

Seminars, Conferences, Addresses

Shari'ah Sciences at the Universities: Reality and Prospectives

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Interest in the development of Shari'ah sciences at the universities has emerged in the context of efforts to reconstruct the cultural and intellectual paradigms of the Islamic ummah and affirm its role in directing and guiding the procession of human culture. As a result of this interest, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, the Islamic Studies and Research Association, Jordan University, Yarmouk University, and Mu'tah University held a conference on the subject.

Institutions that deal with the Shari'ah sciences, particularly universities, play a positive and effective role in awakening Islamic feeling among Muslims and in preventing Islamic thought from being diverted and becoming stagnant. It is therefore mandatory to support them and their objectives so that they can function as solid springboards for Islamic thought and serve as preparation centers for those ulama and *du'āt* who are expected to resolve the crises besetting contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

The importance of the Shari'ah sciences and knowledge has been recognized by past and present Muslim reformers: i.e., al Ghazālī called for the restoration of the religious sciences and Ibn Taymīyah called for the enactment of Muslim behavior congruent with the Prophet's tradition. Furthermore, contemporary reform movements have acknowledged the importance of this role and, consequently, considered the development of the Shari'ah sciences as a basic axis of reform and modernization. Along this line, one can mention the contributions of such reformers as Ḥassan al 'Aṭṭār, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, Khayr al Dīn al Tūnisi, Muḥammad al Ṭāhir 'Āshūr, 'Abd al 'Azīz al Tha'labī, and Ibn Badīs. However, several factors nullified these reformative efforts: the cognitive and psychological dichotomy created by the prevailing duality of education as well as the intellectual paradigm confirmed by the imitation of and preoccupation with external (rather than internal) affairs. Unfortunately, such factors have defeated the reformers' efforts.

Therefore, the continuous revision of the Shari'ah sciences and curricula, as well as the reality of their institutions, must receive an

amount of attention commensurate with their importance and their effect on Muslims. Indeed, it is not easy for one single meeting or conference to say the last word on this serious issue.

In addition to the opening and closing sessions, the conference featured ten working sessions. The opening session included speeches by the heads of the five institutions that participated in organizing the conference, and a general speech by the chairman, Ṭāhā J. al 'Alwānī, on the primordial theme of the conference.

Each working session was devoted to presenting, discussing, and commenting on the relevant papers. There were thirty-eight papers and two main lecturers presented by specialists from Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan, Britain, and the United States. Also, the conference was attended by eighty staff members of the Shari'ah faculties and departments and their graduate students from various Jordanian universities.

The papers covered five themes: a) the origin and development of the Shari'ah sciences, their relationship to the Arabic language and the human and social sciences, and their treatment methodology; b) the educational plans and programs of the Shari'ah sciences institutions at various levels; c) the curricula of the Shari'ah sciences at the universities along with their various components: objectives, contents, methods of teaching and evaluation, and textbooks; d) the recruitment criteria of students and teachers in the higher education institutions of the Shari'ah sciences; and e) the relation of the Shari'ah sciences institutions with the society and other institutions.

The participants made the following recommendations:

First: On the Development and Methodology of the Shari'ah Sciences:

- Revision of the Shari'ah sciences methodologies so that they can be developed in terms of structure, content, and choice of issues. This will enable students to deal with new situations and concepts and to cope with the new changes. However, the legal (*shar'i*) controls of this development and innovation must be observed.
- Development of a new methodology to deal with the Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, and the Islamic legacy.
- Development of a new epistemology to help construct a sound relationship between revealed knowledge and social sciences, through close cooperation among faculty members in the Shari'ah sciences and the human and social sciences, who are supposed to possess a sound amount of knowledge concerning each others' field of specialization.
- Giving due concern to the disciplines of the Arabic language and contemporary linguistics.

