

Toward a Muslim Constructive Role In the Contemporary World Civilization

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What is a Civilization?

Without going through the variety of concepts and terminologies on the subject, civilization simply means: **the comprehensive development of the human potential** in all its dimensions: physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral and psychological. To achieve this potential, civilizations strive **to develop, utilize, and conserve the natural resources**, the benefits of which should fairly reach the whole society, and bring about positive effects on the whole world.

Given this definition, it is obvious that a civilization has certain requirements to deserve its name. After all, civilization is a collective effort by the whole society, and its benefits cannot be restricted to few individuals or be limited to certain groups. Civilization has to bear fruits to all members of society. Besides although civilization development may not affect all sides of society at the same level, it nonetheless, remains inclusive and comprehensive. Civilization therefore has to maintain continuation and duration, and it cannot be considered as such if it just emerged to disappear. Another merit of civilization is that it has the potential of spreading to other societies, and that it can be adapted when it influences others. This civilization merit is being felt enormously in our times of amazingly speedy transportation of persons and goods, and communication of information everywhere in the world.

A Muslim civilization, therefore, should not mean in any way a civilization restricted to the Muslims alone. What had been called a Muslim civilization in the past was developed and enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims all over the world, Arabs and non Arabs. It spread beyond the areas of Muslim peoples and lands wherever and whenever this was possible. Its contribution reached non-Muslim Europe through Spain and Sicily, and influenced the European Crusaders, who in medieval times, thought that they would meet savage barbarians in Jerusalem and its neighborhood. To their surprise they soon came to realize they were witnessing a civilization far better than what they had been seen in feudal Europe. More important, Muslim civilization was not always connected with military power. It continued to work one way or another in Muslim societies during times of military strength or military and political weakness.

What is Muslim Civilization?

Muslim civilization is characterized with certain moral values which are accepted and supported universally by humanity at large, and which are considered by Muslims and other believers in God to be divine commandments that ought to be respected and

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followed by such believers. In fact, these believers feel that the conduct of good goes beyond observance of the law, or the expectation of practical short-term benefits. They do so because they believe it is right and just. They believe in developing the individual's social habit of doing the good things in life. These, in return, will result in individual peace, social harmony, welfare, and spiritual strength. The believer is sure about his/her commitment to God and is also accountable before Him in this life and in the eternal life thereafter.

Such an understanding of the value of what is "good" reaches an unmatched depth in the heart and mind of the believer in God. The reason is that it is connected with and guarded by the faith. It also reaches an unmatched width in its range, for it addresses whatever good for all people and all creations in this universe. The believer is keen and persistent to do the good, whether its results are soon felt or not, since he/she is looking always beyond the short term results of this life. What is "good" or "right" or "just" may have more extensive dimensions for the believer, but it is shared by all human minds in different ways and at different levels.

In the past, Muslim civilization was appreciated for these common dimensions and all its efforts in developing the universal moral values, not because it was related to those who had a certain belief system or follow a certain prophet. The Quran significantly calls "the good": "what is known by all people to be acceptable (al-ma'ruf)", and calls "the evil": "what is known by all people to be rejectable (al-munkar)". Both are related to the universal common sense and sound judgment.

Peoples, Muslims and non-Muslims, have enjoyed the benefits of the Muslim endowments "awqaf" system which has been known to include hospitals, clean water, education, residence, food, bathrooms, and financial aid for all those in need of any assistance. Those who cannot afford the cost of marriage- bachelor-male or female- may be helped to get married through awqaf. The benefits of awqaf have also reached the abandoned animals, especially those old and sick among them.

Through the institution of "hisba", instant justice reached workers who had been unfairly treated with regard to the work assignments or unfair wages. It had even reached animals, regarding over-load carriage or mistreatment. All hisba or justice-related cases were administered by a qualified person called the "muhtasib". The institution of "mazalim" was established to secure justice at the highest level of authority and operated as a supreme court.

Muslim jurists used a variety of methods to reach their legal percepts beside basic reliance on the Quran and the Sunna, including analogy, preference and consideration of the common good. In principle, everything is viewed as legal or lawful in Shari'a unless proven otherwise. Any wise or just conduct is welcomed by the Shari'a, because wisdom and justice are the ultimate goals of faith and belief in the One God by all believers.

