

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION: POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES

The Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization organized an International Conference on March 28-29, 2011 under the banner of UMT Ideas Exchange 2011. This two-day Conference comprised of eight sessions including one session devoted to Arabic papers. The first session of the conference started after the inaugural session of UMT Idea Exchange and comprised of keynote speeches. Dr. Abdul Hameed (Dean, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore), chaired the session.

Dr. S. M. Ghazanfar (Professor Emeritus, University of Idaho, USA), delivered his keynote address on “*Civilization Links: Early Islam and Western Renaissance.*” He said that many discourses clearly indicate that Muslim civilization played an important role in the rise and culmination of the movement of Renaissance in the West. He proved his point by citing Western authors and intellectuals admitting the role of texts of Arabs and Muslims during the Renaissance.

The second keynote speaker was Dr. Adnan Aslan (Professor of Philosophy at Istanbul 29 May University, Turkey). He spoke on “*Religious Pluralism in Islam.*” He was of the view that Islam allows pluralistic societies. He said that Islam has always encouraged pluralism and the history of the Muslim world is replete with examples where Muslims, Christians, and Jews have coexisted peacefully in a harmonious manner.

Dr. Hasan Sohaib Murad (Rector, University of Management and Technology, Lahore), presented souvenirs to the keynote speakers. The session was moderated by Ms. Shagufta Jabeen (Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, UMT).

The second session of the day was chaired by Dr. Absar Ahmad (Former Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Punjab, Lahore). The session theme was ‘Dynamics of Islamic Resurgence’. Dr. Laszlo Csicsmann (Vice Dean, International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute for International Studies, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary), presented his paper on “*Islamist Movements at the Crossroads: The Choice between Ideology and Context Driven Approach to Politics: Case Study on the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.*” His paper was based on his recent research and stay in Jordan. The second paper titled “*The Transformation of Egyptian Islamists: Genuine Value Pluralism or Democratic Window Dressing*” was presented by Ms. Gillian Kennedy (a doctoral candidate in Middle Eastern Studies, Kings College London, UK). She discussed the dynamics of the recent revolution in Egypt. The third presentation was that of Dr. Branislav Radeljic (Associate Lecturer at University of London). Dr. Radeljic talked on “*Islam in European Union: Key Issues & Debates.*”

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Absar, appreciated the efforts of the non-Muslim presenters to understand and write on Islam. He said that this attempt to understand how others view us is commendable and will play an important role in creating an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence. Commenting on the paper by Ms. Gillian Kennedy, he said that she has supported her argument drawing from the Italian philosopher Gramsci and political thinker Machiavelli, and has rightly observed in her illuminating paper that if a modern prince fails to continue playing a cultural and

hegemonic role, the state will soon be reduced to a mechanism of pure coercion and corrupt bureaucracy. No doubt, the modern Prince was Hosni Mubarak who was elected for the 6<sup>th</sup> time in September 2005 with no regard to the fact that Egypt has been continuously in a state of emergency. Since 1981, the electoral system lacked any balance of power in the upper reaches of the state and adopting the notion coined by the famous political scientist Muhammad Tusi, became idle and ineffective. In last year's elections, many candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood were declared ineligible and were barred from participating in the electoral process on one pretext or the other. This made the entire exercise a farce. So, Gramsci's logic of coercion and meager consent or consensual support was demonstrated by the repressive methods of Nasser and Mubarak regimes. In the opinion of Dr. Absar, Ms. Gillian is very right in her observation that repression and catering to the Focurani's reformist concessions falls short of fulfilling the democratic vacuum created by decades of decadent and authoritative rule.

