

Islamization of Knowledge: A *Jihad* for Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals with Special Focus on Nigeria

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Introduction:

Humanity and the universe are not created static. Both are evolutionary in nature. The alternation of night and day, the movement of sun and moon in pursuance of their courses, the evolution of human form from a drop of sperm to full human being in the mother's womb and its subsequent development from infancy to adulthood, and the diversity of color, race and languages, are all indications of the changes that characterize the natural environment and human existence and these reflect and indicate the creativity of Allah, their Creator. The purpose of human creation is to serve as the vicegerent of Allah on earth¹ and for Him to serve this purpose; man is endowed with the sense organs and rationale, which distinguish him from other creatures. Man's acceptance of *amanah* further demarcates him from others.² The word *amanah* is interpreted by scholars from different perspectives. 'Abdullah refers to it as all the sense organs in a man.³ According to Waghid, it refers to the volition and intellect (*'aql*) of humanity.⁴

He also quotes Abdullah to have considered '*aql*' (*rationality*) as a "suitable tool for understanding the revealed knowledge and acquiring new forms of it through reflection on Allah's signs in himself, the history of the past generation and the universe".⁵

Creativity is one of the attributes of Allah. Man is blessed with creativity that justifies his vicegerency on earth. His ability to use this given

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opportunity aright leads him to the high and noble position designed for him by Allah. Failure to move in this direction, he falls even lower than the beasts.

The change in human history has in most cases been achieved by attainment of political authority. This, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) used to transform the pre-Islamic *Jahiliyyah* people from their barbaric, undeveloped and backward status to civilized, developed and cultured nation.⁶ He was able to achieve this goal with the assistance of the knowledge he received from his Creator. He encouraged acquisition of knowledge and gave superiority to the intelligentsia over the ignorant.⁷ To him, the pursuance of knowledge for the benefit of mankind was considered an act of *'ibadah* which is better than engaging in *adhkar* or any other *mu'amalat*.⁸

Realizing the fact that the doors to new learning are always widely opened and that there is no end to knowledge, the spirit of creativity led the Muslims to go as far as to acquire the then available knowledge of the foreign culture they interacted with. Within a short period, they developed their own science in line with the teaching of the Qur'an and practice of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). Galal identifies four main stages, which the development of science in the Muslim world passed through. They are the stages of formation, efflorescence, spreading and decay.⁹ The stage of formation is characterized by the development of such religious sciences as *fiqh*, *hadith*, *shari'ah* and others which in the bid of the Muslims to transmit them to other nations, came in contact with other cultures and so seize the opportunity to translate the Greek and Syriac literature into Arabic. This continued to the stage of efflorescence when such Abbasid caliphs as Al-Mansur, Harun Rashid, Al-Ma'mun and al-Mutawakkil encouraged science on a scale unequalled

by establishing the *Baytul-Hikmah* (The House of Wisdom). The stage has aptly been described by Galal thus:

The scientific movement did not confine itself within translation, but the Muslim scholars started in this stage of efflorescence studies on the basis of the ancient studies, and continued to rationalize the treatment of these sciences or pseudo-sciences to an extent that they established new methods based on observation and experimentation. This scientific method led some Muslim scholars to initiate new techniques such as Algebra, Trigonometry and lay the foundation of new disciplines such as Optics and Chemistry.¹⁰

The third stage marked the spread of the Muslim sciences to other political centres through sponsorship of scholars and technicians by Muslim rulers and some rich merchants. Within a short period, Muslims became an authority in different areas of various disciplines. It is on record that Ibn Hayyan (d. 929 C.E) is one of the first modern chemists for these discoveries of acids, success in distilling sulphuric acid and his extraction of sodium carbonates, potassium, arsenic and silver nitrates. He was said to have written about 500 books on philosophy, logic and alchemy.¹¹ Al-Khawarizmi (d. 850 C.E.) is noted for his invention of the term of logarithm in relation of numbers. He was said to have made the numerical system which was adopted in Europe at the end of the 16th century.¹² Al-Beruni (d. 1048 C.E) discovered the nature of liquid pressure and a method of extracting the salt from the sea. He made tables for the sine and tangent and invented a method of measuring generic weight for nine metals. Ibn Haitham (d. 1039 C.E) is noted for being the first to draw the eye and to explain the phenomenon of reflection and expansion. Al-Idrisi (d. 11266 C.E) was said to have made the first map of the world that was similar to those by modern cartologists. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the author of *Al-Qanun fit-Tib* was regarded as the first to identify tuberculosis, meningitis and other such

inflammations as well as other fifteen types of illness with prescribed 760 remedies.¹³