Many legal principles in the Quran and Sunna, which have continuously been stressed and elaborated by generations of jurists, through successive centuries ensure justice

conceptually and practically. **The dignity of the human being as such** has been particularly stressed in the Quran [17:70], whatever the ethnicity, gender, origin, or age of the individual may be. The rights of those you like or dislike have to be secured in a very meaningful way. Shari'a is against any kind of compulsion – material or psychological through temptation or intimidation – which may be made to make the human being state anything against his/her conviction. This principle stands clear with regard to either faith [the Quran 2:256, 10:99, 11:28], testimony or point of view [2:282]. The rights of **the defendant** for a fair inquiry or trial, and the rights of **the prisoner** have also been stressed in the strongest possible terms [e.g. see Abu Yusuf, al-Kharaj, al-Salafiyya, Cairo: 1347H., pp. 161-6, 190-1]. The rights of the combatant as a **prisoner of war or requester of asylum** are recognized and protected [e.g. the Quran 9:6, 76:8-8-9]. Muslim juristic contribution to international law in peace and war preceded the known work of the Dutch jurist Hugo Gratius [1583-1645] by several centuries. The work of the distinguished jurist Mohammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani (d.189H./804), with its Arabic title “al-Siyar” or “the running of military operations”, stands as a clear example. Interestingly enough, jurists of international law from a variety of countries have formed an association in Gottingen, Germany, which they called “al-Shaybani Association for International Law”. The association was initially presided over by the late Egyptian jurists Dr. Abd al-Hamid Badawi, whose deputy was the Syrian scholar Dr. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid [see the ‘Introduction’ of Dr. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid to “Sharh Kitab al-Siyar al-Kabir” of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Sarakhsi, Institute of Manuscripts: League of Arab States, Cairo: 1971, Vol. 1, p. 14; also: Moh. Haidallah, The Muslim Conduct of State].

The Islamic law called for a special consideration of the evidence required in commercial transactions, whose circumstances are by their nature different from the general civil transactions [the Quran 2:282]. As the late prominent Egyptian jurist Dr. Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri and other modern Muslim jurists have pointed out, the Islamic jurisprudence has its pioneering achievements in such legal principles as the abuse or misuse of the right, the consideration of adventitious circumstances in any civil matters, the liability for negligence... etc. [see Sanhuri's Introduction to the Egyptian Civil Code of 1949, and to his work on civil law “al-Wasit”, Vol. 1]. The International Conference on Comparative Law in The Hague in 1932 recognized the distinctive achievements of Shari'a, and its potential in the modern world, and later an international juristic conference in Paris in 1951 made a parallel resolution.

Furthermore, Muslim civilization was appreciated by all those who enjoyed the fruits of its knowledge and sciences, Muslims and non-Muslims. It was appreciated for its schools, centers of high education and research, public libraries, hospitals, observatories... etc. Non-Muslims frequently came from Europe to Muslim cities seeking knowledge or medical treatment. They did not come naturally to learn the Islamic faith or the revealed teachings or law, but to learn the kind of universal knowledge which Muslims were recognized with an authority as in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, applied arts, and refined crafts, etc. Muslim women were recognized as outstanding specialists in medicine and surgery in Muslim Spain and other areas of the Muslim lands. Mosques had been admired by non-Muslims

and continue to be admired to this very day, for their splendid architecture and fascinating decorations. Fine textiles and perfumes have had for a long time the traces of Muslim civilization in their world trade names such as Damascene, Mosulene, Marocaine, musk, and etc. A well-spread network of land and water routes efficiently connected Muslim lands from within, and connected them with the outside world and secured the trade routes between East and West. These well-maintained ways of transportation and communication, in addition to a similar well-organized mail service for the benefit of the authorities and the public, facilitated the spread of civilization that developed in Muslim lands from its main centers through different directions.

