwānī called for a comprehensive and proper construction of the Muslim intellectual method based on *Tawhīdīc* (integrative) epistemology that harmonizes revelation (*wahy*), reason (‘*aql*), and empirical observation. He criticized both traditionalist tendencies that confined scholarship to inherited formulations and modernist approaches that subordinated revelation to secular rationality. For him, *Tawhīdīc* (integrative) epistemology meant restoring the organic unity between the revealed and the acquired sciences. Knowledge should not be divided into “religious” and “secular” compartments; rather, all disciplines must operate within the overarching spiritual, moral and metaphysical vision of *Tawhīdīc*.¹⁸ Such construction requires proper thinking curricula, research methodologies, and the criteria of academic evaluation so that they reflect epistemic coherence rather than dualism.

¹⁸ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Source Methodology in Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, n.d.), p.4.

Engagement with *Qur’ānic Sunan* of Natural and Social Realities

A central component of al- ‘Alwānī’s *Qur’ānic* methodology is the concept of *Sunan*, the divinely established patterns and laws that govern both natural phenomena and social processes. He argued that the *Qur’ān* repeatedly directs its followers to observe historical cycles, societal transformations, and natural regularities as manifestations of these *Sunan*. Engaging with the *Qur’ānic Sunan* means studying the world empirically while recognizing its moral structure and divine governance.¹⁹ Social sciences, in particular, must identify the ethical and spiritual dimensions embedded in social laws rather than reducing them to purely material determinants. This engagement fosters a dynamic and action-oriented understanding of reality, encouraging Muslims to analyse causes of decline and factors of renewal within a principled framework.

Recognition of Pre-Methodological Factors

Al- ‘Alwānī also emphasized the importance of acknowledging pre-methodological factors that influence intellectual production, including culture, language, historical experience, and psychological dispositions. No scholar approaches knowledge from a vacuum; interpretation is shaped by inherited categories and social conditioning. Therefore, reforming methodology requires critical awareness of these underlying influences. By recognizing cultural biases, linguistic limitations, and psychological tendencies, scholars can purify their analytical tools and avoid reproducing distortions unconsciously. This reflexive awareness is itself part of the *Qur’ānic* guidance, which calls for self-examination and sincerity in the pursuit of Truth.

Establishment of Methodological Tools Aligned with *Tawḥīd*

For al-‘Alwānī, a *Qur’ānic* methodology must be equipped with precise tools aligned with the principle of *Tawḥīd*. These tools include contextual analysis of revelation, thematic interpretation of the *Qur’ān*, *Maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning (attention to higher objectives), and systematic engagement with contemporary realities. *Tawḥīd* serves as the unifying axis that ensures coherence between metaphysics, ethics, and empirical inquiry. Methodological tools divorced from *Tawḥīd* risk becoming technocratic instruments lacking moral direction. Conversely, tools grounded in *Tawḥīd* unify ethical accountability into every stage of research.

¹⁹ Othman, N. F., & Syed Hassan, S. N. S., “Integration of Knowledge from the Perspective of Ṭāhā Jābir Al-‘Alwānī,” *Al-Qiyām: International Social Science and Humanities Journal*, 3(4), (2020): 34.

Enabling *Ijtihād*, Intellectual Creativity, and Epistemic Coherence

Ultimately, al-‘Alwānī viewed the development of a *Qur’ānic* methodology as a precondition for revitalizing *ijtihād* independent and disciplined intellectual reasoning. Without methodological clarity, calls for *ijtihād* remain rhetorical. A reconstructed method empowers scholars to address unprecedented contemporary challenges pertaining to bioethics, economics, governance, and environmental degradation while remaining faithful to foundational sources. In this framework, intellectual creativity is not innovation detached from tradition, but renewal rooted in principled engagement.²⁰ The result is epistemic coherence: a state in which true understanding (beliefs), methods, and applications operate harmoniously within a unified worldview.

