

THE VIRTUOUS CIVILIZATION OF ISLAM

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At the outset it should be admitted that the basic analytical and civilizational framework employed in this paper shall be the one formulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas which to our mind not only reflects the consensus of the majority of the Islamic authorities of the past but also contains many new and fresh insights to address properly our basic contemporary intellectual and civilizational challenges.

The primary aim of this paper is to connect the positive relationship between the worldview of Islam rooted in the fundamental Prophetic mission, with a certain defining spirit, purpose and character. This relationship, deplorably, has largely been taken for granted by traditionalists, ignored or forgotten by the general public, and in some instances, purposely rejected by educated segments of Muslims worldwide—whose worldview has been critically affected by the deepening impact of philosophical secularization since the 19th century onwards.

Forgetting, taking for granted, ignoring, and rejecting these important aspects have perhaps inadvertently led many modern Muslims to emphasize on the relatively less fundamental elements of the Islamic civilizational enterprise, namely the positivistic, socio-political, and materialistic aspects; and not on the more fundamental ones, such as the high-order intellectual, spiritual and ethical-moral virtues. This leads them to not only misplace their own greater achievements demonstrated by the Prophet (d. 8 June 632 CE) and the earliest generations, but also simultaneously distort the most fundamental spirit, purpose, and character of the religion and civilization of Islam and the Prophetic mission. This deplorable attitude, which reflects what al-Attas has consistently identified as a serious loss of *adab*, and confusion and error in knowledge, is manifested in most educational, cultural, and development discourse, planning, and institutions of Muslims worldwide.²

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Keynote Address delivered at the “International Symposium on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: Philosophical and Civilisational Dimensions”, 15th February 2020.

2 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism*, (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Movement of

I. THE WORLDVIEW OF ISLAM

The worldview of Islam, as underlined by al-Attas, is the vision of truth and reality (*ru'yat al-Islām li al-wujūd*)³ on the nature of God, human existence, and the entire created universe. It is based on revelation of God to the Holy Prophet in the original language, memorized by him and his generation, written and arranged in his presence, and authoritatively compiled by the closest companions of the earliest generation. The largest body of Muslims from the beginning, from various schools of thought until today, have not doubted its authenticity as a wholly Divine Text. Its major spiritual teachings and ethical precepts were put into practice by the Holy Prophet, who experienced a multi-faceted human existence: as an orphan and a poor shepherd, a businessman, a family man who experienced great personal losses, a father in law, teacher, grand father, general, judge, and statesman.

His teachings and his exemplary embodiment of the noblest virtues were deeply understood and modeled by generations of Muslims since the earliest times, which were later on systematically formulated on the epistemological and ethical consensus of proven authorities that were sustained and elaborated on despite great trials and tribulations. The worldview of Islam and its derivative system of intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social virtues (*faḍā'il*) is based on the certainty of Divine Revelation, which al-Attas emphasizes, is “confirmed by religion, and affirmed by intellectual and intuitive principles.”⁴

In Islam, the philosophical virtues of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and justice (*'adl*), followed by courage (*shajā'ah*) and temperance (*'iffah*) are made religious⁵ by grounding them in deep consciousness of God (*taqwā*) and sincerity of purpose (*ikhlas*) and truthfulness to one's self (*sidq*). It is accompanied by a constant state of self-examination, watching over the animalistic instincts (*murāqabah*) and the corrections from any possible deviations (*muḥāsabah*). These virtues are based on correct and firm knowledge of the self and of God derived from Reason and Revelation.⁶ This, it must be stressed, “...involves meditation (*tafakkur*), which gradually

leads to other higher order virtues such as repentance (*tawbah*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), hope (*rajā'*), fear (*khawf*), divine unity (*tawḥīd*), trust (*tawakkul*), and finally, the highest virtue for the attainment of happiness in worldly life—the love of God (*maḥabbah*).⁷

When elaborating on the deeper meanings of the term '*dīn*' as deeply related to indebtedness, submissiveness, judicious power, and natural inclination and their various spiritual, ethical and social implications,⁸ al-Attas underlines that,

The man of Islam as a city dweller, a cosmopolitan, living a civilized life according to clearly defined foundations of social order and codes of conduct is he to whom obedience to Divine Law, endeavour towards realizing true justice and striving after right knowledge are cardinal virtues.⁹

The inculcation of right knowledge in man and his proper action in obeying Divine Law and struggling to realize true justice towards the self and everything else is comprehensive *adab*. *Adab* is the discipline of mind, body and soul, which enables someone to know the proper places of everything and to put each and everyone of them in their right and proper places in the order of being and creation such that it leads them to recognize Allah S.W.T. and to act accordingly in every state and situation. The actualization of internal and external *adab* results in virtues whose impact is personal, institutional, scientific, artistic, societal, ecological and civilizational.¹⁰ It should be clear that even though the internal, theoretical virtues are consciously initiated, intended and understood in individual minds, and the external, practical ones are manifested courageously, justly and steadfastly in individual actions, the full fruition of these will be evident in the society and civilization it builds. A good example of this intricate connection between individual virtues and societal development can be seen in the contents of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, which is still very popular in the contemporary

7 Ibid., 97.

8 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *IS*, 47-63.

9 Al-Attas, *IS*, 64.

10 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Acceptance Speech in Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the Al-Ghazālī Chair of Islamic Thought* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1994), 30-2; also his *IS*, 142-144; idem, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Association of Malaysia, 1980), 22-27; see also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 132-151, and idem, “Acceptance Speech”, *Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the Distinguished Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Chair of Islamic Thought on Prof Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud* (Kuala Lumpur: RZS-CASIS, 2020), 17-19.

Malaysia (ABIM), 1978), 99-104. Hereafter cited as *IS*.

3 This phrase is coined by al-Attas as opposed to the more popular one, *naẓrat al-Islām li al-kawn*. See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām: An Exposition to the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998), 1-2, hereafter cited as *Prolegomena*.