Civilization for the whole Humanity:

Muslim civilization was given the name “Muslim” only in later times by historians. In its time, it was appreciated by the contemporary world that knew it only as universal civilization, benefiting all mankind, though it flourished first among Muslim peoples. Civilization, whatever its origins, stages and classifications, is a whole phenomenon, a continuation of human development whatever its different places and times may be. As it has been previously emphasized, Muslim civilization in the past was developed and enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, and by people of Muslim lands and people of non-Muslim lands. Muslims had benefited from the contributions of previous as well as contemporary civilizations such as the Graeco-Roman-Byzantines, Persian and Indian civilizations. However, Muslims developed those heritages and left their fingerprints in their outcomes. Muslims followed an empirical attitude in science, leaving a Greek theoretical speculative one, and showed interest in all aspects of applied sciences (e.g. observatories, surgical instruments, pharmaceuticals, hospital and library services, cartography, etc), while an attitude towards abstraction was obvious in their aesthetics. More important, they developed a system of care for neighbors and neighborhood and local community welfare. These and other traits characterized the universal civilization that developed in Muslim lands in past centuries.

The civilizational effects of Islam and Muslims are true evidence of the significance and value of the message of Islam. Not all the people are interested in going through the faith of Islam and reading its teachings in order to understand the religion, although this may be essential on the part of anyone who feels that his/her intellectual and moral responsibility of knowledge and judgment require doing so. But all people can easily appreciate the common good and human perspective of Islam and come to think about the factors behind them. In other words, the civilizational achievements of Islam and Muslims have been a permanent evidence of the value of the message of Islam. Muslim civilization in medieval times was not only known for its libraries, laboratories, observatories and hospitals, but also for its gardens and fountains, refined textiles and beautifully designed clothes and rugs, perfumes, fragrant incense, decorated glass and pottery and metal products manufactured by Muslims and non-Muslims in Muslim lands. Hard work and perfection are taught by Islam to make the individual achieve the acceptance and reward of God in this life and in the eternal life to come. It is also required for good business to earn one’s living in this present life, and it may be supported morally and spiritually by believers other than Muslims as well. Besides, Muslims, as all human beings, in addition to being inspired by the guidance of their book,

have also appreciated the beauty that is evidence in God's creation of nature, and have tried to reflect on it in their arts and crafts. Islamic teachings about cleanliness were significantly reflected in the establishment of public baths, of which there were once some 27000 in the city of Baghdad alone at the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir (908-932), according to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi in his voluminous history of Baghdad. There were also 60000 in other times. Various kinds of cosmetics and dress fashions were known to have been enjoyed by Muslim women and the rights of Muslim women as members of the family and society were legally and morally secured by Islam. Ulayyah, the daughter of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi (775-785) and the sister of the well-known caliph al-Rashid (786-809), in order to cover a blemish on her forehead "devised a fillet set with jewels which was soon adopted by the world of fashion as the ornament of the day 'ala'Ulayyah'" as it was reported by al-Asfihani in "al-Aghani" and quoted by Hitti in his "History of the Arabs" [McMillan, London: 1970, p302].

Islam as a Civilization Message:

Islam aims at developing the human potential, as well as the natural resources necessary to realize this potential, through the motivation of faith in God and accountability of the human being: "It is He who has produced you from the earth and **entrusted you with development on it**" (11:61). God Himself is in no need of being recognized or worshipped, but His messages to human beings have aimed to secure their own moral and material success in the development entrusted to them (51:56-58). Islam establishes faith in God on the basis of knowledge of His creation, and considers the human work in this world and the human behavior with people in it as ways of worshipping God. The Quran emphasizes the "**dignity of the children of Adam**" (17:70) – all of them not only Muslims. It indicates that dignity cannot be split from securing the required good things of life. The Quran also defends the free movement of people throughout land and sea, and even through the atmosphere and space when this becomes possible (45:12-13). The human merits in all their dimensions physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, and spiritual, with which the human being is favored over many of God's creation, have to be maintained and developed (17:70) by the individual, society, and the state in order to prove gratefulness to the grantor through developing the world with which he/she is entrusted (11:61). This can be done through the development of human relations on the basis of justice and fair treatment wherever humans live, (5:2, 30:22, 49:13, 60:8), starting from one's own family and extending this behavior to neighborhood, society, country, and the whole world. During the prominence of Muslim civilization, the Muslim state provided public services and all requirements of economic development, including roads and water resources for the whole population. Educational and medical institutions were established by the state, as well as by private efforts. Social security for the elderly, the disabled, the seriously ill, the unemployed, and those in hardship was available to all those who needed it, Muslims and non-Muslims. Hosting and helping travelers and strangers suffering from unexpected hardships became a tradition during Muslim civilization, since it is a fundamental teaching in the Quran.

