

## Proceedings of Conference

### on 'Islam and Modernity' held at UMT on March 30, 2009

The Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization at the University of Management and Technology, (UMT), Lahore, organized a conference on "Islam and Modernity", on March 30, 2009 at the University campus. A large number of intellectuals, academicians and educationists from all over the country attended the conference.

In the inaugural session, Dr. Muhammad Amin, Chairman, Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization welcomed the delegates. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Anis Ahmed, Rector, Riphah Int'l University, Islamabad. Dr. Hasan Sohaib Murad, Rector, UMT, gave the concluding remarks.

The Conference had three working sessions during which noted educationists and scholars presented their papers. Dr. Absar Ahmed, former Head of the Department of Philosophy, Punjab University, chaired the first working sessions on "Western Philosophical Thought". The second session on "Western Ideologies and Movements" was presided over by Dr. Basit Bilal Koshal from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) while the last session on "Islam, Modernity and the Muslim World", was chaired by Mr. Ahmed Javed from the Iqbal Academy, Lahore. All the working sessions were followed by question and answer sessions during which the participants raised thought provoking issues in regard to the challenges before the Muslim world. Shields and souvenirs were presented to the speakers at the end of every session. A brief summary of the conference proceedings is given here.

Dr. Anis Ahmed, in his keynote address, said that in the common use, modernity refers to post 18th century industrial society with unprecedented role of economic growth and technology. Conceptually, modernity in the West stands for individualism, empiricism, secularity, globalization, glamorization of life and ethical relativism as its pillars of faith. Secularism liberates the mind from religious dogmatism, i.e. papacy, accepting Christianity without any questioning.

Islam stands for peace within and without and the term *Tauheed* (unionism) is a basic paradigm as Islam doesn't call itself a religion, it calls itself a matter of accepting supremacy of Allah, not only as a creator, but as the ultimate source of knowledge. Therefore, the first pillar of Muslim thought is not a dogma but knowledge. Allah's conscious acceptance as sovereign power and ultimate judge brings unity in life and prosperity and humanity in societies. *Tauheed* becomes the basis for social integration and for political sovereignty. The Quran and the *Sunnah*, being comprehensive, authentic and universal, provide explicit commands, directions and general principles for resolving emerging issues and problems of our society. Therefore, we don't need to suppress some Quranic verse or Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in the name of modernity. The key resolution of relatively modern problems and morality lies in the application of Quran and the *Sunnah*, itself. *Ijtihad* is the key and the methodology for resolving the problems of modernity, political, economic, legal, etc. It is a misconception that *Ijtihad* has been invented by Iqbal or Mawdudi or anyone else. *Ijtihad* is the methodology of the Prophet (SAW), in his life time. However, it requires a direct study of Islamic sources. Islam is unique in its nature and successfully responds within the parameters of universal *Shariah* to the emergent threats and challenges in a

dynamic, innovative and creative manner. The term “universal *Shariah*” means that the objectives of the *Shariah* are not confined to the Muslims alone. Islam does not need reformation and reconstruction because the Quran provides guidance till eternity, and the Holy Prophet (SAW) is the model for the entire humanity and not for the Muslims alone. Islam can't be compared with man made ideologies such as capitalism. Islam does accept role for human efforts but it also provides a big space for Allah to contribute. Islam and Modernity are not two different realms. Islam is as modern today as it was in the 7th century or even much before. Islam also permits Enlightenment as it is the only faith that talks about Enlightenment based on divine guidance and free thought of human beings under that. Islamic thought and Islamic culture / civilization contain elements of modernity and a modern age. The Quran and the *Sunnah* paradigm can produce a society that would be able to sustain and progress, and to come up with psychological innovation, philosophical contribution and social thought inspired by the Quran and the *Sunnah*.

Dr. Hasan Sohaib Murad, Rector, University of Management and Technology, in his concluding remarks at the opening session, highlighted the point that Islam is the most misunderstood religion these days and Islam and the Muslims are under siege from within and without. “We are facing more innovative and newer forms of inquisition, which means persecution - intellectual, cultural and political, coercion, displacement and rejection by some communities. There are attempts to relegate Islam to the dustbin of history as no more relevant. There are three major responses from the Muslim communities to this onslaught from the West. First is the Defeatist group. Intellectually, this group lies outside the axis of Islam. They have been won over by the other side. To some of them, Islam only concerns certain individual rituals and rites and does not bother about public life. The second group is of Interpreters, it looks for compromises, and the middle course. The third are the Constructionists. It includes people who really want to explore the richness of Islam, its relevance, evolution of time and space. They believe in interaction and co-existence on the basis of fundamentals. This third group can do justice to Islam. There will be revival of creative thinking within the paradigm of Islam on the basis of the Quran and the *Sunnah*, so that Islam gets a strong conviction not only from its adherents but also from non-believers. The objective is to understand Islam, to engage intellectual resources to understand Islam in current times, and also to experiment Islam. We can prove that Islam is better, Islam is superior, in fact, it is outstanding and it can meet all challenges.”

