Encounter

DOCUMENTS FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

In the present issue we will examine some Muslim perspectives in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in a moment when we are witnessing a polarizing clash between Islam and Christianity, particularly in the Middle East. Consequently a quest for wider dialogue has become an urgent issue.

If ask ourselves where inter-religious dialogue begins, the answer to this question is very simple: dialogue is born wherever people have goodwill. Dialogue requires empathy together with realism and understanding and among the basic areas where this dialogical attitude can be enhanced is the field education, which cannot be considered an isolated one, but interacts with it and is influenced by other sectors in society, such as family, media etc.

The contribution of Fr. Paolo Nicelli introduces us to the Indonesian philosopher Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas's philosophy of education and his spiritual approach to knowledge. In fact he criticizes the Western understanding of knowledge, which is based on a dichotomy between principles and their application in reality that has as a result of a relativistic approach to reality. He sees that this can be overcame through the Islamic concept of education which represents the acknowledgment and the experience of the truth, that is, the application in the educational field of the directions given by the Qur'anic revelation to all Muslim believers, as the request to promote truth, justice and wisdom in the world. In this sense his work and his concern are directed to help both Muslims and Islamic societies to understand that modernity is not in conflict with religion, because faith is a reasonable act of the human being. In this sense he tries to promote a sort of dialogue-confrontation, at the intellectual and cultural level, which can deter any fundamentalist and violent attempt to promote a non-moderate Islam in the modern world.

Fr. Victor Edwin reports on the life and the thoughts of another Asian Muslim, the Indian scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who is one of the main promoters of interfaith dialogue in the Subcontinent for the greater service of humanity and whose spirit of enquiry, which animates his way of life opens new ways to cultivate knowledge and awareness among the Muslims. He differs essentially from the key thesis of Maulana Maududi, for whom preaching *tawḥīd* necessarily implied the effort to establish theocratic government and he suggests that the "political interpretation of Islam defeats the very purpose for which Islam was revealed". He also stressed "the need to live in peace and harmony with all people and that "the only way to establish peace is to adopt the formula of 'Peace for

the sake of peace', without attaching any conditions to it", thus offering us an interesting reflections on freedom of Religion as well as on *Jihad*.

Fr. Edwin concludes by saying that "three words mark the way of life of Maulana Khan: *connect*, *include*, and *expand*", stressing his openness to others and their views without rejecting them, which makes him an authentic Muslim missionary and a man of dialogue.

A concise and at the same time rich and profound report of the Shi'ah Institute's Annual Symposium 2016: "Lamenting Karbala. Commemoration, Mourning and Memory" provided by Fr. Christopher Clohessy will conclude this issue and enlarge its horizon.

God Bless you!

Francesco Zannini

Syed Muḥammad Naquib Al-Attas and the Islamic Philosophy of Education

(THE QUEST FOR TRADITION AND RENEWAL IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD)

Fr. Paolo Nicelli, PIME, PhD[1]

Since the eighteenth century, there has been in the Islamic world an ongoing debate about the relationship between Tradition and Renewal, and in which the issue of relations between different cultures has become crucial. Contacts between Islamic culture and civilization and Western and Oriental cultures and civilizations have brought about a process of transformation at every level of social and cultural life in the Islamic world. Such a process of transformation is quite challenging, in terms of a positive reconsideration of different approaches to Islamic Tradition and Renewal. However, also evident is the ongoing process of Islamization based on the ideological violence expressed by ğihādism, which gives the idea that Islām is a religion of hatred towards any different experience of faith and idea of culture. This ideological position brings about a kind of xenophobia from the Islamic world towards 'other worlds', and vice versa. In this situation, it is very important to create a balance between innovation on the one hand and the necessity of maintaining a strong bond with religions and cultural roots on the other. Until now, there have been different proposals towards overcoming this situation, but most of them were too inadequate to solve the problem. Sometimes they were counterproductive to the promotion of that required spiritual and material development for a basic common ground on which to build dialogical relations.

