**MUSLIM**

**CIVILIZATION**

*The Causes of Decline and the Need for Reform*

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**FOREWORD**

History is not merely a chronicle of events; more importantly it is a gallery of pictures unveiling successive scenarios of mankind's achievements and failures, excellences and depravities, sublime heights and abysmal falls. It is a record of humanity's long march towards tomorrow, the past merging into the present and opening avenues for the future. It is a mirror in which one can see vibrant episodes of the rise and fall of nations and civilizations through an interplay of ideas, personalities, institutions, communities and societies.

History also presents much more than an unending galaxy of pictures and mirrors reflecting the ebb and flow of events and rise and fall of nations and civilizations. While unfolding for the human eye, these fascinating scenes, it also confronts the mind with challenges. One is prompted to reflect, analyze and delve deeper beneath the surface to discover the causative forces behind all historical phenomena. This is a process through which one moves from the dynamics of history to the realm of the philosophy of history. This opens up for mankind a world of opportunities to learn from the past, so as to reshape the present and pave the way for a better future. History's heights and downfalls both have their lessons, which can be ignored only at mankind's peril.

The Qur'an invites mankind to reflect upon history so that it draws lessons, mend its behavior and seek its tryst with destiny. The

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Renowned historian Ishtiaq Qureshi puts it succinctly when he says, that he Qur'an "does not look upon the present as merely transient, nor upon the past as the sum total of merely so many transients and insignificant presents .... [It] draws attention repeatedly to the misdeeds of previous people and their destruction as the result of these misdoings

Reflection on the factors responsible for the rise and fall of peoples, communities and nations are germane to the Qur'anic way of thinking:

*(O Muhammad) We narrate these (historical) anecdotes of Messengers to you that we may strengthen your heart through them. In these anecdotes come to you the Truth, and Exhortation, and a Reminder for the believers.*

(Qur'an 1120)

*We raised a Messenger in every community (to tell them): "Serve Allah and shun the Evil One''. Thereafter Allah guided some of them while others were overtaken by errors. Go about the earth, then, and observe what the end of those who rejected the Messengers was.*

(Qur'an 1636)

*Have they not seen how many a people we have destroyed before them? People whom we had made more powerful in the earth than you are and upon whom we had showered abundant rains from the heavens and at whose feet We caused the rivers to flow? And then (when they behaved ungratefully) we destroyed them for their sins, and raised other peoples in their place.*

(Qur'an 6:.6)

1. Qureshi, Ishriaq Husain, "Historiography" in M.M. Sharif (ed), *A History of Muslim Philosophy,* Vol. II, Karachi; Royal Book Co., 1983 Pg 1198.

*And indeed before your time, (O Muhammad) many a Messengers has been scoffed at: but those who mocked at them were encompassed by the Truth they had scoffed at. Say: "Go about journeying the earth and behold the end of those who gave the lie (to the Truth).*

(Qur'an 6: or-n)

The Qur'an has emphasized moral as well as material factors responsible for the rise and decline of nations. It has invited mankind to understand the Divine design embedded in historical processes. It has also assigned to man and woman the role nor only to learn from do history but also co fashion it. The dynamic principle of *isuikhlaf* (vice-regency and stewardship) defines the role of human beings on this earth. Their historic mission, as individuals and as a community of believers, is to strive continuously to live by and establish the Divine Will in history's space and time. The position of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as the last prophet spells out for him and the Muslim *Ummah* a unique role in history. The Qur'an puts it clearly:

*Indeed we have sent forth Our Messengers with clear Messages, and we sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that men may establish justice.*

(Qur'an 5725)

The responsibility of the *Ummah* has also been very clearly scared:

*We have made you a mid-most (just) community*

(Qur'an 2:143)

0 *believers! Be establishers of Justice, Witnesses for God*

(Qur'an 4:135)

The Muslim *Ummah* is a nation with a mission which upholds a vision for mankind. It is required to undertake, individually and collectively, active struggle to establish justice within and without, so as to enable humanity to seek the Good in this world and in the Hereafter. If the *Ummah* fulfils its responsibility, in accord with the Divine guidance and following the *uswah* (life example) of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), then it is destined to achieve peace and prosperity in this world and success and salvation in the life to come.

*Allah has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely bestow upon them power in the land as He bestowed power on those who preceded them, and that He will establish their religion which He has been pleased to choose for them, and He will replace with security the state of fear that they are in. let them serve Me and associate none with Me in My Divinity.*

(Qur'an 24:55)

The most distinct and defining aspect of Muslim civilization is that it is based on faith and is inspired by a vision of Man, Society and Destiny based on Divine guidance. Ir is characterized by the integration of the spiritual with the material, and the moral with the mundane. Life is one organic whole. Human problems have to be solved through a holistic approach, and not through any partial or piecemeal approach to human life and its problems. The *lean vital* of Muslim civilization consists in chis vision and the mission to change the world in accord with chis vision through a process of sharing and establishing model personalities, societies and cultures.