In short, al-‘Alwānī’s emphasis on the *Qur’ānic* methodology reflects his broader conviction that the crisis of the *Ummah* is fundamentally methodological rather than merely political or institutional. By constructing properly, the Muslim intellectual method through *Tawhīdic* (integrative) epistemology, engaging the *Qur’ānic Sunan*, recognizing pre-methodological influences, establishing *Tawhīdic*-aligned tools, and revitalizing *ijtihād*, he envisioned the emergence of a disciplined yet dynamic intellectual culture. Such a culture would be capable of generating authentic knowledge, addressing contemporary realities with confidence, and contributing meaningfully to the moral and intellectual advancement of humanity.

Methodology for Engaging the *Qur’ān* as a Source of Knowledge

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī repeatedly underscored that any meaningful reform of Muslim thought must begin with a renewed and methodologically sound understanding of the *Qur’ān* as the source of knowledge. For him, the *Qur’ān* is not only a sacred text to be recited and revered, but the primary source of true, authentic, and universal knowledge. It constitutes the epistemic foundation of Islamic civilization and the ultimate criterion (al-Furqān) by which ideas, methods, and intellectual productions are evaluated. Without centring the *Qur’ān* as the living source of guidance for intellectual and civilizational activity, al-‘Alwānī argued, efforts at renewal would remain superficial. To achieve this centralized position of the *Qur’ān*, he elaborated and suggested several interrelated principles aimed at transforming the way the *Qur’ān* is approached, interpreted, and applied.

1. *Transition from Lexical-Descriptive Tafsīr to Methodological Interpretation*

Al-‘Alwānī observed that much of classical *tafsīr* literature, while immensely valuable, often focused on lexical clarification, grammatical analysis, and narrational reports. Although these

²⁰ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.40.

dimensions are indispensable, he argued that they are insufficient for addressing contemporary intellectual and civilizational challenges. What is required is a transition from a primarily descriptive and atomistic reading of the *Qur’ān* toward a methodological and thematic engagement.

Methodological interpretation seeks to uncover the *Qur’ān*’s overarching conceptual frameworks, ethical objectives, and civilizational vision. It emphasizes coherence (*naẓm*), thematic unity, and the interrelationship between *āyāt* (verses) and chapters. Such an approach moves beyond isolated rulings to grasp the *Qur’ān*’s integrated worldview, its vision of humanity, society, knowledge, justice, and history. For al-‘Alwānī, this shift is essential if the *Qur’ān* is to function as a dynamic guide for reform rather than merely as a repository of textual details.²¹

2. *Affirmation of the Qur’ān’s Universality, Absoluteness, and Epistemic Sovereignty*

Al-‘Alwānī strongly affirmed the universality (*‘ālamīyyah*) and absoluteness of the *Qur’ān* as divine revelation. He argued that its guidance transcends time, geography, and culture, addressing the fundamental dimensions of human existence. While its initial revelation occurred within a specific historical context, its message is not confined to that context. Its epistemic sovereignty means that it stands as the highest authority in matters of truth, value, and purpose.²²

This affirmation challenges the modern tendency to relativize revelation or subordinate it to prevailing intellectual paradigms. For al-‘Alwānī, the *Qur’ān* does not merely coexist with other knowledge systems; it provides the foundational criteria by which they are assessed and integrated. Epistemic sovereignty does not negate reason or empirical inquiry but situates them within a divinely guided framework. In this sense, the *Qur’ān* functions as the originating source and ultimate reference point for constructing a coherent knowledge system.

3. *Liberation from Excessive Contextual Confinement*

While acknowledging the importance of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) and historical reports, al-‘Alwānī warned against excessive contextual confinement that restricts the *Qur’ān*’s universal applicability. He noted that overreliance on particular historical circumstances can reduce *āyāt* (verses) to narrowly defined incidents, thereby limiting their normative and methodological significance. Similarly, uncritical incorporation of *isrā’īliyyāt* (extra-Qur’ānic narratives of dubious origin) may obscure the *Qur’ān*’s conceptual clarity.²³

²¹ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Al-Wahdah al-Binā’iyyah li al-Qur’ān al-Majīd (The Structural Unity of the Glorious Qur’an)* (1st ed.), (Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Dawliyyah, 2006), p.23.

²² *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.45.

²³ *Ibid*, 47.