On one side, there are those who promote the modernization of Islamic societies, adopting the secular understanding of life, which is part of modernity. They think that Muslims must emancipate themselves from classical understanding and practices of Islām. Such a position has is strongly limited in promoting an Islamic identity, because it conforms Muslims to an external model, which is considered hostile by them, because of its political connotations. On the other side, there are those who want to preserve what they call the 'permanent validity of the Islamic system', saying that the present decadence of Muslim societies is due to the loss of the application of systematic and coherent forms of the same Islamic system. In reality, they refuse to recognize the alleged inadequacy of such a system,

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which probably needs to be reformed. Such a position has the limit of promoting a return to the past: a mythical past, evoked not for what it really was, but ideologically reconstructed according to the present situation. This position affirmed itself during the last thirty years within the Muslim world. According to these two ideological positions, the question is whether Muslims should modernize Islām or Islamize modernity. The ultimate answer is yet to be found, and puts the two parties in a situation of impasse, with no way out.

Within recent years, a few voices have arisen to dialogue seriously with modernity, proposing different approaches, which are related to the quest for Tradition and Renewal in the Islamic world. They try to overcome the impasse, mentioned above, whether to accept or to refuse modernity. They want to establish a sincere dialogue-confrontation with modernity, answering to two seemingly contradictory but actually complementary requirements. First of all, they want to evolve themselves, accepting positively the challenge of modernity, with no passive acceptance of the materialistic style of life contained in the modern world. Secondly, they want to preserve the Islamic tradition and Islamic values, without mythologizing the past for ideological purposes, but to preserve these values as a common heritage, that needs to be interpreted and appreciated for the good of contemporary humanity. In order to reach these two requirements, these intellectuals want to dialogue with their cultural and religious tradition, integrating it within the wider cultural context created by different religions and cultures. In South East Asia, Islām historically integrated itself with pre-Islamic cultures, adapting different aspects and values of these local cultures to Islamic culture and religion. Certainly, Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas, a philosopher, theologian and philologist, proposed his personal method to introduce Islām and Islamic values within the plural context of Indonesia and Malaysia. His approach to Islamic and Western metaphysics as well as Oriental ways of thinking, led him to recognize the need for a spiritual and philosophical approach for the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. According to him, true knowledge cannot be separated from a philosophical approach to education, in order to recuperate that right action *(adab)*, which is the deepening of Islamic faith from *islām* to *imān* to *iḥsān*, expressed by *ṣūfī* way of life. Such a way of life introduces the fundamental values and elements of the worldview of Islām.

THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas, born in Bogor (Java) on September 5, 1931, is a prominent Indonesian philosopher, scholar and lecturer in the field of Islamic philosophy, theology and metaphysics,[2] who spent many years in Malaysia. He is a university Professor of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Founder and Director of the International Institute of Is-

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[2]   Cfr. AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur 2001.

lamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), and Distinguished Holder of the al-Ghazālī Chair of Islamic Thought. He is also an expert in the Malaysian history of classical literature,[3] focusing on art and civilization.[4] Some of his works deal with the philosophy and methodology of education in Islām,[5] directed towards the Islamization of the mind, body and soul of Muslims, in order to orient their personal and collective lives to spirituality. His philosophical approach is rooted in the traditional Islamic sciences, with the purpose of promoting the Islamization of knowledge. In this sense, the foundation in 1987 of ISTAC in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) was aimed at accomplishing the task of integrating Islām as religion and culture into the consciousness of young fellow researchers and academics in general. Very important are his studies in Malay Literature and the early Malay mystics, based on 16th and 17th century manuscripts. Such studies are part of his two-volume doctoral thesis on the Mysticism of Hamza Fansuri (d. 1590),[6] which is still one of the most comprehensive research works on the great *ṣūfī* scholar. In this sense, al-Attas, along with Professor A. Teeuw, established that Hamza Fansuri was the originator of Malay ša'ir.[7] Al-Attas also studied the Indian mystic

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[3]   On classical Malay literature see: LIAW YOCK FANG, *A History of Malay Classical Literature,* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore – Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, Jakarta 2013.