Enjoying human rights is inseparable from fulfilling the human duty and obligation in maintaining "the human dignity". Such values have to be protected and administered by the concerned authorities in the country and in the whole world (3:159, 4:58-59, 42:38,

49:9). This is a stage that can be reached by all mankind through use of intellectual and moral-spiritual abilities granted by the Creator. It is to be supported and guarded by the divine guidance for those who believe in God. Muslims worship God and attempt to present His message to others through persuasion and dialogue. They do so by co-operating with all human beings in developing the human and natural resources granted to them all by God. If these values are practiced necessarily by the human instinct or the intellect of the “homo sapiens”, it can be developed to the best of the human potential by the faith in God and human accountability before Him, which guards and prevents any waste committed by arrogance in the case of success, or humiliating despair in the case of failure. The believers in God have to represent His justice and grace in dealing with their fellow human beings whoever they may be, believers or non-believers, co-citizens or others, men or women, adults or children, friends or enemies “And We have not sent you but as a grace and mercy for all being” : (21:107 see also 4:136, 5:2, 4). Justice within the country and through the whole world cannot be confined to political and legal aspects, it has to be comprehensive and include socio-economic aspects of human relations. It has to be secure the “good things of life” for all developed and developing nations, producers and consumers, lenders and borrowers, and the powerful and weak.

Diversity within unity:

It is essential for the continuation and spreading of a universal or “multiethnic” civilization at any time to accommodate human differences through extending times and different places. In the past, such a requirement was obvious in the state of affairs of what has become known as Muslim civilization. While Islam establishes grounds of “common religious culture” it does not require an abandoning of any feeling or practice that represents a natural relation to a particular human group and its socio-cultural life, as long as such a feeling or a practice does not contradict the teachings of Islam. Feelings of closeness to a certain people or a certain place are normal, if they are not being turned into racism or ethnic chauvinism “asabiyyah”. The people to whom one is related represent merely an extensive family, and the land where one is born represents an extensive neighborhood as Gustave von Grunebaum put it in his “Unity and Variety in the Muslim Civilization”.

“From this point of view, the self identification as a Muslim of a ‘nationalistic’ Persian of the Samanid period would appear perfectly legitimate, **in as much as he would continue to accept the Islamic axioms of monistic theism and prophetism, as well as the value judgment which dedicates the life of a man at the service of God.** It is only within this intellectual emotional frame work that he strives after the political independence of his people and the revival of the cultural glories of the Iranian past. **Under the surface of the Muslim identification, no end of changes that may occur, but they will hardly ever affect the identification as such**” [p. 19]; “...the philosophical and scientific potential of Islam was actualized and restated in terms of acceptable to the representatives of the older traditions with which the new religious civilization has to deal. Persian administrative and political thinking, Hellenistic techniques or philosophizing and of secular science, Indian mathematics and medicine were mastered effortlessly. The linguistic Arabization of the borrowings contributed to their assimilation, the foreign view point- whenever pounded in an Islamized setting and

in an Islamized terminology – would be experienced as genuinely Islamic. On the other hand, the progressive explicating of the data of the faith and of their cultural implications would enlarge the basis of inter-civilization receptivity. The flourishing of the Abbasid Empire between AD 760 and 804 thus came to represent [an] integration of Islamic civilization, in which room had been made for ‘local’ traditions which were in part admitted in a bookish fashion, but which mostly forced themselves into the new synthesis through the realities of an actual symbiosis” [p. 23].

In the field of arts, Richards Ettinghausen underlined in the same work the “Interaction and Integration” that occurred:

“The unique character of Muslim art is a commonly known fact, which is experienced even by people who know hardly anything about this civilization. The main normative force which created this phenomenon was Islam itself...; **it created a way of life and attitudes which deeply influenced its architecture, the range and character or its iconography, the treatment and type of ornament, and the choice of material everywhere in its domain.** Yet, in spite of the apparent uniform character of Islamic art, everybody who becomes familiar with its various aspects realized more and more **the tremendous variety in the different regions and even in the changing periods within a single territory.** These differences are so marked that if we take for instance pottery, one of the commonest decorated materials, we can date within a century, sometimes within a half or a quarter of a century, any archaeological site where shreds have been found, and again at times also information about influences of trade or of migratory workers” [p. 107]. (Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization, edited by Gustave von Grunebaum, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago 1967).