Al-‘Alwānī called for a balanced approach: historical context should illuminate meaning, not confine it. The aim is to extract universal principles and methodological insights that transcend their initial circumstances. By liberating interpretation from undue dependence on secondary reports, scholars can recover the *Qur’ān*’s direct and transformative engagement with contemporary realities.

4. *The Qur’ān as the Primary Source of Ethical and Scientific Inquiry*

Perhaps most significantly, al-‘Alwānī envisioned the *Qur’ān* as the primary originating source for both ethical and scientific inquiry. He did not suggest that the *Qur’ān* provides detailed empirical data or technical formulas; rather, it establishes the ontological truth, ethical parameters, and teleological purposes that guide inquiry. The *Qur’ān* shapes how questions are framed, what objectives are pursued, and how knowledge is produced and applied.

In ethical inquiry, the *Qur’ān* offers foundational concepts such as justice (‘adl), mercy (rahmah), trust (amānah), and vicegerency (khilāfah), which must inform social and political structures. In scientific inquiry, it encourages observation of nature, reflection on causality, and recognition of divine patterns (sunan), while maintaining moral accountability. Thus, revelation inspires exploration rather than hindering it, provided that exploration remains aligned with higher objectives.

5. *Toward a Qur’ānic Epistemic Renewal*

Through these principles, al-‘Alwānī sought to restore the *Qur’ān* to its rightful position at the centre of intellectual life. A proper understanding of the *Qur’ān* is not merely devotional; it is methodological and civilizational. By transitioning to a methodological interpretation, affirming its universality and sovereignty, freeing it from excessive contextual restriction, and positioning it as the originating source of inquiry, al-‘Alwānī aimed to cultivate a generation of scholars capable of deriving coherent, relevant, and transformative knowledge.

In his broader project of epistemological renewal, the *Qur’ān* functions as both foundation and compass. It grounds intellectual activity in transcendent truth while directing it toward ethical and practical engagement with the world. Through this *Qur’ānic* orientation, al-‘Alwānī understood that the Muslim *Ummah* could overcome its intellectual fragmentation and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of a morally grounded and intellectually balanced global civilization.²⁴

²⁴ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., “Toward an Islamic Alternative in Thought and Knowledge,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 11, (1989):7.

Methodology for Engaging the *Sunnah*

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī argues that one of the most pressing methodological concerns in contemporary Islamic Thought is the development of a sound and coherent methodology for engaging with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ). He regarded the *Sunnah* not merely as a secondary textual source, but as a dynamic, living embodiment of the *Qur’ānic* guidance that requires methodological renewal in order to respond effectively to modern intellectual and civilizational challenges.²⁵ So, he strongly emphasized the need, importance, and urgency of reconstructing the methodology of dealing with the *Sunnah*, outlining several interrelated principles:

1. *The Sunnah as Applied Revelation and Method*

Al-‘Alwānī viewed the *Sunnah* as applied revelation (wahy muṭabbaq) that is, the practical implementation of the *Qur’ān* in historical reality. From his perspective, the Prophet’s life represents a methodological model for translating divine principles into social, political, legal, and ethical structures. Thus, the *Sunnah* should not be reduced to isolated reports or fragmented legal precedents. Rather, it must be approached as a coherent methodological framework that demonstrates how the *Qur’ānic* values such as justice, mercy, consultation, balance, and human dignity were operationalized in real contexts. This understanding elevates the *Sunnah* from a collection of rulings to a paradigm for civilizational reform.

2. *Ittibā’ and Taqlīd: A Methodological Distinction*

A central concern for Al-‘Alwānī was clarifying the difference between *ittibā’* (conscious, principled emulation) and *taqlīd* (uncritical imitation). *Ittibā’* involves understanding the objectives, reasoning, and higher purposes behind the prophet’s actions and applying them thoughtfully in new circumstances. *Taqlīd*, by contrast, entails mechanical replication without regard to context, purpose, or changing conditions. Al-‘Alwānī argued that true adherence to the *Sunnah* requires intellectual engagement and methodological awareness. Blind imitation may preserve outward forms, but it risks obscuring the transformative spirit of the prophetic model. Authentic fidelity to the *Sunnah*, therefore, demands renewal (tajdīd) grounded in deep understanding rather than literalism.²⁶

3. *Contextual and Purposive Reading of the prophetic Practice*

Al-‘Alwānī stressed the necessity of situating the prophetic actions and statements within their historical, social, and political contexts. Not every prophetic action, he maintained, carries the

²⁵ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.41.