[4]   AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Origin of the Malay Sha'ir,* Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur 1968: IDEM, *Concluding Postscript to the Origin of the Malay Sha'ir,* Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur 1971: BAUSANI A., *Notes on the Structure of the Classical Malay Hikayat,* Translated from Italian by Lode Brakel. Working Paper, n. 16 Melbourne: Centre of South East Asian Studies, Monash University 1979, in P. LIM PUI HUEN, *The Malay World of Southeast Asia. A Select Cultural Bibliography,* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore 1986, p. 360 (https://books.google.it) last view October 3, 2016.

[5]   AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education,* the keynote address delivered at the 'First World Conference on Muslim Education', held in Makkah al-Mukarramah in March 1977, ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur 1999.

[6]   Cfr. AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri,* University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur 1970: BRUINESSEN M. VAN, «The Origins and Development of Ṣūfī Orders (Tarekat) in Southeast Asia,» in Studia Islamika, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April-June), Jakarta, 1994, p. 6: STEENBRINK K., «Qur'ān Interpretations of Hamza Fanzuri (ca. 1600) and Hamka (1908-1982): a Comparison,» in Studia Islamika, Vol. 2, No. 2, Jakarta, 1995, pp. 73-95. According to G. W. J. Drewes, Hamza Fansuri died around year 1590. Other scholars indicate year 1600 for the death of the Sumatran poet.

[7]   Cfr. A. TEEUW, *The Malay Sha'ir. Problems of Origin and Tradition,* English translation of a paper read at the meeting of the Osters Genootschap at Leiden, on November 3, 1965, in (www. Sabrizain.org/Malaya/library/malayshair.pdf), pp. 429-446, ultima consultazione 3 ottobre 2016.
      The Arabic term ša'ir (sha'ir), indicates a pre-Islamic Arab poet, believed to have magical powers. According to tribe culture, the ša'ir was an oracle or a wise man, with supernatural powers, sometimes elected to be an advisor to rulers. Indicating that Hamza Fansuri was the originator of Malay ša'ir, al-Attas writes: "I came across an article by Professor A. Teeuw of Leiden entitled *The Malay Sha'ir, problems of origin and tradition.* Teeuw's important paper in which, after an extensive examination of the relevant available literary source materials, both internal and external to Malay literature, he put forward his idea that Ḥamzah's *sha'ir* is possibly the origin of Malay *sha'ir,* has spurred me to re-examine my own conclusions on the same topic. Having re-examined the validity of the critical analytical method of approach by which I have arrived at such a conclusion, I have been able to satisfy myself in re-affirming it now. It is worthwhile and timely to re-write here some of my arguments on Ḥamzah being the originator of the Malay *sha'ir* based upon my conclusion as set forth in the concluding chapter of my book", in S.M.N. AL ATTAS, *The Origin of the Malay Sha'ir...,* pp. 1-2.

and scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Raniri (d. 1658), who arrived in Aceh in 1637 and became one of the advisors to the sultan Iskandar Thani (who reigned from 1636 to1641).

Introducing Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas' philosophy of education is not a simple task: it requires a deep understanding of his metaphysical approach to Islamic philosophy,[8] which covers different fields such as the concept of religion and the foundation of ethics and morality, the philosophy of science related to the nature of man and the psychology of the human soul. In his introduction to the *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām,* a collection of essays on the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islām, al-Attas writes that, according to the Islamic perspective, such a 'worldview' cannot be understood merely as:

"[…] the mind's view of the physical world and of man's historical, social, political and cultural involvement in it as reflected, for example, in the current *naẓrat al-islām li al-kawn.* It is incorrect to refer to the worldview of Islām as *naẓrat al-islām li al-kawn.* This is because, unlike what is conveyed by *naẓrat,* the worldview of Islām is not based upon philosophical speculation formulated mainly from observation of the data of sensible experience, of what is visible to the eye: nor it is restricted to *kawn,* which is the world of sensible experience, the world of created things […] Islām does not concede to the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane: the worldview of Islām encompasses both *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirah,* in which the *dunyā*-aspect *must* be related in a profound and inseparable way to the ākhira-aspect, and which the ākhira-aspect has ultimate and final significance. The *dunyā*-aspect is seen as a *preparation* for the ākhira-aspect. Everything in Islām is ultimately focused on the ākhira-aspect without thereby implying any attitude of neglect of being unmindful of the *dunyā*-aspect."[9]