4 Ibid., 4.

5 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā' (4):58, and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015), 10-11. Hereafter cited as *On Justice*.

6 Idem., *Prolegomena*, 95-97.

Muslim world, especially in the Malay world.¹¹ Although it covers mostly religious-spiritual virtues, there are long discussions on these matters in relation to many social matters such as marriage,¹² entertainment,¹³ earning a livelihood¹⁴ and wealth¹⁵, education of youth and children,¹⁶ and enjoining good and forbidding evil.¹⁷ He also talked about the importance of society and its various crafts and institutions such as politics and markets.¹⁸

Other works such as *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* by Muḥammad ibn Asʿad al-Dawwānī of the 15th century also clearly indicate this connection although he frequently cites important references to relevant Greek thinkers.¹⁹ Following the work of Naṣīruddīn al-Ṭūsī on the subject, this author discusses the individual virtues in Book One, and domestic and political ones in Books Two and Three respectively. The simpler but comprehensive work of 17th century Imām ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAlawī al-Ḥaddād, *Al-Daʿwah al-Tāmmah wa al-Tadhkirah al-ʿĀmmah* (The Complete Summons and General Reminder), reflects similar unitary connection between personal virtues and societal development.²⁰ Influenced to a great extent by al-Ghazālī, ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥaddād offered useful advice to various groups of people including the scholars, worshippers and ascetics, rulers, merchants, farmers and craftsmen, the poor and the afflicted, and women and children.

In this context, it is instructive to note that in the Malay-Indonesian language, there are two terms that are used to convey the meaning of “civilization”. One is “*peradaban*” which denotes civilization in a general sense—the inter-generational works of men and women of *adab*. The other one is “*Tamaddun*” which is more specific. It relates to a type of civilization that is based on, and guided by religion (*dīn*).

11 Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 6 vols. in 5 (Damascus/Beirut: Dār al-Khair, 1990). Hereafter cited as *Iḥyāʾ*.

12 Ibid, vol 2: “Kitāb Ādāb al-Nikāh”.

13 Ibid, vol 2: *Kitāb Ādāb al-Samāʾ wa al-Wajd*.

14 Ibid, vol 2. *Kitāb Ādāb al-Kasb wal-maʿāsh*.

15 Ibid, vol 4, *Kitāb Dhamm al-Bukhl wa Dhamm Ḥubb al-Māl*.

16 Ibid, vol 3 *Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs*.

17 Ibid, vol 3, *Kitāb al-ʿAmr bi al-Maʿrūf wa al-Nahy ʿan al-Munkar*.

18 Ibid, vol 3, *Kitāb Dhamm al-Dunyā*, 394-396.

19 Muḥammad ibn Asʿad al-Dawwānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī: Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People*, Translated from the Persian with Introduction and notes by W. F. Thompson (London: The Oriental Translation Fund, 1839).

20 Imām ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAlawī al-Ḥaddād, *Al-Daʿwah al-Tāmmah wa al-Tadhkirah al-ʿĀmmah*. 4th printing (Beirut: Dār al-Hāwī, 2000), (*The Complete Summons and General Reminder*), translated from the Arabic by Mostafa al-Badawi (Loisville: Fons Vitae, 2016).

II. ISLAMIZATION AND THE VIRTUOUS CIVILIZATION

The process of inculcating high-order virtues as the fundamental focus of individual and societal development in Islam is called Islamization, which, when it occurs collectively and across several generations, culminates in an Islamic civilization. Al-Attas has offered a comprehensive definition of Islamic civilization which reflects its dynamic yet stabilizing quality. An Islamic civilization, according to al-Attas,

...emerges among the diversity of cultures of Muslim peoples of the world as a result of the permeation of the basic elements of the religion of Islam which those people have caused to emerge from within themselves... Whatever basic and praiseworthy elements of the pre-Islamic civilization that bind people together and are accepted as compatible with Islam become part of Islamic civilization. It is a living civilization whose pulse describes a process of Islamization, not in a dialectical sense of an evolutionary ‘development’, but in the sense of a progress involving every generation of Muslims towards realization of the original nature and spirit of Islam as something already established in history; in the sense of an unfolding of the theoretical and practical principles of Islam in the life of the people; in the sense of an actualization of the essentials and potentials of Islam in the realm of existence. This progress, unfolding, and actualization depend upon the levels of knowledge of Islam, of intellectual and cultural attainment of the peoples in which this (process) occur. Islamic civilization is therefore a manifestation of unity in diversity as well as of diversity in unity.”²¹

This process involves the efforts of truly virtuous individuals, and the most important model and example is Prophet Muḥammad S.A.W. All the major aspects of Islamic civilization are shaped by the Holy Prophet and the outstanding individuals—both men and women, who knowingly and willingly followed him.²² To paraphrase al-Attas in his summary of the “great man” idea of history, these individuals are among the principal causes of the history of Islamic civilization, who have had decisive influence, and who “actualize their age.”²³

21 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, (Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press, 2011), xv, hereafter cited as *Historical Fact and Fiction*.

22 Al-Attas, *IS*, pp. 85-8. See also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, “The Timelessness of Prophet Muhammad and the Nature of the Virtuous Civilization”. *Tafhim: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*, vol. 11 (2019): 1-38.

23 Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, 72.

III. HOLY PROPHET: THE BASIS OF A VIRTUOUS CIVILIZATION

This perspective is organically linked to the most basic *raison d'être* of human destiny and the role of the Prophets in Islam. Human beings and *jinn*s are created to worship the One True God²⁴ and the former, who are “a new and a special creation”²⁵, are entrusted with the Trust as God’s Vicegerents on Earth.²⁶ It must be underlined that from the worldview of Islam, all prophets of God, were commissioned to spread the message of God’s unity and to provide the best examples of the highest ethical-moral virtues, which are amply mentioned in the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth collections.²⁷ The exception is that Muḥammad S.A.W. came to complete the high-order virtues, and the religion he was bestowed with, and the civilization he created was meant to be universal, transcending linguistic, racial, ethnic, geographical, and national boundaries.

Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. himself was raised to perfect high-order ethical virtues (*li utammima makārim al-akhlāq*).²⁸ He is the Seal of the Prophets;²⁹ the universal and final Messenger to Mankind³⁰ whom he leads from darkness into Light (*al-Ṭalāq* (65):11); who is himself the Lamp spreading Light (*al-Aḥzāb* (33):46; *al-Ṭalāq* (65):11); God’s mercy to all creatures, *rahmatan li’l ‘ālamīn* (*al-Anbiyā’* (21):107); God’s favour to all Muslims (*Āli-‘Imrān* (3):64; *al-Nisā’* (4):170); and even to the People of the Book (*al-Mā'idah* (5): 21. He is a man with an exalted character as a standard for mankind (*al-Qalam* (68): 4); and the perfect exemplar (*al-Aḥzāb* (33):21). God and His angels and all believers honor him as the greatest of men (*al-Aḥzāb* (33):56). In the Hereafter, God will grant him the Lauded Station (*Banī Isrā'īl* (17):79).³¹

This was how he understood himself and generations of Muslims during his time and

after.³² Islamic civilization regards the Prophet not only as someone who communicates the Truth through his words but also constitutes it through his actions and silence.³³ For the Muslims, the Prophet transcends both physical space and is timeless. In this sense, the Prophet according to al-Attas, is always relevant, adequate, ‘modern’ or new, and ahead of time because he transcends history.³⁴ Consequently, the Age of the Prophet “became the Criterion for the future”.³⁵

The way the Message was conveyed and demonstrated by the Prophet in his words, actions, and silence was intended to touch the minds and hearts of all Muslims in different degrees. The Prophet is the Most Virtuous Man who created the essential aspects of Islamic Civilization, which is rightly called the Virtuous Civilization. He is metaphorically, the face of this Civilization and best representative of the Most Civilized Man. The miracles of the Prophet—other than the Qur’ān—played a significant role among many of those in the earliest generation of Muslims because these events provided certainty, not merely at the cognitive level (*ilm al-yaqīn*) but at the level of sight (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*) and experience (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*).³⁶ They saw and experienced the effects of these miracles or divine favors involving the Prophet. Perhaps this contributed significantly to their remarkable spiritual and ethical virtues.

The earliest generation understood the metaphysical, spiritual, religious, ethical and civilizational aspects of the Prophet, which give rise to what the Qur’ān affirms in *Āli-‘Imrān* (3):110 as, “the best group ever raised for mankind” (*khayr ummah ukhrijat li al-nās*).

The effective inculcation of these high-order virtues is reflected very early in the process of

32 Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *al-Shifā’*. 1st Section, Chap. 3, 213-304.

33 al-Attas, *IS*, 87.

34 Ibid., 28.

35 Ibid., 27-28. On the ethical foundation of the new Islamic civilization established by the Prophet in Madinah, see for example, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, (American Trust Publications, 2005), 185-190; ethically based social order, Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, (Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989), 58. Marshall Hodgson talks of Muhammad’s pursuit of “a new and total moral order”, *Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 1: 197, also 1: 162-186, hereafter cited as *Venture of Islam*. Our conception of Virtuous Civilization has very little in common with the idea *al-madīnah al-fāḍilah* of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950 CE) whose basic ideas are, according to Richard Walzer, taken from various Greek philosophical schools but ultimately derived from a tradition originating in the sixth-century Alexandrian tradition of Ammonius. See Richard Walzer in Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Mabādi’ ārā’ ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah: Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*. A Revised text with Introduction, translation and commentary by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 9-11. See Ibn Khaldūn’s discussion of “*al-siyāsah al-madaniyyah*” and “*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*” of the philosophers in Abū Zayd ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn. *Muqaddimah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2001), 377; translated by Franz Rosenthal. 3 vols (New York: Bollingen Series/Pantheon Book, 1958); (Rosenthal), 2: 137-138. Hereafter cited as *Muqaddimah*.

36 On these three levels of certainty, see *al-Wāqi’ah* (56): 95; *al-Hāqqah* (69): 51; *al-Takāthur* (102): 5-7.

24 *al-Dhāriyāt* (51): 56.

25 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, vi, 45.

26 *Al-Baqarah* (2):30; *Ṣād* (38):26; *al-An‘ām* (6):165; *Yūnus* (10):14.

27 See the Qur’ān on *Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, and other verses. On hadith literature on this subject please see the multi-volume work of Abū I-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kaḥḥīr, *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* (Cairo, 1968), and in Qāḍī ‘Iyād ibn Mūsā al-Yaḥṣabī, *Kitāb al-Shifā’ bi Ta’rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Dubai: Ja’izat Dubai al-Duwaliyyah li al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 2013), 3rd Section, Chap. 1, 606-709, hereafter cited as *al-Shifā’*.

28 Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *al-Shifā’*. 141.

29 *al-Aḥzāb* (33):40.

30 *al-Saba’* (34): 28

31 See also al-Attas, *IS*, p. 86. For more details, see for example Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *al-Shifā’*, 1st Section, Chap. 2, 97-207.

Islamization in the statements of Ja'afar ibn Abī Tālib, to the King of Abyssinia, just a few years after the beginning of the Prophetic mission.³⁷ This spiritual ethical-social emphasis, rooted in metaphysical worldview, is underlined again in the Last Sermon of the Prophet.³⁸

This historic reality was keenly observed by many historians, such as Leona P. Caetani, when he wrote about the success of the Prophet S.A.W. in inculcating an epistemic and ethical core of his companions.