The real strength of Muslim civilization had always been in the simultaneous pursuit of moral excellence and material strength, prosperity and security. All the phases of the rise and expansion of Muslim civilization were characterized by the dynamic operation of this *lean:* whenever this balance was disturbed, the forces of decline and disintegration weakened the fabric of Muslim society and led

to its downfall. Throughout its historic march, spread over fourteen centuries, Muslim history has witnessed many periods of strength and weakness, of rise and fall, as also of ebb and flow and rout and rally. Yet what has been unique throughout is the inner resilience of the Islamic *lean* and its articulation in different space and time situations. After every decline, there has been a fresh wave of revival characterized by efforts of renovation and regeneration that responded creatively co the challenges of the time.

Every episode of rise and revival drew its strength afresh from the original sources, he Qur'an and the Prophetic practice *(Sunnah).* Every such effort represents elements of continuity all along while catering for the demands of change. There was always continuity of vision and mission, but their articulation in forms tuned in to new needs and situations represents the hallmark of the Islamic venture in history. The strategy for Islamic revival has always included remobilization of the spiritual, moral, material and technological forces. In turn, this led invariably to raising a generation of individuals imbued with this vision and committed to the restructuring of society and co harnessing all sources of power in the service of Islamic ideals. A careful reading of the history of the last fourteen centuries reveals chis dynamic nature of the Muslim ethos which has expressed itself in different space/time scenarios.

This ethos of Islamic history and civilization has been described by contemporary Muslim thinkers as *Tajdid wa Ihya'* (renovation and revival). Earlier thinkers have also addressed this issue in the context of their own historic situations. Some of the more prominent and outstanding thinkers who have examined this aspect of Muslim

1. See Mawdudi, Abul Ala, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in ls!am,* Lahore, Islamic Publications, 3" Edition, 1976; ibid: *Khilaft-o-Mulukiyya,* Lahore, Islamic Publication, 1996; ibid, *The Islamic Movement:Dynamics of Values, Power and Change,* (ed and translated by Khurrum Murad), Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1984. Also see Nadvi, Abul Hasan Ali: *Tarikh Dawat-o-zeemar,* 6 Volumes, Lucknow, India, Majlis Tahqiqat-o-Nashariyyat-e-Islam, 1969-1984.

civilization were Abu Yusuf (n3-182 AH/731-798 AD), Abu'l-f:Iasan ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi (364-450 AH/974-1058 AD), Abu Hamid Mu}:i.ammad al-Ghazal.I (451-505 AH/1055-1m AD), Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 AH/1263-1328 AD), Ibn Khaldun (732-808 AH/1332-1406 AD), Shah Walrullah Dihlawi (1114-1176 AH/1703-1762 AD), and Jamal al-Din Afghani (1254-1315 AH/1838­1897 AD).

It is interesting that despite differences in historical contexts, there is agreement among these scholars about the factors responsible for the decline of Muslim civilization as well as in respect of their insights about the strategies and modalities for revival, renovation and resurgence. All of chemo agree that Muslim decline was never because of islam but due to departures from it. They re-emphasized the original vision and priorities and strived to correct the distortions produced by neglect of the balance between the moral/spiritual and material/technological aspects of the Islamic equation. Strategies for revival focused on preunderstanding of the original vision, reaffirmation of the *Ummah's* mission, promotion of education and character building, and simultaneous mobilization of material, economic and technological resources for rhe reorganization of society on the principles of *shara* (consultation and accountability), *'adl* (justice and socio-economic equity) and unity and self-reliance. These constituted the sum and substance of the essentials for revival and reconstruction, regardless of the form they had to assume because of distinct historic contexts. The real strength lied in loyalty to Allah and His Prophet, moral integrity of the individual and the prosperity and security of society. This is achieved through the harnessing of competitive political, economic, technological and military power. While the manifestations of these revivalist strategies may have differed in different epochs, the above essentials constituted their common parameters.

My dear friend and colleague, Dr. Umer Chapra, has blazed a new trial by examining the contemporary scare of Muslim history and civilization, drawing upon the historical experience of the *Ummah* in

General and applying the tools of historical analysis developed by Ibn Khaldun in particular.

Ibn Khaldun's work provides one of the most comprehensive models for understanding the rise and fall of civilizations in general and of Muslim civilization in particular. His work not only identifies the factors responsible for the emergence and growth of civilizations and for their decline and disintegration but has also applied this analytical model co the understanding of the problems faced by the Muslim society and the pathways for its revival and development. Ibn Khaldun has analyzed historical data with an incisive mind and philosophic vision. He has also tried to look upon the strengths and wealrnesses of human society in the light of values, principles and insights contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and the ways in which they were operationalised in Muslim history.