Within one region such as Muslim Spain (Andalus), each city might have its reputation in a particular civilization feature. According to al-Maqqari, the prominent historian of Andalus (d. 133), “When a scholar dies in Seville and his estate wants his books sold, the books are carried to Cordova, where the market for books is there. But when a musician dies in Cordova, his instruments are carried to Seville for sale, where the market for them is there.” Art became a symbol of the universality of Islam, and the diversity of its civilization as well. In this field, the contribution of the non-Muslim artists and artisans came in harmony with the general Muslim atmosphere, while they practiced their own professional traditions. Besides, non-Muslims could become ministers or court physicians and could hold top positions in the central and local administrations. Muslim civilization was able to assimilate the various religions and ethnicities, as it was able to assimilate various civilizational heritages. It was able to acquire, absorb, supplement and add to the heritage of knowledge known in that time and transmit their contributions around, and thus made the “Renaissance” later possible in Western Europe through Latin translations of Arabic words. The Europeans came to recognize the value of that knowledge, and the achievements of Muslim civilization overflowed into Europe from Muslim Spain, Sicily and Italy. It was indeed transmitted to Europe by the Crusaders themselves at the time of their occupation of the lands east of the Mediterranean. The inter-religious intellectual debate among Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Rushd (Averoes d.1198) and al-Ghazali (d.1111) and Ibn Rushd’s debate with the Jewish philosopher Ibn

Maymun [Maimonides, d.1204] and the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas [d.1274] have been repeatedly emphasized. The continuous stream of human civilization had provided Muslims with other nations, contribution, and Muslim contributions were spread to Europe and other parts of the world where Muslims had relations.

Participation in the Contemporary Civilization Has to Precede Influence:

Muslims throughout their role in history had searched for the civilizational traditions available in their time. They absorbed these traditions primarily through translations provided often by non-Muslims. They began, however, by presented what they had learned with their own understanding, exploration and sometimes supplement. When Muslims became legitimate representatives of knowledge and were recognized as authorities in the fields, they were able to incorporate their new and original contribution to world civilization. Their achievement in acquisition and innovation came to be known after sometime as the civilization of Muslim peoples or Muslim lands. In other words, Muslim civilization started as universal civilization before it came to be distinguished with its Muslim connotation.

Such a Muslim contribution to world civilization was **dynamic and variable**, according the existing sources. Muslims had to first absorb and master knowledge before they could add and influence, depending on the given circumstances. Participation, continuation, and transfusion of new elements represent the only way for developing a sense of humanness and morality in contemporary civilization. Japan is a significant example of becoming a partner in the world civilization. Muslims too cannot isolate themselves from the present civilization, or wait for its self-destruction and then jump off to create a Muslim civilization on their own terms. Civilizations cannot be developed in a vacuum or all of a sudden. Civilizational developments occur gradually and take time to bear their fruits. One cannot do the teaching before learning first. No change could be down without knowing what already exists and without knowing what needs to continue or what needs to be changed and how could it be changed for what is better. The process of civilization cannot be taken as a political coup! In this era of globalism, all humanity is in one boat. The destruction of the contemporary civilization would be a disaster not only to evil-doers but also to passive wishful thinkers, regardless of their good intentions and utopian dreams. The Quran says: “and be ware of a tumult which does not affect in particular the wrong-doers from among you to the exclusion of others” [The Quran 8:25].

Muslims would not be able to incorporate into the contemporary civilization the moral values they believe in, if they keep themselves aloof intellectually and psychologically from such a civilization, or if they keep imitating and following it without being critical and creative. This civilization, giving its unimaginable advances in transportation and communication, has become indeed very global, whatever or wherever its geographical start happened to be. Again, Japan, which is now a true partner in this civilization, presents us with strong evidence. Besides, other countries such as India, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore are also working with the same energy and enthusiasm to catch up with the West. Globalism has become a characteristic of our era, and has inevitably led to the emergence of universal pluralism. Democracy in its elaborated concepts and developed institutions is an invaluable production of the

West, for which no better alternative has appeared, in spite of the obvious shortcomings of a secularization of the entire human life in the name of democracy, which have been made known by Westerners themselves who have also been enjoying and praising the blessings of free thinking and free expression provided by democracy. Further, Muslims need to share the contemporary advances in public administration, management of enterprises public and private and management of mixed sectors, as well as non-governmental and non-profit organizations. In addition, all agree that they need to share the achievements of science and technology.