The Muslims' creativity in science later suffered a setback due to the general decline and decay of the Muslim dynasties, coupled with the Turkish and Mongol invasions. Series of crusades, which followed these, revealed the Muslim world with all its scientific achievements both in Spain and Palestine to the Western world that did not waste time to tap these resources and thus took over the scientific achievements from the Muslims. With the scientific take-over, knowledge was de-Islamized and so the West pretended as if they are the harbingers of the modern science.

In the name of colonization, the de-Islamized western system of education was imposed on the Muslim world. This alien system of education creates a bifurcated system of education, which does not only demarcate religious and secular education, but also relegate revealed knowledge to the marginal level, in addition to creating other crises in the Muslim education system.¹⁴ The recent efforts at finding a lasting solution to these crises culminated in the series of international conferences which consequently gave birth to the Islamization of knowledge— an intellectual exercise believed to be a model for virile Muslim educational reform programme.¹⁵

Islamization of Knowledge -- An Intellectual *Jihad*:

Islamization of knowledge is considered by Al-Alwani as a cultural and intellectual project "aspiring to correct the process of thinking within the Muslim, so that it is able to produce Islamic, social and humanistic knowledge based on *wahy* (Divine Revelation) and *wujud* (Existence).¹⁶ In his own definition, Khalil sees it as "practicing (i.e. discovering,

compiling, piercing together, communicating and publishing) intellectual activity based on the Islamic concept of the universe, life, and man.¹⁷ A more comprehensive definition of the concept is given by Sulaiman who refers to it as:

... an attempt through which aspects of the body and purpose of knowledge and of the process and methodologies of discovering, validating, imparting and applying it, which oppose Islam, are identified and made subservient to the Islamic worldview.¹⁸

The above definitions of the term 'Islamization of knowledge' manifest three important points, namely:

- i. Any knowledge which bifurcates *wahy* and *wujud* is incomplete and faulty and so, inimical to the spirit of Islam, hence the need to address it creatively;
- ii. Knowledge is not neutral as it has always been a product of environment and culture, and so the justification for the Muslims to enrich it with Islamic teachings.
- iii. The concept is an intellectual project meant for the category of people to which the Qur'an refers as the People of Wisdom. This is not to say that it is an exclusive property of the Muslims alone, but we settle on Muslim intellectuals to enable us approach the topic with particular reference to the roles and challenges ahead this set of people.

Jihad is an Arabic word derived from *jahada* which means 'to strive or struggle'.¹⁹ The word at times, is exclusively used for fighting.²⁰ However, in this context, one is satisfied with Waghid's definition of *Jihad* "an educative practice do develop, through tremendous effort, the notion of Islamic education".²¹ He sees *jihad* as a synonym of creative practice of knowledge acquisition and articulation. He contends to this definition based on Al-Burusiyy's *Tafsir Ruh al-Bayan* who asserts that an

understanding of God's knowledge (*ma'rifatullah*) only becomes transparent through *Jihad*, here defined as constant intellectual striving.²² This is equally confirmed by Yusuf Ali who agrees that the sincere scholar's pen or preacher's voice or wealthy man's contributions may be the most valuable forms of *jihad*.²³

Reference to *jihad* as a holy war may not be totally discarded in this respect too. Permission to embark on defensive war is epitomized in the Qur'an thus:

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight) because they were wronged and verily God is most powerful for their aid. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right (for no cause) except that they say, "our Lord is Lord..."²⁴