According to al-Attas, modern sciences base their understanding of reality on a phenomenal world, which has an end in itself. Such a rational attitude is due to that insatiable search for material benefits, which is based on a pragmatic approach to life and nature. What is missed here is the spiritual approach to knowledge, which brings about the consideration that sciences cannot consider mankind as the result of an empiric process, or the result of an economic theory. According to him, there is a serious risk of diverting the real purpose of knowledge: to search for the truth. To reduce knowledge to the accomplishment

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[8] In al-Attas' view, Islamic metaphysics is considered as a unified system that describes the ultimate nature of realty, integrating the correct use of reason on one side with the experience of life and faith on the other side. In this sense, this combination of factors can be connected to other higher orders in the supra-rational and trans-empirical levels of human consciousness. Therefore, the empirical level that human sciences can reach in discovering the contents of reality is not enough to understand its objectivity, since it does not give any understanding of the meaning and sense contained in it. For this reason, al-Attas tries to follow the *ṣūfī* way of life, in understanding how reality is related to the Absolute, to God.

[9] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *Prolegomena...,* p. 1.

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of material benefits brings about the question of the validity of such a knowledge. In his book *Islām and Secularism,* al-Attas considers the continuous changing of Western civilization as the real cause for the reduction of the concept of knowledge,[10] which is affecting the development of Islamic nations and societies in their educational objectives. In a sense, the West is negatively influencing that balance between changing conditions and permanent aspects, which, according to Islamic metaphysics, is the real foundation of reality:

"[…] the knowledge and the rational and scientific spirit have been recast and remoulded to fit the crucible of Western culture so that they have become fused and amalgamated with all the other elements that form the character and personality of Western civilization. But the fusion and amalgamation thus evolved produced a characteristic dualism in the world view and values of Western culture and civilization: a dualism that cannot be resolved into a harmonious unity for it is formed of conflicting ideas, values, cultures, beliefs, philosophies, dogmas, doctrines and theologies altogether reflecting all-pervasive dualistic vision of reality and truth locked in despairing combat. Dualism abides in all aspects of Western life and philosophy: the speculative, the social, the political, the cultural – just as it pervades with equal inexorableness the Western religion."[11]

In his critic of the Western understanding of knowledge,[12] al-Attas is able to describe the dualism of Western culture that is the result of a secularized attitude towards life. Human values can reproduce this dichotomy between principles and their application in reality, which demonstrate how difficult it is to harmonize the content of values. Such a dichotomy poses the quest for the correct understanding of what is good for human being and what is evil and to be avoided. This dualism between principles and their application is in reality the result of a relativistic approach to reality, caused by the incorrect use of reason, which states that nothing in itself is something in its objectivity: it is something only from a subjective point of view. According to such ideology, affirming that everything is

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[10] "[…] so is knowledge of two kinds: the one is food and soul for the soul, and other is provision with which man might equip himself in the world in his pursuit of pragmatic ends. The first kind of knowledge is given by God through revelation to man: and this refers to the Holy Qur'ān. The Holy Qur'ān is the complete and final Revelation, so that it suffices for man's guidance and salvation: and there is no other knowledge - except based upon it and pointing to it – that can guide and save man. God, however has never ceased to communicate with man, and out of His Grace, Bounty and Charity He may bestow the favor of specific spiritual knowledge and wisdom upon the elect among His servants – His 'Friends' (i.e. the *awlīya'*) – in proportion to their various degree of *iḥsān* (q. v. 10:62, 18:65, 31:12, 38:20). The Holy Qur'ān is the knowledge par excellence." AL-ATTAS S.M.N., Islām and Secularism, ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur 1993, pp. 144-145. Al-Attas underlines that the corruption of knowledge is the result of a process of secularization of life and society, which is opposing the gain of material benefits to the religious moral values contained in the revelation, the true knowledge, from which every human knowledge is coming.

[11] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *Islām and Secularism...,* pp. 134-135.

[12] Cfr. WAN MOHD NOR WAN DAUD, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muḥammad Naquib Al-Attas. An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization,* ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur 1998, pp. 72-73.

something in is objectivity while related to the Absolute, to God, is a nonsense, not to be accepted by reason. Therefore, the objectivity of the real in itself is submitted to that subjectivity or to that uncontrollable and insatiable desire of prosperity, which drives people to look for material benefits only.