### **Working Sessions**

The first working session titled ‘Western Philosophical Thought’ was chaired by Dr. Absar Ahmed. Four papers were presented in this session. Dr. Zulfiqar Ali from the University of Karachi read his paper on “The Possibility of Mutual Transformation of Western and Non-Western Civilizations in Foucault’s Analysis”. Mr. Waqar Aslam of Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan presented his paper on “Western Enlightenment and Structure of Religious Thought: A Study of Incommensurability”. The third paper entitled “Reformation: Religious, Political and Social Consequences for Western Society” was a joint venture by Dr. Muhammad Hammad Lakhvi from the University of Punjab, Lahore and Humaira Ahmad from UMT, Lahore. Fourth paper, on “Anguish and Human Predicament in Existentialism,” was by Ms. Ambreen Salahuddin from UMT, Lahore.

In his comments, the Chair said that Islam does not denounce rationality and logical argumentation; rather it advocates the use of rationality providing it divine epistemology. It is no wonder that a high percentage of modern intellectual giants turned religious and even Einstein stated that “Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind,” he pointed out. Commenting on Existentialism, the Chair observed that Existentialist philosophy is focused on the idea that man is condemned to be free. Existentialist concept of anguish though, a reality in a sense to be criticized because it results from a deep sense of forlornness. Dr Absar said that a merely anguished person cannot contribute positively towards the betterment of society at large. So according to him, solutions have to be found in Islam.

The second working session on ‘Western Ideologies and Movements’ was chaired by Dr. Basit Bilal Koshal from LUMS. A paper on “Mirror up to Existentialist and Constructionist Approaches in Leadership Studies” was presented by Rana Zamin Abbas from University of Management and Technology, Lahore. The second paper on “Islam and Modernity - A Selective Influence of Capitalistic Setup” was presented by Dr. Sobia Tahir (Government College University, Lahore). The third paper entitled “Muslim Response to Modernity” was the joint attempt of Dr. Amjad Waheed and Dr. Muhammad Amin (UMT). The last paper of the second session was on Genealogy and Objectives of Economic Science” and was presented by Mr. Zahid Siddique from FAST, Karachi. In his comments, the Chair disagreed with the view that Modernity is the result of the death of classical civilization. Instead, he said, Modernity is a particular interpretation; it is the actualization of the potential within classical civilization or religious civilization. So, it is not a break from the past. Modern economics, modern science, modern politics, are the result not of some secular atheist philosophers sitting around, thinking about these things. Instead, these are the results of a particular religious interpretation of the Christian tradition. Capitalism, liberal democracy, and modern science all go back to the Protestant Reformation.

The third working session on ‘Islam, Modernity and the Muslim World’ was chaired by Mr. Ahmed Javed of Iqbal Academy, Lahore. Three papers were presented at the session. The first paper on “Philosophizing Tasawwuf- the postmodern cult of Sufism” was presented by Dr. Iftikhar Shafi from the University of Karachi. The Chair appreciated the paper for taking the right position on *Tasawwuf* and postmodernity. The second paper on “Western Worldview based on modernity as compared to the Islamic World view” was presented by Dr Abdur Rauf from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The third paper on “The Secularist Modernist Bias of the Western Social Sciences” was written by Dr. Muhammad al Ghazali from the International Islamic University, Islamabad (currently Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan) and read out by Mariam Murad. Commenting on the paper, the Chair said that modernity is a kind of neo-religiosity. It has not invented new ideals, rather it has actualized the existing ideals in the new situation to fulfill the demand of the present age. It has given preference to rationality on revelation. He also observed that modernity has produced greatest minds of the world and a popular critique of the West with cursory knowledge would be of no use. Hence, a serious study of Western Thought is essential to acquire complete knowledge of that evil challenge in order to compete it.