It is incontestable that the Muslim *ummah* was the custodian of sciences for centuries before it was hijacked from her by some powers that consider her a threat to their existence. This position was not only taken away from the Muslims, rather, the attribution of knowledge to Allah was discarded and everything was secularized before being disseminated to the rest of the world. The hitherto pure knowledge acquired from the Muslims was represented to them in the undesirable garb of secularization. Muslims are thus confronted with the task of embarking on rigorous defensive *jihad* against mental degradation, intellectual persecution, academic heresy and incompatible alien culture that they are being exposed to in the name of education. This time around, the *jihad* is not that of sword but of pen to redeem knowledge from total collapse and to link it back to its source – Allah, by reinstating *wahy* as an infallible source of knowledge and settling the dispute between the book of creation (*wujud*) and the book of revelation (*wahy*). Unless the Muslim world rises to this task, it runs the risk of undoing its worldview, bastardizing its values and distorting its culture.

Shehu considers failure to embark on this intellectual *jihad* a great calamity for this *ummah* when he writes:

No sensible human community or generation can choose to be indifferent to it. Those that do that are only waiting for their death. The Muslim world must strive towards an overall educational reform or revolution, and must see this task as the greatest means of not only cultural and mental redemption, but as a cause of salvaging itself.²⁵

Traditional Islamic System of Education -- A Critique:

The internal and external forces working against Muslims are so multidimensional that Muslims should not sit idle watching its further deterioration. In the first instance, the inherited traditional Islamic system of education lacks some fundamental ingredients to make it a replica of true Islamic education. Galadanci is not satisfied with the physical appearance of the recipients of those who patronize Muslim schools, as it does not tally with the spirit of Islam. He observes:

One just needs to look at the scores of dirty looking, underfed and malnourished children in street junctions and roundabouts to know how bad the situation is. These are the students of the Islamic educational system who hold and symbolize all the qualities that Islam stands for; cleanliness, piety, humility, good character and deep knowledge. They possess none.²⁶

In his own assessment, Adebayo sees nothing to write home about in the curriculum, management and organization of a typical Islamic school. He writes:

An assessment of the institution that promote the traditional system of learning shows that they are sub-standard in terms of operation, management, facility and structure. A large percentage of Muslim children who enroll in these institutions have no taste of the much-cherished Islamic education, as some engage in street begging and prone to all sorts of social vices. Except few ones that produced functional Islamic scholars, most of them because of lack of foresight, barbarized themselves by gluing to the curriculum that has little or no bearing with reality and current needs and thus produced graduates who could not contribute meaningfully to the socio-political and economic

development of the modern world. They only become starts at socio-religious like marriage, naming and funeral ceremonies.²⁷

The initial declaration of the closure of the door of *ijtihad* by orthodox Muslim scholars marks a serious setback on the Muslim education system. The following are some of the cumulative consequences of this step as they affect Muslim education:

- i. Intellectual stagnation, which paved way for *taqlid* (blind imitation).²⁸
- ii. Demarcation of *'Ibadah and mu'amalat* thereby restricting *'ibadah* to strict adherence to the pillars of Islam and limiting acts of *'ibadah* to *adhkar*, Qur'anic recitation and *nawafil*. *I'tikaf*, *khalwah* and *tabligh* outing are thus encouraged as a means of spiritual development.²⁹
- iii. Emergency of mystical sects, prayer groups and *as-salat* groups where massive turn out is always recorded.³⁰
- iv. Muslims become second-rated citizens in the field of science, and in their attempt to contribute to sciences, wrongly depend on western theories and ideologies for assessing their own systems to the extent that scientific findings are used to confirm Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions.
- v. Unpreparedness to expand the horizon of their knowledge through their emphasis on acquisition of Islamic education alone with no consideration for the so-called secular education. This happens to the result of departmentalization and separation of education into religious and secular education.

The above points are some of the shortcomings of the prevailing Islamic system of education and they demand academic and intellectual *jihad* to break away from. This is *Jihad Nafs* that needs to be fought internally.