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN ISLĀM

At this point, it becomes important to apply a methodology, which helps people to apply the correct use of reason. Such a methodology can be called 'education', as a guidance for correctly understanding reality and avoiding any erroneous interpretation. Now, two questions arise: what kind of education do we mean here? According to Muslim understanding, what is education all about? Following al-Attas' understanding of education, he says that the term *tarbiyah* (education) is not correct for connoting the sense of Islamic education. Education requires a more articulated process, which involves what education is in itself and what it is in its implementation. According to the Western understanding, education is a "process of instilling something into human beings."[13] The process of instilling indicates the method and the system by which "education is gradually imparted: 'something' refers to the content of what is instilled: and 'human beings refers to the recipient of both the process and the content".[14] At this point, we have three elements that constitute education: the process, the content and the recipient. Between these three elements emerges 'the process', as the most important factor of education, reducing education to a mere theory and methodology to be applied in reality. However, education is also something progressively instilled into man, and the fact that we introduce the human factor, which is the subject of education, changes the order of the three elements mentioned above: the important element is now 'the content' and no longer the process. According to al-Attas, we have to start from man, since he is the subject of education. Man is a 'rational animal' and rationality refers to reason: however, in Western philosophy the concept of rationality is historically controverted and does not fit with the Muslim idea of rationality, which does not separate rationality from the intellect *(intellectus)*. Muslim thinkers did not understand the *ratio* as something separated from *intellectus*. They think that *'aql* (reason) is the unity between *ratio* and *intellectus*: hence, the conclusion that man is a rational animal *(al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq)*.

Man also has the capacity to formulate meaning, which involves judgement, discrimination and clarification as the elements of rationality. Such a capacity is expressed through the articulation of linguistic symbols into meaningful patterns, which are the outward form as

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[13] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education. A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education,* ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur 1999, p. 14.

[14] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 14.

a visible and audible voice of the inner that is called *'aql* (reason). According to the Arabic language, this term means the 'binding' or the 'withholding' in the meaning an "innate property that binds and withholds the objects of knowledge by means of words."[15] *'Aql* is synonymous with the spiritual substance *qalb* (heart), and *qalb* is synonymous with *'aql*. Hence, *'aql* is considered a spiritual reality by which the rational soul may recognize and distinguish what is right from what is evil. In conclusion, when we say 'I', we mean this spiritual substance, which is man in himself. Therefore, when we talk about education in relation to man, we have to comprehend not only the physical aspect or 'animal aspect', but more than that, the spiritual substance that is man in his inner relation with God.

When Muslim thinkers talk about 'rationality', they mean the capacity for understanding speech and the capacity for the formulation of meaning, which involves judgment, discrimination, distinction, clarification. According to al-Attas, such a capacity is based on the "recognition of the place of anything in a system, where that recognition occurs when the *relation* a thing has with other things in the system becomes *clarified* and *understood*."[16] Such a recognition is comprehensible in the concept of *ma'nā* (meaning), which is the 'mental image' in which a word or an expression is applied. Al-Attas says that we have *mafhūm* (understood), when the word or the expression become an idea or a notion in the mind. Such an idea or notion is objectively understood in reality as an essence, which is something that exists outside of the mind, and is called *ḥaqīqah* (reality): and that is a "specific reality distinguished from the others (that) is called 'individuality' or 'individual existence *(huwīyah)*."[17] In this sense, al-Attas may formulate a definition of 'meaning': "the recognition of the place of anything in a system which occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified and understood."[18]

Another factor that is related to education is its 'content,' which al-Attas indicates as 'something'. According to him:

"The teaching and the learning of skills alone, however scientific, and no matter if what is taught and learned is encompassed in the general concept 'knowledge', does not necessarily constitute education. The teaching and the learning of the human, natural and applied sciences alone does not constitute education in the sense we are clarifying. There is 'something' in knowledge, which if it is not inculcated will not make its teaching, and learning and assimilation an education. In fact, the 'something' that we allude to here is itself knowledge: indeed, it is knowledge of the *purpose* of seeking it."[19]

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[15] AL ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 14.