These men were the true moral heirs of the prophet, the future apostles of Islam, the proper trustees of all that Muḥammad had revealed unto the men of God. Into these men, through their constant contact with the Prophet and their devotion to him there had already entered a new mode of thought and feeling, loftier and more civilized than any they had known before; they had really changed for the better from every point of view, and later on as statesmen and generals, in the most difficult moments of the war of conquest, they gave magnificent and undeniable proof that the ideas and doctrines of Muhammad had been seed cast on fruitful soil, and produced a body of men of the very highest worth. They were the depositories of the sacred text of the Qur'ān, which they alone knew by heart; they were the zealous guardians of the memory of every word and bidding of the Prophet, the trustees of the moral heritage of Muḥammad. These men formed the venerable stock of Islam from whom one day was to spring the noble band of the first jurists, theologians, and traditionalists of the Muslim society.³⁹

Later theologians, jurists, *muḥaddithūn*, *mufasssirūn*, Ṣūfīs, linguists, scientists, poets elucidated this religious worldview and its virtues which were upheld by political leaders, administrators, warriors and artisans, and the common people.⁴⁰ Their foundational and

37 "O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured the weak. Thus we were until God send us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness, and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God's unity and to worship him, and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kind hospitality, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, and to devour the property of orphans, and to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, and he gave us orders about prayers, almsgiving, and fasting...." Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh), Translated with Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 151-152. Hereafter cited as *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*.

38 Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 651-652.

39 Leone Principe di Teono Caetani as quoted Thomas Matthew Arnold in the *Preaching of Islam* (Reprint ed., Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1976), 41.

40 See Abū Maṣṣūr 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Tāhir bin Muḥammad bin 'Abd Allāh al-Tamīmī al-Shāfi'ī al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Farq bayn al-Firāq* (Sidah/Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 1998), 312-318; translated from the

permanent principles of private and public virtues, of right and wrong, projected from a particular worldview based on Revelation and Religion, Reason and Experience, and manifested in its legal, ethical, scientific, artistic, aesthetic, social-economic, and ecological principles and practices that respond to various changes in the totality of human existence across generations. In their constant personal and collective struggles, they create a particular history and civilization and experience enduring and lasting spiritual happiness in this continuously changing world, and is promised a more lasting one in the hereafter.

The Virtuous Civilization of Islam embraced peaceful non-Muslim individuals and communities who not only benefitted greatly from it, but also contributed to its vitality and flowering which makes Marshall Hodgson term it, an "Islamicate civilization."⁴¹ Hodgson, in another place, notes that "It (Islam) came closer to uniting all mankind under its ideals."⁴²

IV. THE GOLDEN AGE OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

The Golden Age of Islam, which reflects the best and the highest achievements of the Muslims in a sustained period, is defined and measured by the spiritual and ethical standards and criteria set by the Prophet and the early Muslim generations. Al-Attas reminds us that "concepts such as development, and progress and perfection when applied to man's life and history and destiny must indeed refer, in Islam, ultimately to the spiritual and real nature of man."⁴³ Otherwise, it would mean only "the development, progress and perfection of the animal in man."⁴⁴ The criteria and standards of spiritual, and ethical-moral excellence have been finalized in the Age of the Prophet. In this sense, the Age of the Prophet is truly the Golden Age of Islam.

Al-Attas has rightly argued that the process of the development of Islamic Civilization involves two human levels. In the individual, personal, and existential sense, it refers to the

Arabic with an Introduction and notes by Abraham S. Halkin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*. (Tel Aviv: Palestine Publishing Co, 1936), Chap. 1, 159-163; see also al-Attas, *On Justice*, 4.

41 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1: 58; "There has been, however, a *culture*, centred on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom, and *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom. For this, I have used the adjective 'Islamicate'. I have thus restrict the term Islam to the *religion* of the Muslims...." (italics in original).

42 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1: 71.

43 Al-Attas, *IS*, p. 81.

44 *Ibid.*, 81-2.

perfecting of the self and personality in which the Prophet is the highest and most perfect example, and in the collective, social and historical sense, it “refers to the Community’s striving towards realization of the moral and ethical quality of social perfection achieved during the age of the Holy Prophet.”⁴⁵ And his Age can correctly be called the Age of True Happiness.⁴⁶

It is clear that most, if not all, of the past great achievements of the Islamic civilization, whether in restoring and improving the works of earlier civilizations, or in creating original works in various scientific, artistic, medical, and technological fields, have been surpassed by contributions from other nations and civilizations; especially that of the modern West, but Islamic achievements in the spiritual, moral-ethical aspects that were achieved by the Prophet and his companions remain the highest watermark in the history of Islam. Hence, the labels given by Marshall Hodgson to the Muslims of the prophetic Age as “Primitive Muslims” and “Primitive Caliphate”⁴⁷ are most misleading, for the term “primitive” gives the impression that this religion shall undergo a developmental process still waiting to reach final maturity. The Islam of the Prophetic Age was already the perfect Islam, and Muslims therein as a whole was the best ever raised for mankind as testified by the Qur’an itself.

Al-Attas argues that the virtues of wisdom and justice are more fundamental, under which courage and temperance are subsumed, because the first two are derived from the Names of God and form the true foundation of ethics.⁴⁸ Hence these two are given their proper place in the treatment of Islamic virtues, especially those of the Community leaders who are most central in shaping their age. The political norms of Islamic governance, as underlined by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 CE), are a mixture of religious laws and (rational) ethical rules, norms that are natural in social organizations together with a necessary concern for strength and group feeling.⁴⁹

Hence, traditional scholars such as Ibn Khaldūn and Jalāluddīn al-Suyūfī (d. 1505 CE) and others before and after them included important materials with direct religious and ethical contents in their works on history. Al-Suyūfī’s great book on the history of the caliphs from the reign of the first Abū Bakr (d. 634 CE) until Abū’l ‘Azīz al-Mutawakkil ‘ala-l’Lāh the last Abbassid Caliph (d. 1497), contains useful records of the spiritual, moral-ethical, intellectual, and cultural qualities of these individuals, besides their military and political ones.⁵⁰

45 Ibid., 42.

46 See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: (ISTAC), 1993; also idem, *Prolegomena*, Chap. 2.

47 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1: 196, 198-230, 529.