One key lesson derived from Islamic history has been beautifully summed up by Iqbal when he said that it is Islam that has saved the Muslims in their hours of crisis, and not *vice versa.* Throughout history Islam has remained the ultimate source of inspiration and the most decisive rallying point for revival and regeneration.

This line of thought is diametrically different from the approach advanced by most of the Orientalists and Western scholars of Islamic history. They have generally tried to put the blame for Muslim decline, in some form or other, on Islam and its value framework, ignoring all together that the source of revival in all major episodes of Muslim history had come from none other than Islam itself. In fact some of them have gone co the extent of pronouncing the virtual demise of Islamic civilization, painting Muslim civilization as a legacy, a thing of the past, and not as a living, vibrant and evolving reality and a pace­setter for the future.

This approach has been challenged by contemporary Muslim scholars and it is also belied by the powerful waves of Islamic resurgence in almost all parts of the world. This flawed approach to Islamic history and civilization has been given a new twist in the literature produced

By the "terror industry" which has overshadowed the intellectual and media horizon after the tragic events of 9/11. It is a pressing need of the hour that a more honest, objective and realistic effort is made to understand the nature of Muslim civilization, the real state of present-day Muslim society and to undertake a sympathetic and fact-based analysis of contemporary Islamic resurgence. It deserves to be acknowledged that some efforts are being made in the western world to look upon the Muslim situation in a more realistic manner and also to explore avenues of dialogue and co-operation between Islam and the West despite the dominant discourse which is obsessed with theories and prophecies of conflict and confrontation. I would like to refer in this respect to the works of thinkers like Marshall Hodgson,3 John Esposito,' John Vole/ and Hans Kung,6 among others. Their works provide some silver lining to an otherwise dismal horizon. Dr Umer Chapra's present work, however, is unique and outstanding as it breaks new grounds by presenting the Muslim viewpoint with a high degree of astute scholarship, academic integrity and penetrating insights.

1. Hodgson, Marshall G.S, *the Venture of Islam; Conscience and History in a World Civilization,* 3 Volumes, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974.
2. Esposito, John, L(ed), *The Oxford History of Islam,* Oxford University Press, 1999.

Also, Esposito, John, L and John. D. Vole, *Makers of Contemporary Islam,* New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.

1. Vole, John, D, *Ilam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World,* 2nd Ed, Syracuse University Press, 1994.
2. Kung, Hans, *and Islam: Pas, Present and Future,* Oxford: One World, zoo7. Hans Kung has tried to capture the dynamics of rise and fall and ebb and flow of Muslim civilization in the form of six paradigms: original Islamic community; Arab empire; classical paradigm of Islam as a world religion; paradigm of Ulema and Sufis; Modernization paradigm; and contemporary (postmodern) paradigm. He acknowledges:

'We must recognize that, for all the historical currents and counter-currents, in the various constantly shifting historical images and lived-our realizations of Islam there is an abiding element to which we shall have to devote all our attention: its basic components and basic perspectives stem from an origin that is by no means random bur is given with a quite specific historical personality, a holy scripture. This remains an enduring norm. Hans Kung (2007) page 2o

Umer Chapras major contributions lie in the field of economics, particularly Islamic economics. His excursions into history and philosophy of history also seem to have branched out for his strides into the landscapes of economics. His first major work, *Towards a Just Monetary System* (1985) which has won for him the prestigious King Faisal International Prize (990) deals with the fundamentals of Islamic finance. It is a pioneering study on the issue of *Riba* in a modern financial and economic context. It is a scientific exposition of the Islamic rationale for the prohibition of *Riba* and an original contribution towards developing major contours of a *Riba-free* monetary system. Chapra has ably demonstrated that, on counts of stability and equity, a *Riba-free* financial system is not only feasible but also superior to interest-based systems. It seems his mind remained puzzled on the issue as to how can a *Ribii-free* monetary system operate in isolation. It could be fully operationalized and could produce *its* optimal results only in an economic system whose entire landscape is Islamic. This seems to have prompted his quest to study the Islamic economic system in its entirety and also examine it in the context of the contemporary economic systems of capitalism, socialism and the welfare state. The efforts of this research and reflection were presented in his second major work, *Ilam and the Economic Challenge* (1992). This thoroughly researched and well-written book contains highly incisive discussions on capitalism, socialism, welfare state and the Islamic economy.

While making this comparative study, Chapra has also dealt with issues involved in the implementation of an Islamic economic system in the contemporary Muslim context. He tried to focus on the need to develop a comprehensive strategy for the application of the Islamic approach to the economy of Muslim countries. Chapra has emphasized that this new approach cannot produce desirable results unless there are fundamental changes in the objectives and modalities of policies and socio-economic programs pursued in the Muslim world, which should also be coupled with a thorough restructuring of

Their economic institutions and mechanisms. An Islamic financial and economic scheme can bear fruits only as part of an overall reform and restructuring program me for the economy.