Western System of Education -- A Critique:

The adoption of the western system of education by the Muslim world calls for a strong and serious *jihad* from the Muslim intellectuals in the contemporary period as well. The adopted system of education is in conflict with the Islamic paradigm. The conflicts are succinctly observed by Husein and Ashraf thus:

Modern Western education places an exaggerated emphasis upon reason and rationality and underestimates the value of the spirit. It encourages scientific inquiry at the expense of faith; it promotes individualism; it breeds skepticism; it refuses to accept that which is not demonstrable; it is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Even where it does not directly challenge faith, to the background as something much less important than reason.³¹

Scholars have studied the Western system of education with a view to identify its shortcomings from various perspectives. To discuss these shortcomings extensively will make this paper voluminous. However, for us to realize the fact that a *jihad* against these problems is imperative, we hereby list the following:

i. Aims and objectives of education:

The National Policy on Education spells out the aims and objectives of education in Nigeria. A careful study of the policy shows its one-sidedness approach towards worldly life with scant heed towards life after death.³² A policy, which has no concept of God and provision for the world Hereafter, is un-Islamic and a system of education that portrays this, is hazardous to Muslims' consumption.

ii. Conceptual Worldview:

The system is diametrically opposed to Islamic worldview and hostile to its value system. The materialistic, agnostic and atheistic Western experience is in no way in line with Islamic teachings. The materialistic

experience of the West, for instance, leads to the institution of usury (interest) in the Western economic setup. This pervades all other social and behavioural sciences and the arts and humanities.

iii. **Teachers:**

The productivity of a system of education depends to a large extent on the teacher in charge of imparting such knowledge to the pupils. The absence of the teacher as of exemplary person educationwise and characterwise has been observed by Farhan as a dilemma of Western education. He sees a great dichotomy between his scholastic activity and his private and social life and so the Western teacher rather than being a role model is mere propagator of knowledge. In the Western circle, emphasis is laid on teachers' academic qualification with no consideration for character.³³ This no doubt has implications on the students who are invariably products of such teachers.

iv. **Product of Western Education:**

The materialistic personality in the individual, the contempt with which people look at religion and spiritual needs, the relegation of *'wah'i* knowledge and promotion of empirical knowledge are reflected in the products of the Western system of education. The alarming rate of rising number of cults and cult related activities on campus are evidences of the downplay of morality imminent in the system. Husain and Ashraf (1979) equally attribute the emergence of 'dance institutes, dramatic clubs, the cinema and the mode of fashions that cinemas and theatres encourage, state-sponsored cocktail parties, ladies 'fashion', as part of the life style of the products of the system.³⁴

v. **Inconsistency in concept, theories and findings:**

It has been observed by scholars that experts in modern sciences are over-confident, pompous and arrogant to realize the limits of their

knowledge. Based on this, their discoveries are at times being faulted while some could not withstand the test of time. An example of this is documented by Quraishi and Ali-Shah thus:

It is unfortunate that very often, theories and values are projected that are not yet proved and that are later abrogated. For instance, the atom was once considered indivisible; the concept later stood as badly shattered as the atom itself. Likewise, the concept of conservation of mass was once a fundamental "law"; it is not even a theory now. We were once told that a certain quality of butter or animal fat taken daily was essential for our health, but the effects of cholesterol accumulation have considerably reduced this importance of fats. And so on and so forth. This goes to prove that some findings of science are of a transient nature and subject to frequent revision.³⁵

It is inexhaustible to discuss the shortcomings of the Western system of education, which the Muslim world has absorbed itself in. The separation of *wahi* from 'aqli' knowledge, unjustified departmentalization of knowledge, excessive materialism and many others are few characteristics of this system of education.³⁶ An intellectual *jihad* is the only mammoth challenge before the Muslim intellectuals to overcome this malaise and to change the status quo for better.

Strategies for the *jihad*:

For a battle to be fought and won, there is the need to strategize the modality for carrying it out. The strategy starts from planning. An unplanned battle is usually at the favour of the opponent, hence the need to consider the following while planning for this intellectual *jihad*.

Enlightenment:

This involves awareness and creativity among the *ummah* on the status of Muslim education in the contemporary world. It is thus the first assignment of the Muslim intellectuals to expose and campaign against the crises in the Muslim education system and the need for the *ummah*

to stand to the task of liberating knowledge from further distortion, wrong manipulation and erosion. This step becomes essential in view of the fact that the *ummah* needs to be carried along in the process of the *jihad*, so that it may not ignorantly go against it. It is observed that some secularized Muslim elites have constituted themselves as stumbling stone for the programme of Islamization of knowledge, which they see as a threat to their prestige and profession. For this reason, every means has to be explored to make the *jihad* a communal and universal one. The print and electronic media, pamphlets, tracts and stickers must be used to reach the grass roots. Workshops, seminars, conferences and lectures and even personal contact must be organized for the purpose of sensitizing and synthesizing all stakeholders in the Muslim education to rise to this task.