²⁶ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Reviving the Balance: The Authority of the Qur’ān and the Status of the Sunnah*, (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017), p.91.

same normative weight. Some actions were specific to particular circumstances; others expressed universal principles.²⁷ He advocated a *maqāṣid-oriented* (purposive) reading of the *sunnah*, identifying the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) behind legal rulings and the prophetic decisions. This approach ensures that the ethical and universal aims of Islam, such as justice, public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and removal of harm, remain central when deriving guidance for contemporary societies.²⁸ In this regard, al-‘Alwānī called for renewed scholarship that integrates hadith studies with jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*, rather than treating them as isolated disciplines.

4. *Systematizing the sunnah within a Methodological Framework*

Another major concern for al-‘Alwānī was the fragmentation of Islamic scholarship. He argued that the *Sunnah* must be systematized within a unified epistemological and methodological framework rooted in the *Qur’ān*. This involves: (1) Harmonizing the *Qur’ān* and *sunnah* through thematic and holistic interpretation. (2) Proper examining classifications of *hadīth* in light of contemporary methodological needs. (3) Integrating rational inquiry and revelation rather than opposing them. (4) Moving from atomistic legalism toward a coherent civilizational vision.²⁹ For al-‘Alwānī, methodological reform in dealing with the *sunnah* is inseparable from broader intellectual reform (*iṣlāḥ al-fikr al-islāmī*). The *Sunnah* should function not only as a source of law but as a catalyst for ethical renewal, social reform, and civilizational engagement. In this sense, Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī’s contribution to the methodology of the *Sunnah* lies in his insistence on moving beyond literalism and uncritical imitation toward a principled, contextual, and purposive engagement with the prophetic guidance. By understanding the *Sunnah* as applied revelation, distinguishing conscious emulation from blind imitation, and integrating it within a comprehensive *maqāṣid-based* framework, al-‘Alwānī sought to restore the *Sunnah* to its dynamic role as a living guide for contemporary Muslim societies.

Re-Examining the Islamic Intellectual Heritage

Another vital domain requiring sustained and critical engagement in the intellectual training of Muslims is the vast corpus of Islamic intellectual heritage (*turāth*). This heritage, rich, diverse, and spanning centuries cannot be approached through imitation (*taqlīd*), romanticization, or uncritical reverence. Nor should it be dismissed wholesale in the name of modernity. Rather, it

²⁷ Ibid., p.93.

²⁸ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p.133.

²⁹ *Reviving the Balance: The Authority*, p.47.

demands a principled, analytical engagement that enables Muslims to benefit from it constructively and responsibly in addressing contemporary realities. In this regard, Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī provided an important methodological framework for approaching Islamic intellectual heritage. As a leading thinker associated with contemporary Islamic reform and revivalism and a former president of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, he emphasized that renewal (*tajdīd*) requires neither rupture from the past nor blind continuity with it, but a disciplined and critical but genuine engagement. Al-‘Alwānī highlighted several key principles for a sound and productive engagement with Islamic intellectual heritage:

1. *Analytical Engagement Beyond Total Rejection or Total Acceptance*

Al-‘Alwānī rejected three simplistic approaches to heritage: (1) total rejection, which dismisses the intellectual legacy as obsolete or irrelevant; (2) total acceptance, which treats the heritage as sacred and beyond critique; and (3) selective grafting, which extracts isolated rulings or concepts without understanding their epistemological and historical foundations. Instead, he called for analytical engagement rooted in intellectual rigour. This entails proper examination of the assumptions, contexts, methodologies, and objectives that shaped classical scholarship. Heritage must be studied as a dynamic intellectual endeavour, not as a fixed and infallible repository of answers.³⁰