This seems to have brought him to the next stage of reflection: the problems of social change and the search for historical models for the reconstruction of society and economy. The focus in his third major work: *The Future of Economics: An Islamic Perspective* (2000) was widened to explore these areas. In this book he has tried to grapple with the complex problems of the interface between economy, society and history. He also drew heavily on Ibn Khaldun's model for socio­economic change which provides a major key to the understanding of the past as a prelude to planning for the future. It was his quest for a new economy based on Islamic values and principles that prompted him to dwell at length on issues of political economy: the role of the state, the processes of social change, and dynamics of history. In this discussion he also discovered the need to emphasize the centrality of *Maqisid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of the Shari'ah: the protection of *din,* intellect, life, posterity and wealth) in dealing with the specifics of *fqh.* In the matrix of his analysis some other factors also become prominent, particularly the issues of freedom, human rights, justice, good governance, accountability and fighting corruption and the eradication of poverty and ignorance. That is how Chapra seems to have moved along with economics onto the realms of history, sociology and politics. The results of this intellectual pilgrimage can be seen in his present study, *Muslim Civilization: Causes of Decline and Need for Reform.*

*Muslim Civilization: Causes of Decline and Need for Reform* is a multi-disciplinary study and has to be read and understood in the context of the author's earlier works. This volume, while focusing on the causes of Muslim decline, the nature of Muslim contemporary crisis, and the need for reform, also spells out major elements of a comprehensive strategy for reform and reconstruction. The roles of ideas, individuals, institutions, social movements and state have come

*Into* sharp focus. This strategy is rooted in the moral, spiritual and ideational vision of Islam and the ideological and political ambitions of the Muslim *Ummah.* The main building blocks of the proposed strategy consists of the mobilization of economic, sociological, political, technological and structural factors for the reconstruction of Muslim society and state.

Another important feature of this study is that it addresses issues which deal with Muslim civilization in the context of the current global matrix. The author emphasizes the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges and makes a reasoned plea for a comprehensive strategy as against the existing partial strategies for reform. Chapra's advocacy of a holistic approach is in keeping with the historic ethos of the Muslim *Ummah.* This is also in consonance with the longings of humanity that *is* afflicted by the fruitless efforts to find solutions to economic, social and political problems without bringing about a fundamental shift from the dominant secular and liberal paradigm. A shift which provides a new paradigm that integrates moral and material dimensions and assigns centrality to justice and equity for all human beings.

Clarity of vision is the first major requirement for any worthwhile strategy for reform. Umer Chapra has successfully spelled out a vision for an Islamic society and economy to be carved out under the umbrella of the Islamic paradigm. Efforts to rebuild society in the light of this paradigm are the destiny of the Muslim *Ummah* in the twenty-first century. Vision and action are major planks of this strategy; for vision without action remains a dream, and action without vision is a nightmare and a recipe for disaster.

Chapra's approach has the merit of being morally motivated and man-centered. Justice and well-being for all human beings is the ultimate destiny that beckons mankind. Strategies that emanate from secular and materialistic paradigms ignore these vital dimensions. Chapra pleads for a thorough integration of the moral and spiritual dimensions with the material and technological ones. Human resource

Development becomes the premium mobile for the establishment of a just socio-economic order. Development and the harnessing of material and technological resources are means to that end, and not ends in themselves. Chapra has rightly emphasized the importance of freedom, equality of opportunities, transparency and accountability at all levels and justice and tolerance as essential elements of any worthwhile strategy for reform. Education and research must reign prominently in this strategy as would be comprehensive programs for scientific and technological development. Democracy and participatory mechanisms would be the soul of such a system. The ultimate objective is justice for all and the unity and self-reliance of the *Ummah* in a pluralistic, competitive and non-hegemonic world. The challenges of corruption, consumerism and ecological neglect would also have to be addressed. While the individuals remain the real pivot of the system, the role of moral filters, price mechanism, other socio-economic institutions and a positive role of the state are major pillars of this new system. Umer Chapra has identified all the major ingredients of a viable strategy for change so as to enable Muslim civilization to reach a new height while maintaining its distinct identity and becoming a blessing for the *Ummah* and humanity. I have no reservation in suggesting that Umer Chapra's scholarly quartet, particularly the final volume on Muslim civilization is a major contribution coward’s rhea development of Islamic socio­economic thought in our times and is bound to open up new vistas for intellectual discourse and discussion within the community of Muslim scholars and dialogue with the rest of the world. These ideas also provide a viable basis for fresh policy formulation and political and socio-economic restructuring of Muslim society.

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