

On Reflection:  
Towards an Islamic Dynamism  
in an Era of Globalism

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Muslims believe that the Message of Prophet Muhammad, may Peace be upon him, is the final message of God to the humankind, and that the Quran is the final divine scripture. The primary and general impression of such a belief on Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is that the message of Islam and its revealed book, the “Quran”, have to be followed literally by all who believe in them in every time and place until the end of the world. Unless it is explained to all minds that Islam and its divine sources have their dynamism from within to cope with changing needs in different times and places, it is difficult—or even impossible—for any contemporary mind, to understand how a message and a Book which came out more than fifteen centuries ago, can respond to the needs of our time in different material and socio-cultural circumstances all over the contemporary world. In an era of globalism, mass-production and mass-marketing and mass-communications through satellites and computers and the “Internet”, it is essential to show how may Islam fit in our contemporary world with its qualitative and radical changes.

The humankind through its enormously extensive succession in this world needs in its guidance what is permanent and responds to the common human essentials, and to what is changeable and responds to the variable needs of a certain human society in a particular time and place. Moral values as justice, honesty and truthfulness are permanently needed in any human society, but particular circumstances may require a specific articulation of these values to respond to the emerging changes. Is acquiring “state classified” or personal “private” information from computers by unauthorized persons immoral or dishonest,

and not only illegal? Is stealing electric power or telephone access from city cables dishonest? Should honesty and truthfulness be strictly observed in dealing with establishments such as stock markets and gambling casinos? How can Islam, whose sources were revealed fourteen centuries ago, respond to issues which have emerged only as an outcome of our contemporary scientific-technological development, such as: genetic engineering, surrogate motherhood and cloning?

Being the final divine revelation, the Quran has formulated its guidance in a general way, and has addressed and relied on the human mind which is entrusted by understanding and implementing God's guidance through unlimited variety of circumstances in different times and places. The divine guidance is the invaluable gift of God, and the human mind is the invaluable gift of God, and both have to interact—with one another and complement one another, not to contradict one another or ignore one another. The divine sources of Islam are not meant to be fixed and limited such as mathematical tables, or dictionaries or encyclopedias are formulated, and thus the human minds and activities have to strictly and mechanically stick to their statements. The divine sources are formulated in a general way, and presented to the human mind which has to understand and apply them to the changing circumstances. The human mind is always changing within the individual, the society, and the entire humanity; and thus the interaction of what is changeable with the permanent divine texts cannot be anything except changeable. The divine sources of Islam are permanent and unchangeable, but the Islamic human thinking in dealing with them has always been changing, as the intellectual history and heritage of Islam strongly prove.

We essentially need to emphasize this Islamic dynamism in our era of globalism, to stress how the general should interact with the particular so as to provide what is particular for the given time and place. Such dynamism can clearly

be realized in the legal heritage of Islam, even within the heritage of one juristic school. Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 820) has been ever mentioned for considerably changing his "madhab" when he changed his residence from Iraq to Egypt. Later jurists in any one "madhab" might have different views in many issues from the earlier ones for the changing circumstances, and the jurists of any one "madhab" who lived in different countries might have different views about the same issues according to their different circumstances.

Unless such an obvious and essential Islamic concept is emphasized and clarified, Muslims and non-Muslims alike will always face difficulty in understanding how the ever-changing human needs can be met through the permanent divine sources, especially in the legal rules. In light of such a dynamism, essential contemporary issues such as "human rights", including the rights of children, youth, women, and religious minorities, as well as necessary world cooperation, have to be discussed and presented in our distinctive era of globalism. How may the permanent principles be turned into variable practicalities? What is the legitimate juristic mechanism that bi-focus on the revealed truth and the human continuously changes? How may the permanent essentials be distinguished from circumstantial thinking and elaboration? How can we draw the line between the "divine" and the "human", between God's revelation and through the angel, and the intellectual reception and developed culture through the human thinking and actions? Through such an approach, Islamic dynamism can prove its constructive role in the contemporary world; and this will be always—in sha'a Allah (may God permit and help us to do)—in these "Reflections".

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