48 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 10-11.

49 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 378-379; (Rosenthal) 2:138-9.

50 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *History of the Caliphs*. Translated from

Ibn Khaldūn’s famous analysis on the rise and fall of civilizations is clearly rooted in the strength of the spiritual and ethical virtues of key leaders, which determine the qualitative strength of the ruling group. In fact, he basically echoes the Qur’anic and prophetic warnings that secular scientific developments and the material wealth of a settled civilization may contribute to the weakening of the spiritual, moral-ethical fibre of the ruling group which would directly undermine its solidarity.⁵¹

The long letter of Caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to Mālik al-Ashtar upon the latter’s appointment as the Governor of Egypt is most instructive for those who want to understand the sublime virtuous spirit of that generation, who were facing unprecedented internal, religious, and political challenges.⁵² Ibn Khaldūn included, in his *Muqaddimah*, an elaborate letter of ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Yaḥyā (d. 750 CE), the Chief Secretary of the Umayyad Dynasty, to all secretaries of the Dynasty, which basically shared the same vision as that of Caliph ‘Alī.⁵³

Ibn Khaldūn also inserts the famous letter of Ṭāhir bin Ḥusayn, a General under the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma’mūn, to his son ‘Abdullāh bin Ṭāhir whom the Caliph appointed as Governor of al-Raqqah, Egypt. Perhaps not being aware of ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib’s long letter to Mālik al-Ashtar, Ibn Khaldūn regards General Ṭāhir’s letter as “the best and most comprehensive” exposition of the unity of metaphysical worldview of religion, moral-ethical virtues of leaders and society, and civilizational development.⁵⁴

The popularity of the General’s letter was so widespread that it naturally reached the Caliph, who complimented it on its comprehensive content, and reportedly said that the General did not omit any of the matters that concern this world, the religion, administration, the formation of opinion, politics, the improvement of the realm and the subjects, the preservation of the government, obedience to the caliphs, and the maintenance of the caliphate. He has dealt very well with all these matters, and has given directions how to address them.⁵⁵ The Caliph commanded it to be distributed widely to all officials of the empire and to act accordingly.⁵⁶

Besides the Qur’an, Ḥadīth, and the standard works on Law according to the various

original Arabic by H.S. Jarrett. First published in 1881 (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1970).

51 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 149-158; (Rosenthal) 1: 249-310.

52 Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *Classified Selections from Nahj al-Balāghah*. Translated by a group of Muslim specialists and revised and edited by Farouk Ebeid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnāni/ Cairo: Dār Kitāb al-Misri, 1989), 300-349.

53 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 307-311; (Rosenthal) 2: 29-35.

54 Ibid., 378; (Rosenthal) 2: 139.

55 Ibid., 387-388; (Rosenthal) 2: 156.

56 Ibid.

schools of thought, works by practitioners such as the *Siyāsat Nāmeḥ* of Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092) and of scholars such as Abū Yūsuf's (d. 798 CE), *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, al-Ghazālī's *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (d. 1111, Abū Ḥasan al-Māwardī's (d. 1058 CE) *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, and *al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyyah*, and *Akhlaq-i Jalālī* by Muḥammad ibn As'ad al-Dawwānī (end 15th century) and others are widely referred to in guiding the rulers.

In the Malay world, the earliest extant Inscription, the Terengganu Inscription dated 1303 CE, proves beyond any reasonable doubt not only the existence of a vast Islamic political and legal influence in the north-eastern part of the Malay Peninsular but also underlines its spiritual-ethical content.⁵⁷ The advisory works of Nūruddīn al-Rānirī, *Bustān al-Salāṭin* (d. 1648), and of Bukhārī al-Jawhari, *Tāj al-Salāṭin* (used in the Malay world since the beginning of 17th century), and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, and *Muqaddimat fī Intizām Wazā'if al-Malik* of the 19th century prominent Malay scholar, Raja Ali Haji during the Johore-Riau Sultanate⁵⁸ were popular. These sources, together with the active role of the scholars—and in some regions, the Ṣūfīs—clearly strengthened the sacred ethical-moral foundations of political governance, and of a virtuous civilization.⁵⁹

Since the earliest times, Muslims regard the administration of justice as a paramount virtue and a great duty,⁶⁰ and jurists travelled with the armies and settled in great camp cities to establish law and justice.⁶¹ Muhammad Basheer Ahmad's study of court cases decided between 1206 CE, when Islam had acquired full administrative footing in India, until 1750 AD, 43 years after the death of Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughal rulers, indicate the universal and

consistent respect for justice as espoused by the Qur'ān, the Prophetic tradition, and the Islamic legal tradition by the generality of rulers.⁶² He describes the separation of the judiciary and the executive, which started in the time of 'Umar al-Khaṭṭāb:

Under the Sultans the Qazis were independent of the Government and were considered to hold office under the *Shara'*, with which no one, not even the Sultan, could interfere. Rulers like Muḥammad Tughlaq (d. 1351, founder of Tughlaq Dynasty) sometimes circumvented the Judges by investing their Wazirs with powers to try important cases, but this was not the rule. When Sultan Mahmud Shah Bahmani (1500) proposed to indulge in the same practice, Qazi Sadr Uddin Sharif, his Chief Justice, went "on leave" outside the Kingdom and refused to resume duties, unless the Sultan gave him an undertaking that the powers of the Qazis would not be taken away in the future.⁶³