2. *Heritage as Contextual Human Interpretation*

A central point in al-‘Alwānī’s thought is the distinction between revelation (*wahy*) and human interpretation in the form of *fiqh*, *kalām*, *tafsīr*, etc. While revelation is divine and absolute, the intellectual heritage represents historically situated human attempts to understand and apply that revelation. Recognizing this distinction: (1) preserves the sanctity of the revelation; (2) frees scholars from sacralising past interpretations; and (3) encourages *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in new contexts. For al-‘Alwānī, the classical jurists and theologians were responding to the political, social, and epistemic conditions of their time. Their conclusions were often appropriate for their circumstances but are not automatically binding in radically different historical contexts.³¹

3. *Objectives and Methods over Solution Replication*

Al-‘Alwānī emphasized that the true value of Islamic heritage lies not primarily in its historical rulings, but in its methodological tools and higher objectives (*maqāṣid*). Instead of

³⁰ Ya‘qūbī, R., “Al-Muḥaddidāt al-Manhajīyyah li-Ta’sīs Fiqh al-Murāja‘āt ‘Inda Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī,” *Contemporary Islamic Thought*, 31 (109), (2025): 64.

³¹ *Reviving the Balance: The Authority*, 111.

mechanically replicating historical solutions, contemporary scholars must: (1) analyze the objectives (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) that guided earlier jurists; (2) study the reasoning processes and legal methodologies they employed; and (3) Reconstruct principles rather than reproduce conclusions.³² This shift from imitation of outcomes to understanding of processes enables creative, principled responses to modern challenges in governance, economics, ethics, science, and social life.

4. *Utilization of Heritage as a Resource for Contemporary Intellectual Renewal*

For al-‘Alwānī, heritage is neither a museum artefact nor a rigid legal code. It is an intellectual reservoir that can nourish renewal (*tajdīd*) if approached properly. When critically assessed, it offers: (1) conceptual frameworks; (2) ethical orientations; (3) methodological precedents; and (4) insights into civilizational development. The goal is not restorationism, but renewal grounded in authenticity. Heritage becomes a resource for intellectual revitalization supporting the genuine construction of Islamic thought in dialogue with contemporary knowledge systems and global realities.³³

5. *Integration of Revelation and Reason in Contemporary Context*

Al-‘Alwānī also stressed the need to reintegrate the *Qur’ānic* worldview into contemporary epistemology. He argued that fragmentation within Muslim intellectual life stemmed partly from a disconnect between Islamic revealed knowledge and other forms of knowledge. A critical engagement with heritage, therefore, must be coupled with a renewed *Qur’ānic* methodology that unifies ethical, rational, and empirical inquiry.

It is remarked that Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī’s approach calls for disciplined intellectual maturity: a posture that honours the past without idolizing it, critiques it without dismissing it, and draws from it without being imprisoned by it. Proper training of Muslims in “right thinking” thus requires cultivating analytical tools, historical awareness, and methodological competence so that Islamic intellectual heritage becomes a living source of renewal rather than a barrier to it.

Methodological Engagement with Western Intellectual Heritage

From the perspective of Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, engagement with modern Western intellectual heritage was neither an act of imitation nor rejection, but a deliberate, principled, and methodological undertaking. He saw himself as operating within a comprehensive *Qur’ānic*

³² Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., *Ijtihād* (Occasional Papers No. 4), (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), p.8.

³³ *Reviving the Balance: The Authority*, p.75.

paradigm that demanded intellectual openness combined with epistemic confidence. His approach may be expanded and articulated along the following lines:

1. *Critical Assessment of Western Epistemic Assumptions and Paradigms*

Al-‘Alwānī maintained that modern Western thought must be studied seriously and rigorously, not superficially or polemically. However, he insisted that its underlying epistemic premises, such as secular materialism, empiricism as the sole criterion of truth, and the fragmentation of knowledge, must be critically examined. He argued that many modern Western paradigms are rooted in specific historical and theological experiences, for example, the conflict between Church and state, which cannot be universalized as neutral or value-free models. Thus, Muslim scholars must distinguish between empirical achievements and the philosophical frameworks that interpret them. Critical engagement, in his view, required epistemological awareness, not passive consumption.³⁴