In his comments on the paper of Mr. Branislav Radeljic from Sarajevo, Dr. Absar said that the paper gives us an overview of Islam and Muslims in Europe, their trivial and gradual yet painful entrenchment in the industrially developed, and largely secular and liberal countries of Europe. Dr. Absar Ahmad said that all three papers deal with very essential and sensitive concepts. Most of the political parties in Muslim lands in Jordan and Egypt are trying to coexist with secular parties but they are not dealing with theological or ideological concepts, thus ignoring the basic conceptual framework. In this reference, Dr. Absar quoted Dr. Fazlur Rahman, an eminent scholar of Islamic thought who was a professor at Chicago University. In a paper published in an academic journal of Chicago University, Dr. Fazlur Rahman explored the core concept of *Iman*, *Islam* and *Taqwa*, culminating in the highest and ultimate civilizational, social political goals of Islam. Dr. Absar highlighted the following points from Dr. Fazlur Rahman's paper:

1. Personal inner faith is not by any means sufficient for God's purposes. Organized normative community is a dire necessity. He thus fully affirms reification which is Cantwell Smith's term; reification of *Iman* in the temporal context while all modernists attempt to empty Islam of its political context.
2. In Kennedy's paper you heard about a French scholar Olivier Roy using the term 'Post Islamism' and similarly Jenny B White's paper is titled 'The End of Islamism'. Even Turkish intellectual Akif Burkey has written an article titled 'the Death of Islamism'; he believes in the personalization of Islam, making it a private ritualistic religion whereas it is in fact a 'Deen' as we know from the Quran.
3. Discussing deeply the nature of *Taqwa*, which is one of the core concepts of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Taqwa*, Fazlur Rahman very rightly observes that the self is an emanation as it is applied in the notion of *Taqwa* and it can never by itself mean self righteousness. Thus he writes, "if self examination had built in success, humanism would work perfectly well and there would be no need for transcendence." Dr. Fazlur Rahman thus in one stroke disposes of both rational and humanist philosophers and those present day modernists and Muslim intellectuals who try to "*deshariatize*" Islam through various innovative modes. At another place we read that only when it (Islam) has become a social order, it becomes a political order i.e., Islam has to play a world role. One cannot earn the political order unless the basis of the social order is laid firmly. Thus Dr. Fazlur Rahman stands for real action and dynamism and repudiates the stresses of soul and empty political slogans.

4. All of us are familiar with the Muslim Brotherhood or *al-Ikhwan ul Muslimun* that was founded by Hasan al Banna in 1928 and much later in the 1940s Maulana Maududi started *Jamat-e-Islami* in India before partition. Syed Qutb's tract 'Milestones' *Maalim fi al Tareeq* and similarly Hassan al Hudaibi's "We are Preachers not judges" are also known. This title is very significant. Maulana Maududi's writings provided lot of theoretical help to *al-Ikhwan*. They were more dynamic and active but theoretically, the understanding of the Quran and socio-political thought was contributed by *Jamat-e-Islami*, and many of Maulana Maududi's works were translated into Arabic. Similarly Dr. Israr Ahmad started '*Tanzeem-e-Islami*' for Islamic renaissance and revival. Maulana Maududi and Dr. Israr Ahmad don't believe in attenuation of Islam. They believe in authentic Islam and the Quran and the *Hadith* or the *Sunna* whereas all these movements in most of the Arab countries are now presenting a much attenuated form of Islam which is pluralistic and quite liberal.

Dr. Absar concluded by thanking all paper presenters. The session ended with the distribution of souvenirs to paper presenters and the session chair.

There were two paper presentations in the third and final session of the day based on the theme of 'Muslim Intellectual Contribution.' Ms. Zora Hesova (a Czech Republic National, Doctoral Candidate at free Berlin University), presented her paper on "***Scheler and Ghazali: Explorations of the Finality of Knowledge between East and West.***" Her presentation was based on the exploration of the ways in which Islamic tradition in general and Islamic philosophy in particular, contributes a constructive rethinking of modernity in a dialogue between Western and Islamic thought. Dr. Faraz Anjum (Assistant Professor, University of Punjab, Lahore), presented his paper on the topic of "***Crisis of Muslim Civilization in Modern Times: some Insights from Ibn-e-Khaldun's Thought & Ideas.***" His research was an attempt to understand and explain the crisis of Islamic Civilization with the help of the social analysis and critical ideas of Ibn-e-Khaldun.