The influential Muslim rulers of Andalusia and the Ottomans reflected similar virtues. 'Abdul Raḥman III (d. 961 AD), al-Ḥakam II (d. 976),⁶⁴ and Abī 'Āmir Muḥammad al-Manṣūr (d. 1002), who governed well and did not place themselves above the Sharī'ah even if he, like al-Manṣūr, had certain personal weaknesses like drinking wine, which he managed to quit a few years before his death.⁶⁵

The absolute power of strong Ottoman rulers like Selim 1 and Sulayman 1 were oftentimes limited by Sharī'ah laws as epitomized by the famous edict of Ebussuûd Efendi, the great Ḥanafī jurist (d. 1574), reflecting the universal worldview of Islam: "The sultan's order is not applicable to matters that are unlawful."⁶⁶

In the political history of Islam, such as when they encountered pre-Islamic political traditions in newly conquered territories, they generally tried to adapt these local norms and practices, or customary laws (*urf*) to suit the worldview of Islam and its legal and ethical principles, employing the required wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. This happened everywhere, including in Mughal India, the Ottoman Empire, the Mongol dominated states,

62 Ibid.

63 Basheer Ahmad, *Administration of Justice*, pp. 274-275; regarding relations between the Qazis and the Rulers, see pp. 275-29). For an excellent study on 'Umar al-Fārūq's religious and administrative policies, see Shibli Nu'mani, *Al-Farooque: Life of Omar the Great*. Translated by Syed Abu Zafar Zain. 5th edition (Karachi: Haji Mushtaq Elahi Farooqui, 1975) on judicial policies, 201-212.

64 Ahmad Thomson and Muhammad 'Ata 'Ur Rahman, *Islam in Andalus* (London: Ta-Ha, 1996), 63-69.

65 Ibid, 76.

66 Mehmet Ipşirli, "The Ottoman State" in *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilization*. Ed. Ekmelledin Ihsanoğlu. Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture (IRCICA), 2011), 1: 137. Hereafter cited as *The Ottoman State*; see also al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, 314.

57 See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription* (Kuala Lumpur: National Museum, 1970). Fully reprinted in Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, *Batu Bersurat Terengganu: Its Correct Date, Religio-Cultural and Scientific Dimensions* (Kuala Lumpur: Department of National Heritage, 2012), 1-28; See also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "The State of Islamization in the Malay Peninsula as Reflected in the Terengganu Inscription", in Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, ed., *Batu Bersurat Terengganu*, 29-52.

58 See an excellent study on this texts by Khalif Muammar A. Haris, "Ketatanegaraan Islam di Alam Melayu Abad ke-19", in Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, ed., *Bunga Rampai Bangsa, Kebangsaan & Patriotisme* (Kuala Lumpur: Center for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS) and Akademi Kenegaraan, 2015), 93-156.

59 Nizām al-Mulk al-Ṭūsī. *The Book of Government (Siyāsat Nāmeḥ)*, translated from Persian by Huber Drake (London/Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (Counsels for Kings), Translated from Persian by F. R. C. Bagley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Bukhārī al-Jawhari, *Tāj al-Salāṭin*, Romanized by Khalid Hussain (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966).

60 See Majid Khadduri, *The Concept of Justice in Islam* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

61 Muhammad Basheer Ahmad, *The Administration of Justice in Medieval India* (Allahabad: Aligarh University, 1941), 31. Hereafter cited as *Administration of Justice*.

and the Malay world. The customary laws and the Shari'ah existed in mutually complimentary fashion, albeit with some occasional tensions.⁶⁷

According to a prominent authority of Ottoman history, Halil Inalcik, many Muslim jurists regarded these customary laws as being,

...both necessary and legal, provided that the *seriat* made no statement on the case in question; that the law conformed to a generally accepted custom or principle that could serve as a basis of analogy; that it was necessary for the welfare of the Muslim community, that the sovereign could effectively enforce the law; and that it contained nothing contrary to *seriat*.⁶⁸

Similar tendencies also occurred in India during Muslim rule from its earliest times, with greater preponderance given to the pre-Islamic customs, which were “too deep rooted for interference”.⁶⁹

In the Malay-Indonesian world, this process of adopting the local customs and adapting them to the needs of the Shari'ah has become crystallized in a very famous Malay idiom, particularly in Minangkabau, “Custom is based on Shari'ah, and Shari'ah is further based on the Book of God” (*adat bersendikan sharak, sharak bersendikan Kitabullah*), is most reflective of the wisdom of the process of Islamization.

As we have stressed earlier, the metaphysical worldview of Islam and its conception of theoretical and practical virtues pervades all levels of Muslim thought and civilization, with various degrees of intensity.

V. THE WESTERN WORLD CONCERN ABOUT VIRTUES

The West has also long been conscious of the doctrine of virtue, which became part of its consciousness since the Ancient Greeks, who discussed it without needing to justify its importance, and appropriated later by Christian thinkers.⁷⁰ The doctrine of virtue, more than the emphasis on legal rights and obligations, as Josef Pieper put it:

67 Ipşirli, *The Ottoman State*, 1: 134-135; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2017), Chaps. 12 and 13, on the “Onset of Islamization”.

68 Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*. 3rd Impression of 1973 edition (London: Phoenix, 1997), 70.

69 Basheer Ahmad, *Administration of Justice*, 73.

70 Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), xi. Hereafter cited as *Cardinal Virtues*.