[16] AL ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 15.

[17] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 15.

[18] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 15.

[19] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 16.

For al-Attas, Muslims agree that all knowledge comes from God. However, "the manner of its arrival and the faculties and senses that receive and interpret it are distinctively not the same."[20] Therefore, knowledge being a gift from God, it must be interpreted by the soul through its spiritual and physical faculties. In this sense, God being the origin of knowledge means that knowledge with reference to God is the "arrival in the soul of the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge": with reference to the soul as its interpreter, knowledge is the "arrival of the soul at the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge."[21] In this sense, knowledge is that 'something' coming from God as a gift given to us, which sustains the soul in understanding the reality of an object in its essence and not in its physical aspect only. Such a concept of knowledge leads the knower to understand reality and the objects of reality in themselves, in their objectivity, which means as they really are, and in the right place for which they have been created. "In fact a thing or an object of knowledge is other than what it is, and that 'other' is what it means."[22]

Epistemologically speaking, knowledge being the arrival in the soul of the meaning of a thing or the arrival of the soul at the meaning of a thing, the knower cannot understand things superficially only, basing his understanding of things on the simple basis of his senses. In fact, the understanding of things, simply as things, leads to an erroneous knowledge, that is, to the ordinary level of experience. On the contrary, the understanding of things in their essence and purpose leads to a deeper level of experience, which means to the understanding of the real meaning of things. Applying this concept to the relations between created things and their Creator, who is God, knowledge, as referring to meaning, "consists of the recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence."[23] However, for al-Attas, 'recognition' alone does not imply a "concomitant action to behave in accordance with the requirements of what is recognized."[24] If true, recognition must be followed by acknowledgment, the knower must follow the requirements, which make him know the right or proper place of things. Then the knower must act in order to realize such requirements. Hence, the complete definition that al-Attas gives to the content of education: as the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.

Al-Attas notice that the concept of 'proper place' indicates two domains of application: the ontological domain, which includes man and the empirical world, and the theological

[20] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 16.

[21] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 17.

[22] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 17.

[23] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 18.

[24] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 19.

domain, which includes the religious and ethical aspects of human existence. In fact, 'proper place' signifies 'real' and 'true', both included in the meaning of the term *haqq* (truth). The term *haqq* indicates a judgment *(hukm)*, in opposition to *bāṭil* (falsehood, something vane, futile). Then *haqq* signifies the search for those requirements of wisdom and justice, which place in the knower the right or proper place of things. In this case, the knower can realize that unity between justice and wisdom, which is the correct way to apply that knowledge given by God, in having right judgments and acting properly. Therefore, al-Attas says: "Truth or *haqq* is then a *suitableness to the requirements of the proper places of things as recognized by true judgment*."[25] Therefore, when the truth is revealed to the knower by God through knowledge, it becomes important for him to conform his life to that truth, putting himself in the proper place. In this sense, his conformity with truth indicates the recognition of such a truth in both domains, the ontological and the theological, and expresses the necessity to conform his conduct to truth. Thus, *haqq* means also 'duty' and 'obligation', to be kept by the knower as manifestation that something true has changed within. Al-Attas indicates such a change as the real 'acknowledgment', which is "the fundamental element in true 'recognition' in the Islamic concept of education,"[26] which means affirmation and confirmation or realization and actualization in ourselves of what we have recognized: the truth. In this sense, we may have the complete understanding of what education is in itself: the acknowledgment and the experience of truth.

THE MEANING OF ADAB AND THE ACQUISITION OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE

According to al-Attas, understanding reality means recuperating the real meaning of *adab*, right action, based on the recognition of the integration between reason and experience of life and faith. For him, the process of the acquisition of knowledge cannot be called 'education' unless that knowledge includes a moral purpose. *Adab*, as a right action, comes from self-discipline based on objective knowledge, whose source is wisdom. Wisdom is the combination between the correct use of reason, in understanding and recognizing all the factors of reality, and the experience of life and faith: "For the sake of convenience I shall translate *adab* simply as 'right action'. There is an intrinsic connection between meaning and knowledge. I define 'meaning' as the *recognition of the place of anything in a system, which occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified and understood.* 'Place' refers to right and proper place in the system: and 'system' here refers to the Quranic conceptual system as formulated into a worldview by tradition and articulated by religion. Knowledge as we have already defined is the *arrival of meaning,*

[25] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 21.

