SCIENCE AND RELIGION AS THE FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION FOR PEACEFUL SOCIETY-SOME PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

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Introduction

There are four key terms that merit our attention: science, religion, education and society. Out of these four, the first two, seen from the context of this present topic of discussion warrant us greater attention. The reason is “science” and “religion” as knowledge discipline can be comprehended differently- in this respect: “science” and “religion" from the western perspective is different from science and religion from an Islamic perspective. As for “education” and “society" we do not need definitive discussion, perhaps what is needed here is to elaborate a general concept of education that purports to bring about peaceful society as couched in this topic of discussion.

Setting The Premise

In the western (European) tradition, briefly we can say that due the impact of humanism in the 14 and 15th centuries and followed by empiricism in the 17-18th centuries “science” and “religion” are two different knowledge domains- they are not only separated but they are also anathema to each other –resulting an epistemological problem: the dichotomous differentiation between the two sources of knowledge- (acquired and given) , the problem which this modern society is facing now. As both “science” and “religion” has its own domain, each asserts and advocate “truth”, thus we have “religious truth” and “scientific truth”. The latter is based on empirical data while the former is based on non-empirical data. This idea of dualism permeates in almost all aspect of human endeavors and thinking such as the notion of : the “sacred” versus “profane”, “religious” versus “secular”, “natural” versus “supernatural”, “church” versus “state”, “physical” versus “metaphysical”, etc.

From an Islamic perspective, the basic principle of Islamic epistemology is the concept of harmony (al-mizan) among the source of knowledge which is consistent with the Supreme Principle of Unity (al-Tawhid). Philosophically speaking there is a logical harmonious relationship between the ontological consciousness of unity and epistemological balance of all branches of knowledge, for a simple reason that all knowledge ultimately originates from Allah (Al-Qur'an, Chapter 55 verses 1-5).

Thus, Islamic epistemology advocates the notion of unity, oneness and integrated approach to understand all types of knowledge, be it science, religion, philosophy, humanities, etc. As for the ultimate truth, there is only one truth.
Thus, our own conviction is that the Islamic approach to understand science and religion can guarantee us a solid rock basis for a foundation of education of the society. It is in this aspect now we turn to.

Foundations of Education

We have already resolved the epistemological problem (posed by Science and religion in the western perspective) by employing an Islamic perspective. The focus of our discussion is that in what way or rather what role can science and religion play in bringing about a peaceful society? Or from educational point of view, it is assumed that the teaching and learning of science and religion will bring about a peaceful society. With this backdrop we will deliberate on the topic: how science and religion can be made as the basis of education in bringing about peaceful society.

First, let us find out the meaning of science in Islam. The Arabic term al-’ilm (plural: al-ulum) in English means science, sciences, thus “’ulum al-din”, the English rendering is religious sciences. The person who possesses al-’ulum is called al-’alim, and term ‘allamah gives the meaning of an expert on some disciplines of knowledge. From here we can say that there is no real distinction between “science” and “religion” as found in the western concept. What makes the difference is the way how knowledge is sought. From Islamic viewpoint acquisition of knowledge is of two types: one is God-given knowledge such as wahy (revelation), which explains about metaphysical and spiritual (unobservable) world and the other is acquired- knowledge that is achieved through senses, intellect and insight which deals with the observable world or the empirical world. Having said this now we can easily understand Ibn Khaldun’s categorization of knowledge: which is also of two types: (al-’ulum al-hikmiyya al-talasafiyya- philosophical sciences) and (al-’ulum al-naqliyya wa al-wadiyya- perennial “conventional” sciences). According to Ibn Khaldun (d 1406CE), all sciences (al-’ulum) emanate from Divine knowledge (al-’ulum al-naqliyya kullaha hiya al-shar’iyya).

Much earlier, Al-Ghazzali (d.1111CE) also categorized knowledge into two: ‘ulum al-aqliyya (intellectual knowledge) and ‘ulum al-shar’iyya (divine knowledge) and the two are likened the two faces of the same coin. Our understanding of ayat (signs) of God from reading the Holy Qur’an (al-ayat al-maqru’ah) is the same as what we see (observe) the signs (al-ayat al-manzurah) of God from nature (open book) that He created. This is basically what we understand by “science” and “religion” in the modern term. When we talk about the theory of knowledge in the Islamic epistemological system we are also talking about the source of knowledge, the means to knowledge, hierarchy of knowledge, classification or types of knowledge and application of knowledge which are all interconnected and all of them are well defined. It is not the intention of this paper to elaborate each and every aspect of it, rather this is to show the notion of the concept of al-Tawhid which is very central in Islamic epistemology. Philosophically speaking when we talk about Sciences (al-’ulum) it involves the realms of epistemology(
theory of knowledge), the realms of ontology (theory of creation) and the realms of axiology (theory of values). To ensure a sound foundation of educational processes that will enhance human transformation, the above three realms must be present. To this now we turn to.