...has things to say about this human person; it speaks both of the kind of being which is his when he enters the world, as a consequence of his createdness, and a kind of being he ought to strive toward and attain to—by being prudent, just, brave and temperate. The doctrine of virtue, that is, is one form of the doctrine of obligation; but one by nature free of regimentation and restriction. On the contrary, its aim is to clear a trail, to open away.⁷¹

The Ancient Greeks were brilliant philosophers who debated much on the various fundamental philosophical virtues, but as al-Attas has noticed, without religion, these virtues cannot be properly practiced in an effective manner; nor are they sufficient to achieve enduring happiness, which can be experienced even in this world and not determined by external and internal situations.⁷²

The Christian civilization too was concerned about virtues, and had profound theoretical discussions on ethics and morality rooted in Biblical scripture and Greek wisdom, especially as carried out by Augustine in the 5th century and Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century.⁷³

Modern secular Western civilization, despite its marvelous contributions to various areas of scientific and socio-economic advancement in large parts of the developed world, still grapple to develop an effective way to educate responsible human beings. Many of their thoughtful religious leaders and thinkers worry about the weakening of the spiritual and moral virtues of modern humanity. Jose Ortega Y Gasset, just before the Second World War, talked about the rise of “a new barbarian” who is, “above all, the professional man, more learned than ever before but at the same time more uncultured....”⁷⁴ Seventy years ago, Carroll Quigley after detailing the many great and far-reaching scientific, political and economic successes of modern Western civilization, admitted: “Some things we clearly do not yet know, including the most important of all, which is how to bring up children to form them into mature, responsible adults....”⁷⁵ There are many factors that could explain this situation. Perhaps one of the major reasons is the increasingly pervasive influence of epistemological relativism in academic and

71 Ibid., xii.

72 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, pp. 93-94. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*. 11 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), 2: 272 ff.

73 For an excellent elucidation of the virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance and their various sub-divisions, see, Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, 3-206.

74 Jose Ortega Y Gasset, *Mission of the University* Translated by Howard Lee Nostrand (New York: W.W Norton, 1944), 38-39.

75 Carrolle Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in our Time* (New York and London: Macmillan/ Collier, 1966), 1311.

leadership circles in Western society. This, as Richard Bernstein observes, weakened the ethical and moral perspective and determination by making all points of views acceptable.⁷⁶

This cancerous trend become more widespread, and forced Cardinal Ratzinger, in April 2004 a few hours before being elected as Pope Benedict VI, to warn the Catholic leaders of the growing “dictatorship of relativism”, which rejects all absolute values “and leaves as the ultimate measure only the measure of each one and his desires.”⁷⁷

This threat is confirmed by his successor, Pope Francis, in March 2013 as the “tyranny of relativism.”⁷⁸ The rampant disregard for generally established facts and truth have reached high political levels such that several national leaders in Europe have been elected based on fear, anger and disinformation above reasoned debates which are feared to be undermining long-standing democratic institutions.⁷⁹

Recently, a few Western educational experts tried to revisit the importance of virtues in the context of modern higher educational development as a response to the pervasive dehumanization and commercialization of education. Referring significantly to Aristotle, Jon Nixon argues for the concept of Virtuous University through which he seeks to redefine the moral basis of academic professionalism in teaching, research, scholarship and collegial relations. In these areas, he suggested four virtues to be deliberated and practiced: Truthfulness, which includes accuracy and sincerity; Respect, which consists of attentiveness and honesty; Authenticity, which includes courage and compassion; and Magnanimity, which includes autonomy and care.⁸⁰

Other scholars, such as Karen Armstrong, proposed another solution, which stresses on the external human conduct. Regretting the deeply “nihilistic self-destruction at the heart of the brilliant achievements of our modern culture”⁸¹ due to purely rational education and abuse of traditional religions, Armstrong suggested that humanity return to the most ancient human spiritual and ethical wisdom of the Axial Age which flourished from about 1600-200 BC. This was the period of the Buddha, Socrates, Confucius, Jeremiah, the mystics of the

Upanishads, Mencius, and Euripides who, according to her, subscribed to perennial philosophy. Most fundamentally, she emphasized, “What mattered was not what you believed but how you behaved. Religion was about doing things that changed you at a profound level.”⁸² It is instructive to remind ourselves that although all these ancient figures placed great importance on external ethical conduct, they were also very firm on the doctrinal certainty of their ethical teachings.

VI. THE CASE OF CHINA

Some non-Western nations are trying to frame and develop a better conception of civilization based on their worldview. For example, modern China is creating its own modernity, interpreting and applying socialism from a Chinese perspective, which has been predominantly influenced by Confucianism and certain features of Taoism and Buddhism.⁸³ Since the 1980s, there has been a sort of revivalism of Confucianism in Chinese society, including more discussions on Confucianist economics.⁸⁴ In fact, according to a respectable authority such as Martin Jacques, the challenge to Western hegemony posed by Chinese modernity and socio-economic governance will be greater than that posed by so-called Muslim fundamentalism.⁸⁵

China is also actively seeking to be the first ecological civilization; not necessarily to replace the modern western one, but primarily to deal with its own ecological challenges arising from its fast-paced economic and technological changes.

Some of the basic features of an ecological civilization as espoused by the current Chinese leadership are that human beings should not regard themselves as being superior to other parts of Nature; that the relationship between humans and others should be one of equality, friendship, and mutual reliance; that human beings should feel indebted to nature as the source of their

82 Ibid, xiii.

83 See for example Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Derk Bodde. 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), and Charles A. Moore, editor. *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968).

84 See for example Tianglong Yu, (2009) “The Revival of Confucianism in Chinese Schools: A Historical Political Review”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28:2, 113-129; Shufang Wu, “The Revival of Confucianism and the CCP’s Struggle for Cultural Leadership: A Content Analysis of the People’s Daily, 2000-2009”. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2014 vol. 23, no. 89, 971-991; and Kazimierz Poznanski (2017) “Confucian Economic: How is Chinese Thinking Different?”, *China Economic Journal*. 10: 3, 362-84.

85 Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World*. 2nd edition (London: Penguin, 2012), see Chap. 5: “Contested Modernity”.

76 Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 3-4.

77 http://www.vatican.va/gp11/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html. Accessed 24 Dec 2018.

78 <http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2013/03/22/full-text-pope-francis-address-to-diplomats/>. Accessed 24 Dec 2018.

79 Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth* (London: William Collins, 2018).