The divine guidance, as revealed in the Quran and Sunna allows for the human intellect which represents, with the divine guidance, the most invaluable blessings of the Lord to the human species. Both have to interact with one another in accordance with God's will and plan, without contradicting one another, or being isolated from one another. The believer in God and His gifts to the human race as a whole has to search for "wisdom" wherever it may be, and "the believer in God is the most deserving of whatever wisdom he/she may find" – according to tradition of the Prophet (brought out by al-Tirmidhi). The Quran reads: "Give them glad tidings to my [true] worshippers who listen to all that is said, and follow of it what is best; it is those whom God has graced with His guidance, and it is those who have really minds" [39:17-18].

This divine guidance was observed by the Muslims in the past, and has to be observed in the contemporary world with regard to any civilizational development they may have come across. Such a human interaction is essential in a universal civilizational development. "And if God has not enabled people to react positive towards on another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth; but God is limitless in this bounty unto all-beings" [2:251], "and as for the scum, it passes away as [does all] dross, but that which is of benefits to people abides on earth" [13:17]. It is a responsibility that the entire world will someday come to acknowledge for the Muslims and Islam, if it is fulfilled. It is also the only effective way to present Islam positively to humanity as a whole in our time. Such a message is destined to reach the human masses all over the world, whereas any preaching can reach only a very thin minority or a selected audience.

An Enormous Need For A Moral Direction:

The contemporary global civilization badly needs a moral dimension to correct its direction, fill in its gaps, treat its limitations, widen its perspective, deepen its foundations, and safeguard its progress against abuse and divergence and internal decay. Such a decay may develop from detected or undetected psychological and intellectual and sociological factors, whether they may be on the surface or in depth. In this way, the contemporary civilization could be more balanced, effective, comprehensive, safeguarded and self-correcting.

In spite of their tremendous material progress, the most developed societies in the contemporary civilization are suffering from physical and environmental pollution. Drugs, alcoholism, violence, family deterioration and gang mushrooming are daily practices by children and youth who have abandoned their families or have been abandoned by their families. Corruption at high levels among politicians and civil

servants, judges and police is accelerating. Sharpening gaps between the haves and have-nots, as well as madness in space exploration and war destructiveness are shaking, while physical and social diseases get less attention and spending from the state authorities. These are only examples of the well-known sufferings of the contemporary civilization as represented at the top of today's world.

Robert A. Denther points out in his book "Major Social Problems" about poverty: "Most poverty in America rests with those who are too old or too young (i.e. children under 18 years old) too sick or too disabled or too remote from economic opportunity by virtue of geography or ethnic discrimination to benefit from the growing economy. Poor people are not willing to be poor. Most of them work if they could [and as hard as they could]" [Road McNally, U.S. 1972, pp.113-115]. The American Bar Association panel in Washington on August 3, 1993 underlined these alarming statistics about the year 1991:

- One in five American children lives below government acknowledged standards for base subsistence, 14% of the nation's preschool children live in impoverished families, and the overall child poverty rate tops that in any comparable country.
- Gunshot wounds are leading cause of death for both African American and Caucasian American teenage boys.
- African American and Latino children are more likely than Caucasian children to be poor.

"Newsweek" magazine reported on September 11, 1989 that children in Philadelphia, PA start in drug trafficking when they are between six and eight years, then they become hooked on it!