**Aims of Education**

Cognizant of the presence of other aims, such as social, economical and political, the ultimate aim of education is to humanize humans. From our perspective, humanizing humans is in tandem with the inherent (God-given) nature of human beings, created in their best mould (ahsanu al-taqwim Q95:4) which serves as kinetic potentials to develop their faculties such as mental, spiritual and physical. In educational terms they are known as cognitive, affective and psycho-motor. The purpose of these development is to guide human being to realize his/her very existence, the purpose of this life, and the afterlife. In our religious term it is known as taqwa (piety), or God-fearing human being. Then comes the question of what sort of knowledge input or what type of instructional materials that are needed to develop these qualities. To enlighten us let us consider some of the thoughts forwarded by Ibn Khaldun’s pedagogical scheme (Chapter 6 of Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun). In learning processes, there are four elements involved: (i) the faculty of thinking (fikr) as the source of all kinds of learning, (ii) scientific instruction (sina’ā, a craft), (iii) acquisition of learning which turns into a habit (malaka) (iv) the knowledge of science which is the product of understanding (fahm). Then as to how this integrated processes could be maintained so as to ensure a continuous process of education (life-long education, utlubu al- ‘ilma min al mahdi ila al-lahdi), Ibn Khaldun introduced the term al-sanad fi ‘l- ta’lim, literally means continuity of teaching tradition. We will now deliberate on the concept of al-sanad fi al-ta’lim in our present context.

**Requisites For Peaceful Society**

Ibn Khaldun’s theory of human civilization (‘umran al-bashari) is the result of flourishing scientific instruction (ta’lim al-ilm), supported by the existence of political stability and continuity of teaching tradition (al-sanad fi ‘l-ta’lim). He contends that civilization must be built upon the triumph of knowledge and sciences. He co-relates sedentary (hadhari) or urban culture with the achievement of sciences and craft as opposed to nomadic (badawi) culture devoid of knowledge and learning tradition. Of equally important aspect in building good society he attributed this learning processes which he called sina’ā (a form of craft) which is identical to habit (malaka) of the people at large. By habit it is meant that the habitual doings of the community that are in consonance with the Islamic norms. This is what the concept of ma’rufat (sing. ma’ruf) as opposed to munkarat (sing. munkar) informs us. All ma’rufat (good deeds or actions) are the habitual deeds of a people and everybody does that because the
norms are widely accepted by the society, while those bad deeds (munkarāt) are not a common thing, let alone become a habit of the society.

Based on Ibn Khaldun’s theory on human civilization we have identified three pertinent elements that contribute to the well-being of any human society.
   a) the existence of teaching and learning tradition in the society
   b) the observance of al-amru bil ma’ruf wa al-nahyu ‘anil munkar (inviting to good deed and forbidding evil)
   c) the existence of political stability.

What is more revealing is the concept of malaka (habits) in which according to Ibn Khaldun the notion of understanding, appreciation and conscientization (al-fahm wa al-wai) is embedded within the society. In other words, the impact of continuous teaching and learning processes will transform the society into God-fearing, virtuous and grateful. This is perhaps what al-Farabi (d.950CE) termed as al-Madinah al-Fadhilah when he explains the concept of virtuous city or in al-Ghazzali’s term “kimia al-saadah” when he describes the concept of happiness.

Teaching and Learning Tradition in the Present Society.

The idea of life-long education is not new to us. So as also our understanding of the role of education in any society. With the assumption as portrayed in the above topic “science and religion as the foundation of education for a peaceful society” we have discovered that it is not a straight forward discourse, rather it warrants strict qualifications with some set of requisites. Based on the above discussion, the following observations may help us in coming to a meaningful conclusion.

1 By “science” we mean that all knowledge pertaining to observable world or physical world, be it natural sciences or human sciences and by “religion” we that all knowledge pertaining to unobservable world or metaphysical world, such knowledge about God (theology), about creation (ontology), about final destiny (teleology).

2 Discipline of knowledge under the nomenclature of “Science” and “religion” is by no means the two are separate, rather they are one likened two faces of the same coin as espoused by the concept of Tawhid.

3 There must be a continuous teaching-learning tradition cutting across all strata of human society whether in the form of formal, informal and non-formal education.

4 This continuous teaching-learning tradition, aside from imparting knowledge and skills that are required for the well-being of this worldly life, there must be also a continuous process of imparting good values as decreed by the quranic
concept of *amr bil ma’ruf wa nahyu ‘anîl munkar*. The latter will ensure the well-being of the life hereafter.

5 The existence of political stability which is essentially the result of the above four elements is required by the society so as to enhance conducive environment for the continuous teaching-learning processes at the greater heights.

Conclusion

What we have been deliberating this far is not an utopia. We have resorted to many ideas of the past, and this does not mean that we cannot afford to solicit modern and contemporary ideas. Following the principle of fiqh such as *al-jam ‘u bayn al-qadim al-salîh wa al-jadid al-naﬁ’*, meaning: an integration between the relevant past which is good with the contemporary one that is worthy and in another version: *al-muhafazatu ‘ala al-qadimi al-salihu wa akhzu bi al-jadidi al-aslahu* meaning, preserving the good aspect of the past and taking the new ones which are better. It is in this spirit, in our humble opinion that these ideas, such as the concept of *‘umran al-bashari*, which is not only a great idea but it is universal in nature. We are convinced that with sincere reflection on some of the principles that have been laid down by our past thinkers and with some adjustments and modifications to suit the need of our present society, we will be able to contribute invaluable service to the society. This is what we all aspire for, and may Allah reward us.

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