[26] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...*, p. 21.

and the *soul's arrival at meaning,* and this is the *recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such as it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.* But knowledge as such does not become an education unless the recognition of proper places is actualized by acknowledgment – that is by confirmation and affirmation in the self – of the reality and truth of what is recognized. Acknowledgement necessitates action that is proper to recognition. *Adab,* or right action, consist of such acknowledgment. Education, then, is the absorption of *adab* in the self."[27]

Therefore, if the recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence, true knowledge cannot be separated from that Wisdom that is present at the very beginning of creation: God. The Qur'anic revelation is, according to al-Attas, the place where true knowledge can reach the soul of the believer, giving meaning to his life and action. But knowledge, without a methodology of life directed to truth, is not enough for deepening the sense of life in itself, for reaching that sense which gives the true understanding of reality and society. Then al-Attas introduces education, as the absorption of *adab,* the right action of the believer in looking for good and avoiding evil. It is the actualization of that right action in our personal life, in our self, that makes the difference in society, opening to the individual and the collective, transformation towards justice, as the reflection of wisdom, which is the light coming from the lamp of prophecy. Such prophecy enables the discovering of the right and proper place to be, as a condition of being. *Adab* becomes that cognitive action for the actualization of the condition of being in the proper place. In this sense, *adab* is the reflection of wisdom, which brings about the right and just order in society: "it is the spectacle of justice (*'adl*) as it is reflected by wisdom (*ḥikmah*)."[28]

Describing the human self or soul, al Attas says that there are two aspects to be considered: first of all, the soul which is predisposed to the acts of faith. Such a soul is intelligent by nature, loyal to God and open to recognize his will: it is the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*). Secondly, is the soul which is bestial by nature and inclined to evil. Such soul does not recognize and follow the will of God, and it can be called the carnal or animal soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawanīyah*). If the rational soul subjugates the animal soul and controls it, the

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[27] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *Prolegomena...,* p. 17. "*Adab* is the discipline of body, mind and soul: the discipline that assures the recognition and acknowledgment of one's proper place in relation to one's physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials: the recognition and acknowledgment of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various levels *(marātib)* and degrees *(daraǧiāt)* [...] Its actualization in one and in society as a whole reflects the condition of justice *('adl).* Justice itself is a reflection of wisdom *(ḥikmah)* [...] *Adab* is the method of knowing by which we actualize the condition of being in the proper place [...] So *adab,* in the sense I am defining here, is also a reflection of wisdom: and with respect to society *adab* is the just order with it", in AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...,* p. 22.

[28] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *Prolegomena...,* p. 17.

animal soul can be put in its proper place and *adab* towards oneself is realized. Alternatively, when the animal soul is not controlled, we will have the loss of *adab,* which drives men and society to confusion and error in knowledge, and which brings about the conflict within the *umma islāmīya,* through division (*fitna*). The rise of leaders, who are not qualified for valid leadership, is the result of the loss of *adab,* since they do not express the moral, intellectual and spiritual values required for a Muslim leader. In this sense they are not in their proper place of being, corrupting the *umma* and the society in itself. Therefore, such corruption brings from within any kind of evil thoughts and actions, corrupting the outside of the soul. Hence, the confusion and error in knowledge can become the real cause for a vicious circle of life lived by the members of society, and then the corruption of society in itself. The development of a Muslim society in an Islamic state means to transform society into a virtuous place in which to live. Such an objective can be realized only when the bearer of knowledge, the true Muslim, fulfils the requirements of *adab*: only after that can the believer touch the Qur'ān, the source of true knowledge.[29] In this sense, the believer will represent both within himself and without, the theological and spiritual reality of the *khilāfah allāhi* (The Caliphate of God). In becoming the *khalīfah allāhi,* the faithful are called by God to order the world and society according to the will of God, promoting good and avoiding evil.