Human and Material Resources Development:

There is need to identify and assess materials and personnel to be used for this *jihad*. Doing this, will afford one, the opportunity of realizing the standard of the equipment and the sophistication or otherwise of such materials. It is also necessary to study the available weapons of the other camps. If there is any need to procure foreign materials for this purpose, then there is the need to identify those that can suit one's environment and can be handled effectively well for the attainment of the laid down objectives. It would be suicidal to believe that a group is self-sufficient and does not need assistance or experience from anybody. After all, no system is completely bad or entirely independent.

The point we are trying to make is that the programme of Islamization of knowledge demands proper mastery of the Islamic legacy and proper understanding of the modern discipline. It goes further to critical assessment of both the Islamic legacy and the modern discipline. This

forms the basis of Al-Faruqi's twelve steps leading to Islamization of knowledge; the first seven steps represent our view of the planning stage for the intellectual *jihad*. The steps are:

Step 1. Mastery of the Modern Discipline: Categories Breakdown

Step 2. Discipline Survey

Step 3. Mastery of the Islamic Legacy: The Anthology

Step 4. Mastery of the Islamic Legacy: The Analysis

Step 5. Establishment of the Scientific Relevance of Islam to the Disciplines

Step 6. Critical Assessment of the Modern Discipline: The State-of-the-Art

Step 7. Survey of the *Ummah's* Major Problems

Step 8. Survey of the Problems of Humankind

Step 9. Creative Analysis and Syntheses

Step 10. Recasting the Disciplines under the Framework of Islam:

The University Textbooks

Step 11. Dissemination of Islamized knowledge ³⁷

The next step after the planning stage is that of development. This involves the actions of Muslim intellectuals in promoting intellectual activities in line with the Islamic epistemology. The task ahead is more than reframing the contents of their discipline from Islamic perspective. Rather, the methodology, process, organization, evaluation; the theoretical and practical aspects of every discipline must be made subservient to Islamic worldview. At this stage, Muslim intellectuals are to yield to Qur'anic call for the use of the senses to probe and explore the hidden treasures of Allah in the universe. It is not out of Islam to make intellectual attempts into considering foreign civilizations with a view to develop new science as well.

Another aspect of this stage is textbook development. Faith-laden textbooks that would reflect creativity and originality are expected to be written by Muslim intellectuals in their respective disciplines. Such books

must be written in local and national and international languages. These books when written must be revised and updated from time to time to withstand the contemporary situation and to avoid dormancy in knowledge. This fact is stressed by Husain when he says:

Human knowledge is a constantly changing process in the humanities as well as the sciences; nothing the source of which is man can ever stand still. To imagine that a set of books written in the twentieth century will forever solve the problem of Islamization is to nurse all illusion. Every new generation of Muslims must be prepared to re-examine knowledge in the light of their understanding to keep pace with advances outside the community.³⁸

In addition to the above, our libraries must be filled up with current relevant and well-researched materials such as text books, journals, theses and other reference materials in all subjects necessary for the advancement of human knowledge. This is highly important, looking at the fact that any educational transformation depends on well-planned, well-organized and well-coordinated library services.

Economic Strategy:

This stage further extends to sourcing fund for the *jihad* – the Islamization of knowledge programme. Promotion of outstanding Muslim scholarship could only be ensured when it is adequately funded. Muslim philanthropists must stand to the task of sponsoring this *jihad*. After all Muslim communities in Britain, France and the USA depend mostly on their private initiatives for generating funds for this programme. The institution of *zakat* must be embraced and properly managed by those in charge so that percentage of what is realized from there is set aside for the programme. Government assistance can also not be left out in this process as well.