2. *Rejection of Positivistic Reductionism and Axiological Neutrality*

Al-‘Alwānī rejected the claim that knowledge can be value-neutral. He viewed positivism as a reductionist methodology that confines knowledge to measurable phenomena while excluding Islamic revelation, metaphysics, and moral reasoning. From his *Qur’ānic* perspective, knowledge (‘ilm) is inseparable from ethical responsibility (amānah). Any intellectual system that divorces facts from values ultimately produces moral disorientation. Therefore, he challenged the positivistic assumption that science and social sciences operate independently of worldview commitments. For him, every epistemology is embedded in a moral and metaphysical vision.³⁵

3. *Selective Engagement Guided by Tawḥīdic Epistemology*

Rather than adopting an isolationist stance, al-‘Alwānī advocated selective appropriation. He affirmed that beneficial insights, empirical findings, and methodological tools from the modern Western scholarship could and should be utilized provided they are examined properly through the lens of *Tawḥīd*. *Tawḥīdic* epistemology, grounded in revelation, reason, and empirical observation, serves as the criterion (furqān) for evaluation. Engagement, therefore, must be guided by clear methodological principles: (1) alignment with the *Qur’ānic* ontology and

³⁴ Al-‘Alwānī, T. J., “Some Remarks on the Islamic and the Secular Paradigms of Knowledge,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 12(4), (1995):540.

³⁵ Ibid., p.541.

anthropology; (2) preservation of moral purpose (maqāsid); (3) integration rather than fragmentation of disciplines; and (4) commitment to reform (*islāḥ*) rather than mere adaptation. This selective engagement was, for him, an act of intellectual confidence rooted in the Islamic revelation.

4. *Liberation from Intellectual Dependency through Methodological Autonomy*

Al-‘Alwānī was deeply concerned with intellectual dependency (tab‘iyyah fikriyyah), whereby the Muslim scholarship merely mirrors the modern Western categories, terminologies, and theoretical frameworks. He called for methodological autonomy, meaning the capacity to generate concepts, questions, and research agendas from within the Islamic worldview itself.³⁶ This autonomy does not imply intellectual isolation. Rather, it signifies freedom from epistemic subordination. The Muslim scholarship, in his view, must move from reactive critique to proactive contribution, offering integrative models capable of addressing contemporary human crises, ethical, social, and civilizational.

5. *Reintegrating Revelation and Reason*

A central pillar of his methodology was overcoming the false dichotomy between the Islamic revelation and reason. He argued that the *Qur’ān* calls for reflection (tafakkur), deliberation (tadabbur), and critical inquiry. Thus, the integration of transmitted knowledge (naql) and rational inquiry (‘aql) is not optional but foundational. Modern crises, he believed, stem partly from epistemic fragmentation. A reintegrated methodology would restore harmony between metaphysics, ethics, law, and social sciences.

6. *Civilizational Dialogue Rather than Civilizational Conflict*

Al-‘Alwānī viewed engagement with modern Western thought as part of a broader civilizational dialogue. He rejected both uncritical Westernization and reactionary isolationism. Instead, he advocated for constructive interaction that contributes to global knowledge while preserving Islamic identity. In this sense, studying the modern Western intellectual heritage was not a concession but a responsibility, necessary for reform and renewal (tajdīd) and for articulating Islām’s universal message in contemporary intellectual language relevant for humanity.

In short, from al-‘Alwānī’s perspective, engagement with the modern Western intellectual heritage must be critical yet open, principled yet confident, selective yet creative

³⁶ *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, 69.

and comprehensive. His project was ultimately one of epistemological reform seeking to restore the unity of knowledge under the guidance of the Islamic revelation while interacting meaningfully with the modern world.

IOK as Training of the Muslim Mind

Al-‘Alwānī regarded IOK as the proper training ground for cultivating an Islamic intellect capable of *ijtihād* (creativity guided by the Islamic revelation). He realized that many contemporary crises in Muslim societies stem not from a lack of information, but from methodological confusion. The Muslim mind, he argued, must be trained to: (1) think through the *Qur’ānic* worldview; (2) integrate revelation, reason, and empirical inquiry; (3) overcome dualisms between sacred and secular; and (4) restore coherence between knowledge and action. Thus, IOK was not about “Islamizing” textbooks superficially; it was about reforming the epistemic foundations and methodological structures upon which disciplines are constructed.