Dr. Syed Nomanul Haq (Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Lahore University of Management Sciences, LUMS, Lahore), chaired the session. He opined that after coming across such discourses, he feels the need to revisit and reconsider some commonly used terms. This whole dichotomy of rise and decline, modern and ancient/primitive, orient and occident; all these are highly problematic terms. Many among us know that all these are social constructs, many are more ideological than others but these are nonetheless constructs and we have to break them in order to make sense of our own station. He added that he always had problems with the dichotomy between East and West, Orient and Occident. Dr. Nomanul Haq quoted Marshal Hodgson who has pointed out the Rise of the West, the Rise of Europe, as a convergence, and not a single thread that starts from the Greeks and goes on to the Renaissance and then rises somewhere in Paris, London and Amsterdam. But it is really a convergence of many forces and in that convergence, the thread of Islam is extremely important. So in a way when the West rises there is some contribution of Islam in it. Now given this point where many things get together and a new phenomenon rises, it is hardly surprising that we find a parallel between the ideas and examples of Ghazali and a 20<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Max Scheler. He emphasized that he cannot imagine, he cannot even begin to write the history of the legendary West without having recourse to Arabic resources nor can he write a history of Arabic culture without having recourse to the Greeks. They are all connected; once felt in 11<sup>th</sup> century Spain of Ibn-e-Khaldun, once felt somewhere else. And of course the whole process of translation in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and transmission of administrative structures, attitudes, institutions, all the things that make up the

Modern European Civilization, is rooted in Muslim Civilization. He appreciated the idea of reconnecting these threads, for if nothing else, it is an antidote to the rhetoric of clash of civilization. Seen as a continuous human effort, this whole issue of clash goes by the board once this historical continuity is realized.

Commenting on knowledge, he pointed out two issues. First is the idea of knowledge as it grows in a utilitarian mode where knowledge is information management. Knowledge is an instrument of utility on the one hand and on the other, knowledge having a higher goal has actually two fundamental dimensions; one is what our speaker told us, the question of hierarchy and teleology. Nowadays teleology is rejected in biological evolution.

Dr. Nomanul Haq reminded the audience that there are scholars and thinkers in Europe who have questioned all and he recalled Iqbal who addressed the whole issue of education:

*“Drown the self of seeker into the acid. This burning acid of Education is so effective that if it is Himalaya of Gold it becomes a heap of dust.”*

Dr. Allama Iqbal was well aware of the ethical dimension of education. It attenuates the Islamic way of thinking because it separates ethical implications from acquiring knowledge. Dr. Nomanul Haq's own basic premise is strengthened by Dr. Iqbal who saw the dichotomy. He said that this whole duality, at least, between East and West really breaks down because he sees in Post-modernist thought, even in Foucault who has been quoted by Ms. Zora and in Heidegger, things that are really parallel. This mode of thinking where much of what we do is social construct, even religion can be a social construct as there is no such thing as “*Deen*” and “*Dunya*” and so on. What is religion, he asked. Is it *madhab*? *Madhab* is a doctrine, and “*deen*” is only one. There are issues with these concepts and one has to revisit the categories and terms for real scholarship. One does not go into rhetorical propaganda and if one really means business then one has to think. So for example, Foucault in hermeneutics raises these issues and so does Max Scheler and we have these concerns that knowledge must have an ethical dimension. It cannot be just information management as it is today.

Dr Nomanul Haq said that Pakistan faces an intellectual problem. Concluding his discussion, he said that he feels happy when he comes across Abu Hamid al Ghazali being mentioned with Foucault and Scheler. Now the typology of knowledge is really an exercise in Social Sciences but the typology given by Zora Hesova is useful in the attitude of Perennial Philosophy and that of Mahdi Yazdi and traditional modality arising out of tradition is very important thing to note.