As a conclusion of this brief exposition on al-Attas' understanding of the Islamic philosophy of education, we must underline the main concept of education that the philosopher formulated through his epistemological, ontological and theological overview. Education is "the recognition and acknowledgment, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence."[30] Such an acknowledgment is not only directed towards posing the quest for tradition and renewal in the Islamic world and society, but is also directed towards posing the quest for the spiritual and ethical renewal of the self, according to that truth that is God in Himself. More specifically, education is the application of the directions given by the Qur'anic revelation to all Muslim believers, as the request to promote truth, justice and wisdom in the world, starting from the self and then reaching society.

Coming back to the previous question on the modernization of Islām and the Islamization of modernity, al-Attas proposes a different way of thinking, to avoid the impasse in which some Muslim thinkers have been trapped for so long. He wants to dialogue with modernity, criticizing its failures and errors, starting from the deep concern of promoting

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[29] AL-ATTAS S.M.N. , *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin (Message to the Muslims),* paragraph 53, Unpublished monograph, dated May 1973, p. 180-181, in WAN MOHD NOR WAN DAUD, *The Educational Philosophy...,* pp. 75: 429.

[30] AL-ATTAS S.M.N., *The Concept of Education...,* p. 21.

a scientific understanding and a spiritual acknowledgment of reality, without any separation from its origin, God, and His revelation, the Qur'ān. In his philosophy of education, al-Attas suggests the metaphysical foundations on which to build a methodology to lead Muslims to live in the modern world without abandoning their faith. He knows very well that a simple scientific approach to acknowledgment and reality cannot totally satisfy that desire that human beings express through their religious sense. He knows very well that human beings cannot live detached from that spring of life that is God.

In this sense, his work and his concern are directed to help both Muslims and Islamic societies to understand that modernity is not in conflict with religion, because it is not in conflict with reason, since faith is a reasonable act of the human being. The conflict between faith and reason in the modern world is only possible when there is no space for the application of *adab*, which means that there is no education in the meaning that the philosopher formulated above. Therefore, according to al-Attas, Islām must inspire concern for the spiritual relationship between man and God in the modern world, purifying modernity from any materialistic attempt to reduce both the man and the world to pure matter devoid of spirit. It is about creating the conditions of equilibrium between the reform of religion (*iṣlāḥ*) and its renewal (*taǧdīd*), where *adab* may become the method applied to the reform and the renewal of religion and society. In our opinion, al-Attas follows in the wake of those who, while wanting to preserve the Islamic tradition from any possible materialistic and ideological reduction, do not refuse to deal positively with modernity. A dialogue-confrontation, which arises on an intellectual and cultural level, is useful to deter any fundamentalist and violent attempt to promote a non-moderate Islām in the modern world.

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Significant and Coherent Voice in the South Asian Islam: Maulana Wahiduddin

Victor Edwin SJ[31]

INTRODUCTION

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (b. 1925) is a well-known Indian Muslim scholar. He is known around the world through his writings and participation in conferences. Wahiduddin Khan (hereafter Maulana Khan) is a significant voice in and for Islam in India, and indeed globally, today. This essay will show that his ideas are coherent with his life and his mission, and therefore that his voice is truly significant and coherent.

This essay has two sections: the first section presents some attitudinal qualities of Maulana Khan that shape his voice and message, while the second section purports to show that his ideas are coherent with one another, rooted in peace and well-integrated with his way of life.

This essay is based on the two long interviews that Maulana Khan gave to the present writer as well as interviews that he gave to Tomas Lindgren and Mattias Dahlkvist.

SECTION I

BLESSED WITH A SPIRIT OF ENQUIRY

Maulana Khan studied at *Madrasat ul-Islah* in Azamgarh, northern India. Although his *madrasa* education was based mainly on memorization and repetition, he cultivated a spirit of enquiry during his early years. He recalled that one of his teachers, Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997), sowed the seeds of the spirit of query in him.[32] He narrates that once Islahi Sahib, while explaining the Qur'anic verse: 'Do they never reflect on the camels and how they

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[32] Imam Amin Ahsan Islahi was an India born, Pakistani Muslim scholar, famous for his Urdu exegeses of Quran, Tadabbur-i-Qur'an.