

Editorial

Vision of AJISS: Back to Basics

When the International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists decided to launch *AJISS* sixteen years ago, they had a shared vision of the condition of the Ummah, the crises facing it, and the resolution of those crises. These were the three challenges that inspired the work of IIIT and AMSS the last two decades. As we write the editorial for the first issue of the seventeenth volume of *AJISS*, we recall those challenges and that vision of Islam and discover that they are still deeply relevant today.

The first challenge was to understand Islam and then interpret that understanding. Today, more than ever before, Islam is considered a great religion, an egalitarian faith, and a holistic way of life by Muslims and others. More and more people are realizing the extent to which Islamic values and the Shari'ah, which are just and universal in character, may contribute to solving the problems of contemporary civilization. They also recognize that Islamic guidance, which integrates revelation and reason, answers eternal questions about living righteously on earth and establishing a just and rational *'umrān* (civilization).

Both IIIT and AMSS believe that Muslim scholars and intellectuals will serve Islam and humanity if they articulate a comprehensive worldview premised on Islamic ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This worldview will enable Muslims to institutionalize and observe Islamic ideals and central principles such as *tawhid*, *'umrān* and *tazkiyah*, enable non-Muslims to interpret life, nature, and human phenomena, and have sufficient elements shared between them to facilitate a universal discourse that can bring the fruits of Islam to all humanity.

The second challenge concerned diagnosing the contemporary condition of the Muslim Ummah. Despite the Islamic values and principles that it possesses and the human and natural resources it enjoys, the Ummah has been in decline for several centuries. Muslims have been subjected to incomparable defeats and humiliation. In today's global media they are

stereotyped as terrorists, fanatical, and backward. Although many Muslims have adopted Western models in the realms of politics, economics, and education, striving to realize the material fruits of Western modernity; however, in the bargain, they have lost many of the virtues of an Islamic model.

These Muslims lack vision; intellectual poverty and anarchy color their performance. Revival and reform in the Muslim world have been attempted but unfortunately most of these efforts have dealt with symptoms not causes. No doubt, external forces did not allow Muslims much opportunity to realize the intellectual challenges and concerns of the time; however, what aggravated the situation even further is that Islamic projects concerned with reform did not fully comprehend the problems of Muslim mentality (thought processes and culture), which developed during periods of backwardness. Many of these reform projects are also ignorant about the *sunan* (laws) of social change.

Thus we arrive at the third challenge: prescribing solutions and remedies. The need to revive the Islamic civilizational project, which is comprehensive and integrated, is inescapable. Muslim activists, scholars, and politicians need to work hard complementing each other's efforts and covering all fields of activity and issues simultaneously. The *American Journal of Islamic Social Science* (AJISS), sponsored by IIIT and AMSS, was envisaged to be a forum of serious study and dialogue among intellectuals and scholars regarding only one aspect of that project, namely, Islamic methodology as a way of thinking, research, and practice. Its task was to revive Islamic thought, providing a clear vision that in turn facilitates efforts on other fronts regarding not only the needs of Muslims, but also that of all humanity.

A main feature of Islamic discourse during most of the 20th century has been Islam's regaining its identity as a civilization. This task was directed at the Islamic self: in one sense a historical search, in another a defensive reaction. Toward the end of the century transmitting Islamic ideals and values became obviously another important task that complemented the first. This mission-oriented task was directed toward the non-Muslim other, which required an added — not alternative — discourse of openness, flexibility, and reconciliation. These two tasks: maintaining Islamic identity of the self, with its unique and special qualities, and transmitting Islamic ideals and values, are a religious duty as well as a human need. Together they pave the way for the Ummah to actualize its international presence.

Revival of Islamic thought might be a direct responsibility of the Muslim intellectual elite but the realization of this project demands the involvement of the whole Ummah. For this reason, interaction with the issues that concern the Muslims should always be present on the Muslim scholars' agenda. We have to acknowledge that reviving Islamic thought is contingent on the ability of the Muslim intellectual elite to constitute itself on the basis of valid assumptions, appropriate methodology, and prioritized research programs. This process of development and change has proven to be slow, as has been the transfer of its effect to new generations of Muslim scholars and researchers. But we need not despair. When we look back and assess what happened, we find a modest accumulation of experience. Circumstances may come to provoke a dramatic, swift change and precipitate a complete paradigm shift.

AJISS has served admirably as a forum that articulates this vision and fine tunes many of its elements. Research papers, articles, and discussions published in *AJISS* since its inception have accumulated a considerable amount of quality literature that will be essential to shape the future of Islamization of knowledge.

I encourage our readers to make use of this past research and suggest specific projects on how to better distribute its benefits and develop its ideas and practices.

Fathi Malkawi
Associate Editor