Sharing his insight on reformation of the *Madrassa*, Dr Nomanul Haq said that there are problems of discipline, peace and security, but as an institution the *madrassa* has been historically significant. Dr. Fazlur Rahman was a product of the *Madrassa*. Jamal-ud Din Afgahni never went to a university, Sir Syed never went to a university; they were all *Madrassa* people and *Madrassa* people have made remarkable contributions in the development of science. It should be noted that scientific revolution was initiated by Copernicus who drew upon the work of Ibn al-Shatir who was a “*Muwaqqit*” (time keeper) in a mosque of Damascus. Copernicus is a verbatim citer. He quotes verbatim; where there is *Alif* he writes A, where there is ‘baa’ he writes b. He takes theorems of Naseer-ud-Din al-Tusi for example, and Mu'ayyad al-Din *al-Urdi* who have quoted

verbatim manuscripts on the Vatican and in Arabic and there are annotations written in Latin, so that means that there were people who knew both Arabic and Latin.

The second day of the Conference started with the recitation of some verses from the Quran. The theme of the first session was 'Muslim Cultural Heritage.' There were two presentations; one in Arabic language and the other in English on Islamic Architecture. Dr Spahic Omar (Bosnian National, Assistant Professor at International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), spoke on "*Islamic Architecture and the Prospect of its Revival.*" The paper concluded that Islamic architecture embodies the message of Islam through its multidimensionality. It both facilitates the Muslim's realization of Islamic purpose and its divine principles on earth, and promotes a lifestyle generated by such a philosophy and principles.

Mr. Kamil Khan Mumtaz (famous architect of Pakistan and former Head, Department of Architecture, National College of Arts, Lahore), chaired the session and presented the characteristics of traditional Islamic architecture. He was of the view that the function of Islamic architecture is to remind us constantly who we are and where we are and where we want to go. Islamic architecture reminds us that, yes we are on the horizontal plane of the world, but there is a higher reality and that is the real origin and destination of man. This horizontal plane is temporarily a passing phase. And this brings us to the function of history, because the function of history is also precisely the same. History is also meaningless if it does not enlighten us as to who we are and where we are and where we want to go. But there is something very curious about the way we look at history. Usually we look at history on a horizontal plane (these people came from here, they conquered this land and went to another land, etc.) in time and space.

In other words, this is a linear paradigm of history and surprisingly all of us accept it without questioning it. As someone said, change is the only thing constant in the universe. But nothing follows a linear progress - development or change forever in one direction. Every natural phenomenon in the whole universe follows a cyclic paradigm: origin, development, evolution, degeneration and return. How is it that we have conveniently adopted a paradigm of human history that goes forever from primitive man to civilized man, to industrial man, to modern man, to postmodern man and better, towards progress and development forever.

Is this possible? Isn't it absurd? Then why do we adopt such a model of history? It must suit somebody. And yes, it does. This is a paradigm of history that suits every fascist, imperialist, Marxist, Modernist, all kinds of supremacists. Because it shows that where they are in time and space, they are coming from a lesser and moving towards a better future forever. But if this is an absurd notion and everything goes in cycles then we need to look at the lessons of history.

Again, man in all traditions has had a cyclic paradigm of history, and human history, we should know as Muslims, is designed on a cyclic model. But within the cycle, while at the end of the cycle of course we must return to our origin, there are larger cycles and there are smaller cycles. It is almost like a rubber ball that has been tossed up, it follows a big arch, hits the ground and bounces back, hits the ground in smaller arcs, and then smaller and smaller, and ultimately it stops. Energy dissipates. So consider human history as this kind of cycles within cycles. There is natural man as he was created *ashraful-makhlوقات*: the greatest creation, and then he falls to lower than the lowest. Natural man: the biggest circle, sixty thousand years in which man lives in direct relationship to nature; civilized man: much less time about six thousand years, a tiny portion

of human history, and it is in this period that man attained so much of what we recognize as civilization, be it Greek, Roman, Persian and Assyrian, Christian civilization, Muslim, all civilizations belong to this cycle of time including the revealed books. And then comes the smaller cycle: six hundred years of modern man, industrial man, in which begins a process of dissipation, not only of man's own energies but the energy sources available to him, precisely because of modernization and industrialization. And now we have gone beyond.