Beyond Unthinking Religiosity and Blind Modernism

Al-‘Alwānī stood firmly against two extremes: (1) unthinking religiosity, which reduces Islām to ritualism and inherited formulations without intellectual vitality; and (2) uncritical modernism, which absorbs Western paradigms without epistemic scrutiny. IOK, in his understanding, offered a third path: a critically grounded, spiritually rooted, intellectually disciplined methodology. It sought to revive the dynamism of Islamic scholarship while engaging contemporary realities with competence and confidence.

IOK as an Epistemological and Methodological Project, Not Merely Cultural

One of al-‘Alwānī’s most important contributions was insisting that IOK is fundamentally an epistemological and methodological project. It concerns the sources, hierarchy, and integration of knowledge. He emphasized: (1) the centrality of the *Qur’ān* as a source of epistemological and methodological guidance; (2) the role of the *sunnah* in ethical and practical embodiment; (3) the necessity of the *maqāṣid* (higher objectives) in structuring inquiry; and (4) the indispensability of *ijtihād* as an ongoing intellectual responsibility.³⁷ For him, the task was not “rethinking” in the sense of reacting to the modern Western categories, but right thinking, thinking correctly from within a coherent Islamic epistemic framework. Rethinking may remain reactive; right thinking is principled and constructive.

³⁷ Ibid., p.133.

Professionalism and Scientific Spirit

Al-‘Alwānī’s discourse reflects deep scholarly rigor. He combined: (1) mastery of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and traditional disciplines; (2) familiarity with modern Western social sciences; (3) a disciplined epistemological and methodological approach; and (4) a strong ethical and spiritual consciousness.³⁸ He rejected anti-scientific attitudes and affirmed that scientific inquiry, when guided by ethical and metaphysical clarity, is fully compatible with *Tawḥīdīc* epistemology. For him, the problem was never science itself, but the philosophical assumptions often attached to it.

Ethical and Civilizational Responsibility

Al-‘Alwānī saw IOK as part of a broader civilizational responsibility (*shahādah*). In his view, the Muslim *Ummah* must contribute solutions to humanity’s crises, such as environmental degradation, social injustice, and moral relativism, by offering a unified and ethically grounded knowledge system. IOK was therefore not inward-looking. It aimed at restoring balance between knowledge and values, power and responsibility, progress and morality, true understanding (faith) and reason.³⁹ In essence, al-‘Alwānī envisioned the Islamization of Knowledge as a long-term project of epistemic reform and intellectual liberation. It trains the Muslim mind to think creatively, ethically, and scientifically. It replaces imitation with *ijtihād*, fragmentation with unity, and reaction with principled construction. For him, the ultimate goal was not merely academic reform but the reawakening of a confident, morally grounded, and intellectually autonomous Islamic civilization capable of engaging the modern world without losing its *Qur’ānic* worldview.

Conclusion

It is concluded that from the perspective of Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) was never a slogan, nor a mere academic reform project. It was, rather, a profound epistemological undertaking aimed at shaping the very structure of the Muslim mind. He saw it as a comprehensive vehicle for intellectual, spiritual, and civilizational renewal. For al-‘Alwānī, IOK was both *Qur’ānic* in foundation and universal in scope. It is *Qur’ānic* because it derives its epistemic principles from the Islamic revelation, affirming *Tawḥīdīc* as the organizing principle of all knowledge. It is Universal for the reason that it does not seek isolation but aims to contribute to humanity’s shared intellectual heritage. In al-‘Alwānī’s view, Islām does not produce a parochial or sectarian knowledge system; rather, it offers an integrated

³⁸ Ibid., p.129.

³⁹ Ibid., p.47.

vision capable of addressing global crises such as ethical disorientation, fragmentation of disciplines, and the collapse of meaning in modern civilization.

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