80 Jon Nixon, *Towards the Virtuous University* (The Moral Bases of Academic Professionalism, 2008), 2-11.

81 Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), xi.

origin and to treat it well; that Nature should not be over-exploited; that the natural ecosystem and environment must be properly respected; that moral principles must be followed to ensure equity between peoples, nations and generations; that minimal and efficient consumption of natural resources and their conservation must be advocated; that sustainable development should be made the highest national objective as opposed to short-termed development goals and over-exploitation of resources; and that the fruits of development must be enjoyed by all members of society, not only by a minority.⁸⁶

All the above general characteristics need to be systematically and coherently elaborated on and put into practice and exemplified at the personal and community levels, which presupposes an inner spiritual and ethical transformation. It involves fundamental changes in the worldview of the Chinese population concerning the nature and destiny of man and the universe, the meaning of true happiness, and a radical transformation of societal lifestyle. It is not certain how the Chinese government plans to carry out this total and fundamental transformation.

CONCLUSION

Characterizing the Islamic civilization as virtuous does not exclude the fact that some of the ideas and actions of the leaders and other members of the Community were and are contrary to the widely accepted worldview of Islam and its virtues. What is most instructive is that the fundamental aspects of the worldview of Islam and the vision of truth and reality it projects, and the basic virtues it seeks to inculcate has not significantly changed among all the major schools of thought in Islam.

Mistakes, errors and deviations, no matter how grave can still be theoretically understood and corrected when the basic elements of this worldview and virtues are firmly established based on the long standing consensus of generations of diverse groups of authoritative scholars. Equipped with a clear understanding of the worldview and virtues, there is a likelihood that the perpetrators will feel regret or remorse and atone for their mistakes and change for the

better; and the proper authorities will know and be confident in their decisions. But when the basic framework is changed, the reversal and distortion of virtues will be normalized, and the perpetrators will not feel regret, remorse, or be willing to change for the better.⁸⁷ In fact, he may be emboldened to demand equal rights to persist in his errors and vehemently oppose established and valid religious and civil authorities. On the other hand, in a fundamentally altered religious and ethical framework, these authorities will be weakened and the society upon which they derived their communal legitimacy will be confused. In this condition the basic spirit and character of the Islamic civilization as we know it will disappear. But as Hodgson has confidently observed more than four decades ago: “The vision has never varnished, the venture has never been abandoned; these hopes and faith are still vitally alive in the modern world.”⁸⁸

Of course, the philosophical program of secularism and its attendant relativism, combined with a crisis which al-Attas identified as the loss of *adab* among Muslim educated classes and leaders in all fields, will shake the very foundations of their worldview, question the eternal authority of the Qurʾān and the Prophet and all the venerable leaders of the Community.

The warning by al-Attas should be seriously heeded—that the life and person of the prophet should not be terrestrialized and despiritualized because that would prepare the ground for a ‘secularized’ Islam and corrupt its ethical and moral virtues, and distort the nature and mission of its civilization.⁸⁹ The continuous Islamization of Muslim thought and practice which refers fundamentally to the collective “striving towards realization of the moral and ethical quality of social perfection achieved during the age of the Holy Prophet who created it under Divine Guidance”⁹⁰ must be intelligently and progressively sustained.

To reiterate, the worldview of Islam and the virtues it enunciates and inculcates, are based on certain knowledge, and manifested in the lives of men and women of different ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and geographical backgrounds who created legal, political, socio-economic and scientific principles and institutions and produced literary, artistic and architectural effects which cumulatively shaped the Virtuous Civilization of Islam.

87 Perhaps this is one of the reasons why in the worldview of the majority of traditional Muslims and their conception of virtues, committing minor and even major sins—with the exception of heresy—does not automatically made the perpetrator a *kāfir*, a disbeliever, but a sinner (*fāsiq*). See for example al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, p. 351; (Halkin), 216. See also Ramaḍān bin Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī, Muṣliḥuddīn Muṣṭafā al-Qastallānī, and Aḥmad bin Mūsā al-Khayālī, *Al-Majmūʿah al-Sunniyyah ‘alā Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʿid al-Nasaʿiyyah* (Damascus: Dār al-Nūr al-Ṣabāḥ, 2012), 469-471, 611-615.

88 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1: 71.

89 Al-Attas, *IS*, 37, 114, and 125.

90 *Ibid*, 42.

86 See in Jiang Chunyun, “Creating an Ecological Civilization” from: www.climateandcapitalism.com/2013/03/31/chinese-leader-calls-for-ecological-civilization/ accessed. 9/6/2015. This article first appeared in January issue of the English-language edition of *Qiushi Journal*, a publication of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The author is former vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China. See also Catherine Brahic, “China Battles to be the First Ecological Civilization”. *New Scientist*. 13 June 2014. Issues no 2973. Accessed 9th June 2015.

Many of them were truly great men and women who contributed meaningful and lasting achievements. Despite the changing personal and societal fortunes and circumstances, they generally experience enduring happiness, as understood in the spiritual sense. Their personal and collective endeavors were, and are, a result of the process of Islamization, which every generation of Muslims must continue to carry out with proper education and the inculcation of *adab* and virtues at the highest levels, and in the most comprehensive sense.

Let me end by saying that despite the many local and international challenges that contemporary Muslim are facing, such as simple ignorance, poverty, scientific and technological backwardness, socio-political instability and corruption, and extremism and terrorism, al-Attas, since two decades ago, has regularly reminded Muslims of their moral duty:

Remember that we are a people neither accustomed nor permitted to lose hope and confidence, so that it is not possible for us simply to do nothing but wrangle among ourselves and rave about empty slogans and negative activism while letting the real challenge of the age engulf us without positive resistance. The real challenge must be mounted from the fortification not merely of political power, but power that is founded upon right knowledge.⁹¹

91 Al-Attas, *IS*, Preface.