We are now in the postindustrial and postmodernist stage. If the civilizational stage was about 6,000 years, modernism beginning with the Renaissance is just about 600 years. And postmodernism, beginning with the atomic explosion of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, barely 60 years. 60,000, 6000, 600, and 60! That is where we are at now and this is also the way that the resources of this planet are dissipated. Conserved, maintained for 60,000 years or more, ever since man was on this planet, but with modernization we began to dissipate and deplete the resources. In the cyclic view of history of all traditions, whether it is Greek or Hindu or Islamic, all of them point out to the end of the cycle of time. These are the last days, *Aakhira*, this is the *kalyug*, and this is the dark epoch. So when we talk about the future, when we talk about reviving Islamic civilization when we talk about keeping abreast with the developments of science, technology and modernism, when we talk about ... what are we really saying? Is there any time left? Allah Almighty tells us that He can create another generation different from us. What that will be, Allah SWT alone knows. Kamil Khan Mumtaz said that we need to place our deliberations' on architecture, culture, history, and civilization within this traditional, and Islamic paradigm of what and who we are, what is the world, where are we coming from and where are we going.

The second paper of this session was in Arabic Language covered the distinctive features of Islamic civilization and was presented by Dr. Abdul Hai Madni (NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan), Civilization. Dr. Mazhar Moeen (Principal Oriental College, University of Punjab, Lahore), and Dr. Khaliq Dad (Head, Department of Arabic, University of Punjab), jointly concluded the session.

The theme of the second session of the day was 'Inter Civilizational Dialogue.' There were two presentations in the session. Dr. Naveed Yazdani (Director, School of Professional Advancement, University of Management and Technology, Lahore), presented the paper titled "***From Modernity to Postmodernity: A Historical Discourse on Western Civilization.***" He covered the historical paradigm of Modernity and Postmodernity. He also analyzed the behavior of Western civilization in this context. Ms. Memoona Sajjad (pen name Maryam Sakeena), the second presenter of the session, addressed on "***Fraternity of Civilization: Prospects for Dialogue and Search for Common Thread.***" She refuted the idea of Clash of Civilization and said that Islamic history is rich in narratives of pluralism, tolerance and peaceful co-existence with diverse communities. Mr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, (Director, Iqbal Academy, Lahore), concluded the session and said that the role of Islamic Tradition is most important in this postmodern age.

Three papers were presented in the third session of the day under the theme of 'Islamic Civilization: Emerging Issues and New Horizons.' The first presentation was ***Pluralism in Islam: A Comparative Study with Western Pluralism*** by Dr. Farooq Hassan (Assistant Professor at NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi, Pakistan). The second paper was a joint presentation of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Majooka and Mr. Habib Elahi Sahibzada (University of Hazara, at Mansehra, Pakistan). Their research was on the "***Resources of Muslim World: A***

***Reflection on the Muslim World's Resources, Their Development and Utilization.***” The third presentation was delivered by Ms. Nighat Noureen (Lecturer, School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Department of Social Sciences, UMT, Lahore), on the topic of ***“Islamic Globalization: An Urgent Need of the World.”*** Session Chair, Dr Syed Sultan Shah (Head, Department of Islamic Studies, Government College University, Lahore), concluded the session.

The theme of the final and last session of the Conference was ‘Islam and Postmodernity.’ Two papers were presented on postmodernity. Ms. Sabina Shah (Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature at University of Hazara), presented her paper on ***“Cultural Invasion through Media War: Islamic Civilization and the Challenge of Postmodernity.”*** Her paper encompassed the notion of Post-modern life in the Islamic world. She emphasized that importance of mass media in the Post-Modern world is beyond any doubt. She was of the view that through mass media, the Occident is continuously trying to impose its sensibilities on the Oriental mind. Dr. Muhammad Zaid Malik, (Assistant Professor, International Islamic University; Islamabad), expressed his views on the topic of ***“Post-Modernity and Crisis of Muslim Identity.”*** Dr. Zafar Iqbal (Former Head, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Management and Technology, Lahore), concluded the session. At the end, Dr. Muhammad Amin (Head, Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, UMT), gave the vote of thanks and announced the closing of the Conference.

All the working sessions were followed by question and answer sessions and souvenir presentations. A large number of students from UMT and other educational institutions attended the Conference. Educationists, intellectuals, media representatives and members of the general public interested in the various dimensions of Islamic civilization graced the Conference with their presence.