As for violence, the final report on "The Causes and Prevention of Violence" in 1969 pointed out: "America has always been a relatively violent nation. Rapid social change in America has produced different forms of violence and widely varying patterns of motivations, aggression and victimization... Violence has usually been the 'lava 'flowing' from the top of a volcano fed by deeper fires of social dislocation and injustice; it has not been stopped solely by capping the top". An earlier report in 1968 from the "National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders" known as "the Kerner Commission Report" stated: "Disorder did not erupt as a result of a single 'triggering' or 'precipitating' incident, but was generated out of an increasingly disturbed social atmosphere... The typical rioter was a teenager, a young adult, a life-long resident of the city, a high school dropout, usually under-employed or employed in a menial job, with a new mood of self-esteem and extremely hostile to the high classes even of his own ethnicity... What the rioters appeared to be seeking was fuller participation in the social order and material benefits enjoyed by the majority, rather than rejecting the system in which they were anxious to obtain a place for themselves". It is ironic that the same causes triggered the recent riots in Los Angeles and school mass killings after more than two decades, which sharply underline a serious failure.

With regard to the deterioration of moral responsibility in sexual behavior, the Census Bureau Report on “Fertility of American Women in June 1992, stated that about one in four births in 1991 were out of wedlock (24%), across all demographic strata not the poor only, and including the educated, the employed... etc. Pope John Paul has rightfully warned that the isolation of sex from its unitive and procreative purpose and roles could undermine the society’s stability. Social research has established relations between irresponsible sexual practices, drug-addiction, and violence, and between these ills and some mass media present actions especially the TV. Sexual irresponsibility has led to an acceleration in the cases of women abuse and children abuse (even in the churches) that we all now witness among developed countries, and also in the developing ones.

The American public education stands neutral and passive towards these moral defects. Dr. William K. Kilpatrick, the professor of education at Boston College and the author of “Why Johnny Can’t Right from Wrong” has pointed out the moral failure of public education in his article. “Turning out moral illiterates” [Los Angeles Times 20.7.1993]: “Many of today’s young people have difficult time seeing any moral dimension to their actions. There are many reasons why that is true, but not more prominent than a failed system of education... It tells children to decide for themselves what is right or wrong. IN (the past) teachers worried about students chewing gum; today they worry about robbery and rape [and even murder]. Decision making curricula pose thorny ethical dilemmas to students, leaving them with the impression that morality is problematic and that all questions of right and wrong are in dispute... The assumption behind the ‘student moral decision making’ method is that students will arrive at good moral conclusions if only they are given the chance. The actual result is moral confusion. A recent national study of 1700 students between 6th and 9th graders revealed that a majority of boys considered rape to be acceptable under certain conditions. Astonishingly, many of the girls agreed. This kind of moral illiteracy is further encouraged by values-education programs that are a little more than courses in self-esteem... They are based on the questionable assumption that a child who feels good about himself/herself will not want to do anything wrong. It is just as reasonable to make an opposite assumption that a child who has uncritical self-regard will conclude that he/she cannot do anything bad. Such naïve self-acceptance result in large part from ‘non-directive, non-judgmental as long as you feel comfortable with your choices’ a mentality that had pervaded public education for the last two and half decades. Many of today’s drug education, sex-education and values-education courses are based on the same 1960 philosophy that helped fuel the explosion in teen drug use and sexual activity in the first place.”

Such a lack of moral consciousness, which can be highly remedied through God consciousness, is crippling the contemporary civilization from reaching the full potential of social width and psychological depth. IN a symposium organized by UNESCO in New Delhi in December 1951 on “The Human Ideal and Philosophy of Education in the East and the West”, the distinguished scholars and thinkers from both parts of the world discussed the danger of “the enslaving of the human’s own self through his/her effort to control the nature by means of science”. A French writer, Andre Rousseau quoted Terez Bruce in significantly underlining a most serious and urgent epistemological and

educational problem in our time: "...the problem of developing an anthropology which is not the science of the human animal, but the science of the whole human being, including all his/her spiritual values, studied from individual and social points of view in the same time". Rada Kreshnan, the outstanding Indian thinker, described the religious experience as an "innate consciousness and absolute liberation... It's not merely a case of conviction about a series of given concepts, but a shake of the whole being while facing the problems that come out from the human relations in the daily realities: it is a way of life, love and practice of wisdom". A professor of philosophy at Colombo University in Sri Lanka, G.B. Mala Lazzyikira, called the attention to "one of the most silly [and destructive] outcomes of the mechanical [dominant trend, which] is 'the naïve average person,' who lacks cultural refinement and ideals and is fully closed to any that he/she has not personal [material] interest in it, and whom the various mass media have contributed to make his/her general pattern". Clarence Faucet, a dean at Stanford University in California U.S. and the head of the department of education there at that time, expressed his worry "that education may be concerned excessively with 'methods', while it has an unjustified suspicion about abstract values". Maulana Abu al-Kalam Azad, the prominent Islamic scholar and national politician in India warned that "The Human being will never be able to find a convenient solution for his/her problems: individual and social, national and international, before he/she can recognize properly his/her own being, and can define his/her place in the greater universe".