Political Strategy:

One of the causes of the crises in the Muslim education system is the separation of thought from action, or in other words, the separation of power from religion. In the early history of Islam, proper mastery of religious knowledge was prerequisite to appointment to any political office. Acquisition of knowledge was considered a matter of compulsion for all before embarking on any business or profession. This made the political class of the period a true representative of the people and everybody saw the affair of the state as a joint responsibility. Any shortcoming of any of them was quickly overcome by the solidarity and total experience of all. Later, this unity between thought and action was broken and so everything began to deteriorate. The wide gulf between religion and politics consequently led to dependence solely upon reason by the political class, while intellectual class dissociated themselves from the political class. The outcome of situation like this could be realized in the Nigerian educational system where those in political power consider education less important by allocating only a meager percentage of their annual budget to education. According to Abdul Kareem, only 22.4% in 1999, 14.1% in year 2000 and 11% in the year 2001 was earmarked to the Ministries of Education, Health and Agriculture in Nigeria, while most developed countries of the world allocated about 50% of their annual budget to these important ministries. In the year 2001 Nigeria allocated 5% to Education whereas UNESCO recommends at least 26%. Because of the *laissez-faire* of the government toward education, only 3.0% of those who graduate from secondary schools pass on to the university.³⁹ The situation should not continue like this. Muslim intellectuals should now endeavor to strike a balance between the personal and the public values as exemplified by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) in his life. They

should not see politics as a dirty game to be played by the ignoramus or those who have shallow knowledge about their Creator. It is only when they are involved in politics that they will be able to use their mental energies to effect change in the society. This is the stage where curriculum, syllabi and other aspects of education could be innovated and given an Islamic touch. This is the stage where training of teachers based on Islamic paradigm becomes a public affair. This is the stage attained by Shaikh Uthman Dan Fodiyo when in 1804 he assumed the office of *Amirul-Muminin* and thus liberated his subjects from intellectual stagnation by Islamizing education, emphasizing women education, writing many text books and establishing schools. Stressing the indispensability of the combination of power and religion, Mawdudi is quoted to have observed:

If people are free to commit adultery, no amount of sermons will stop them. But if governments forbid adultery, people will find it easier to give up this evil practice. Similarly, it is not enough to preach sermons against drinking, gambling, usury, bribery, pornography and morally corrupting education, if the overall environment of the surrounding society encourages or at least condones these things. Power, however, can do much to eradicate them.⁴⁰

Establishment of Educational Institutions:

For the Muslims to be able to affect this change positively and effectively in the contemporary education system, there is the need for them to see the establishment of an Islamic university in this country as a matter of urgency. Reacting to this, Okunu is reported to have said:

A very important issue has arisen in our political educational landscape, the issue of Private universities. When the Christian Mission, notably the Baptists and the Catholics, already have permission to establish their universities and are making efforts to do so, the Muslim Ummah appears not to be aware of this

issue. And unless the Muslim Ummah rises to the occasion and acts positively, all the gains of the past 80 years in their search for knowledge will be lost. And we will enter the new Christian Millennium trying once again to catch up educationally with our Christian brethren as we did in the early 1920s.⁴¹

Our observation is that some of these Christian oriented universities are now in operation admitting both Muslims and non-Muslims in the universities of Nigeria. While only two are propertied by Muslim individuals and communities; namely Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin and Kastina University, Kastina.⁴² That not withstanding, the Crescent University, Abeokuta, Fountain University, Osogbo, Hijrah University, Ede and Shaykh Kamaldeen University, Ilorine, are all at advanced stage of taking off. Establishing Islamic universities is the only way. The efforts of the existing Muslim primary and secondary institutions will not be a waste, or else their products will end up being admitted into private un-Islamic universities where their previous Islamic background will get diluted or completely destroyed.

CONCLUSION:

Muslims throughout the world cannot afford to be stagnant, as this is against the spirit of human creation. Islam encourages creativity and so it will be a shortsightedness of the Muslims to remain static in efforts at making life comfortable through education. Indeed *jihad* entails an attempt for making life better and a shift from the prevailing unsatisfied condition to a better atmosphere conducive to human existence. The Islamization of knowledge is a new form of *jihad* to be fought by Muslim intellectuals against intellectual stagnation, cultural exploitations and all kinds of oppression which the *ummah* had been exposed since several centuries ago.

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