Second: On Study Plans and Programs:

- Revision of the university-level study plans and programs of the Shari'ah sciences so that each program qualifies the Muslim *du'āt* and produces competent intellectual leaders who can deal with urgent modern issues.
- The need for university-level Muslim scholars in the physical, technological, human, and social specializations to obtain enough knowledge of the Shari'ah sciences that will enable them to consolidate their society's entities and direction. At the same time, the specialists in the Shari'ah sciences need to acquire a reasonable knowledge of the human and social sciences and the other modern knowledge so that the universities insure an integrative interdisciplinary kind of education in both directions, a trend that is expected to help overcome the obstacles of dualism and cognitive and psychological separation among young educated Muslims.

Third: On the Curricula:

- Identification of the educational objectives of the Shari'ah sciences in such a manner that all relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies are clear. This will help teachers and students to select the content, teaching, and evaluation methods and to the use of relevant scientific measurement techniques and tools.
- Development of course content so that it balances the nature of the subject and its relation to the needs of the era, and so that the student can realize his distinct Islamic identity and interact through it with the requirements of the present era.
- Preparation of course textbooks with due consideration paid to content and methodology, and the realization of a balance between the need to use modern textbooks and the importance of consulting original and legacy references.
- Development of new teaching methods suitable for the nature of the subject and the needs and levels of students, which will enable them to think more thoroughly, discuss and debate issues more competently, and to inquire, research, and make use of modern educational technology.

Fourth: On the Teacher and the Student:

- Selection of exemplary, pious, disciplined, experienced and competent teachers as well as the continuous enhancement of their abilities through training courses that will enable them to have access to knowledge resources in their specialization and to the real issues and conditions of the society.

- Maintaining permanent contact channels among university professors of the Shari'ah sciences by holding periodical specialized seminars to discuss various aspects of the teaching process.
- Student selection should be based on a clear criteria of good conduct, religious behavior, and their desire for studying these sciences. Care must be taken of the various aspects of the student's personality, including good behavior, morality, and thought, so that each student's personality is integrated and balanced and maintained.
- Care should be given to foreign Muslim students, particularly those who do not speak Arabic and who are from minority populations. Requirements of leadership qualification and training should be provided to enable them to assume their prospective leadership role in their countries.

Fifth: On Research and Scholarly Production:

- Preparation for a series of specialized local, regional, and international seminars and conferences to address the crucial issues in our Islamic legacy. The conference views the following issues as having priority in such seminars and conferences:
 - The relationship between the Qur'an and Arabic and what is important for understanding the Qur'an, the development of Arabic and linguistics, and the clarification of the link between the absolutism of the Qur'an and the relativity of Arabic.
 - The methodology of dealing with the Qur'an, which is the source of Islamic thought, culture, and knowledge. The aim is to discover the Qur'anic epistemology and its reflection of the preceding aspects.
 - The methodology of dealing with the Prophet's sunnah as a source of Islamic thought, culture, and knowledge and as the implementation of the Qur'anic values in reality. This methodology should be viewed as the most important element in understanding the sunnah and tackling the historical and contemporary issues emanating from it.
 - The methodology for dealing with the Islamic legacy as a form of the development and progression of Islamic thought through time and space.
 - The methodology of dealing with the western legacy as an effective factor in the formation of the mind and culture of contemporary humanity.
 - The methodology for establishing a linkage between revealed knowledge and the human and social sciences.

- Urging university staff members to prepare textbooks on introductions to Shari'ah sciences, to establish a scientific link between the student and the science he/she is studying so that the introduction includes, in addition to the known educational and curricular specifications, a synopsis of the historical development, objectives, and schools of the particular science, its sources, basic books and areas of innovation and reactivity. All of this should be presented in the relevant global historical, geographical, and intellectual contexts as well as how that particular science is applied at the present time to achieve the required goals and to deal with new issues.
- Directing the research of graduate and postgraduate university students to be part of the methodologically governed accumulation of knowledge, to deal with the most important problems and challenges that face the ummah, and the identification of its cultural and cognitive identity.

Follow-up Committee:

Finally, the conferees recommend the formation of a follow-up committee composed of the conference chairman, the deputy, the rapporteur, and two members of the preparation committee. The overall objective of this committee will be to distribute these recommendations to the participants in the conference and to the concerned institutions, follow up with their implementation, supervise the publications of the conference, and translate papers into English and other Muslim languages so that as many people as possible can benefit from them.

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