In contemporary international relations, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, the Malaysian Prime Minister in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations during its forty sixth session on September 24, 1991, has underscored some serious signs of the missing moral dimension in the modern world: "The world needs policing..., but are we to have self-appointed policemen, or are we to have a police force that is beholden to the U.N.?... Can our conscience be clear if a whole nation is starved into submission... and the principal victims are the old and the infirm, the pregnant mothers and the newborns?... Should wars be fought or [international] police action taken by totally destroying the recalcitrant nation in order to avoid casualties among the police force?... We condemn chemical warfare, but must we still have nuclear weapons around?... Who determines when a deterrent is needed?... [Can we be] sure that someone irrational might not become a leader and gain access to the button?... Weapons for defiance should be solely for defense. We need weapons only for fighting criminals... We want to remain independent, and to conform to international norms as determined by all nations of the world... The international community is now at the cross-roads. We truly have a chance to build a better world through consensus and to use the UN as the principal forum and vehicle for achieving our objectives. We cannot afford to miss this historic opportunity... It must, however be underlined that a global consensus approach requires tolerance for different ideas and practices inherent in our complex and pluralistic world. Let us then work together as partners in our common endeavor to build a better world".

Towards a Muslim Constructive Role in the Contemporary Civilization:

A Muslim impact on the contemporary global civilization can only be reached through constructive engagement and effective participation in it. Wishful dreaming for its end so that another civilization will rise in its place is not a practical matter. A Muslim

participation in the contemporary global civilization has to be itself ‘contemporary’, not just a repetition or imitation of historical efforts of the past. Past efforts were made according to the existing circumstances, and were considered at that time a progress in relation to what has been previously dominant. Our past civilization made benefit of the contributions existing at the time, and did not totally reject or ignore them. In fact, it maintained them to their best and developed them through continuous additions and advances well-known in the universal history of civilization. In this way, Muslims could become constructive partners in world progress, and become productive successors of earlier civilization builders, who are worthy of having a civilization to be named “Muslim” by later generations. In the past, Muslims became recognized resources for Greek, Persian and Indian knowledge, presenting it and adding to it through their intellectual and moral merits. What historians called a “Muslim civilization was in fact a part of world civilization, by Muslim and non-Muslim efforts in the Muslim countries.

Muslims have to work earnestly and modestly to prove their role in the contemporary civilization. This will enable them to pump and infuse some moral values into its stream. They can do so, only, through their individual and social behavior, not through any superficial or empty rhetoric, and definitely not by making theoretical statements. Muslims can be a force of moral inspiration to the contemporary global civilization, which may influence all the participants in it. In this way, Muslims could become known as the spiritual and intellectual contributors to the ‘revitalization and moralization’ of the contemporary global civilization. They can do that only through true Islamic values, conscientious thinking, and productive actions.

In this world of global pluralism, diversity is inevitable within any group, religious or ethnic, which may spread over various parts of the world. Muslims themselves have had such an experience with diversity throughout history.

Let humanity see Islam through the sincere and persistent efforts of Muslims. Only through discovering the wonders of God’s creation, developing and beautifying our world (morally and physically), nurturing sincere understanding and honest cooperation among peoples and nations, showing a true compassion to all peoples, and giving contemporary global civilization its badly-needed infusion of richness, warmth, width and depth; only through such merits and efforts Muslims can have an everlasting impact on contemporary civilization.

The Quran’s guidance is very inspirational:

“...and help one another in furthering virtue and righteousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and aggression” [5:2]

“And say [unto them]: Act and God will behold your deeds, and [so will] the conveyor of His message and the believers...” [9:105]

“Verily, God is with those who are conscious of Him, and are withal doing their best to offer what is good.” [16:128]