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Abstract

This paper briefly describes the Post Modernism philosophy, introduces the work of its key proponents, provides a critical appraisal of Post Modernism thought and finally it compares the Post Modernism philosophy with philosophical heritage of Islamic faith and civilization and recommends ways to cope up with the challenge of postmodernism.

Keywords

Post Modernism, Sociology, Philosophy, History, Islamic Civilization, Modernism, Enlightenment, Globalization

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Introduction

Post Modernism is a reaction to modernism, but it is not a different ideology from modernism in every sense. It is critical of few ideas of modernism and it proposes emancipation from oppression manifested in culture, language, laws, customs, religion etc. Eclecticism and freedom of expression, in reaction to the rigidity, unnecessary emphasis on rationalism and aesthetic limitations of modernism, are the hallmarks of the postmodern thought.

Postmodernism refers to a cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement but lacks a clear central organizing principle. Post Modernism literature includes complexity, contradiction, ambiguity and diversity.

Postmodernism philosophy is also critical of Enlightenment universals. Postmodernism philosophy asserts that truth doesn't exist in any objective sense but is created rather than discovered. The postmodernists have given a new secular trinity of tolerance–diversity–choice.

Postmodernism supports "a new kind of superficiality" or "depthlessness", in which models which once explained people and things in terms of an "inside" and an "outside" (such as hermeneutics, the dialectic, Freudian repression, etc) have been rejected.

Post Modernism ideas appear to have been conducive to, and strongly associated with, the feminist movement, racial equality movements, gay rights movements and even the peace movement, as well as various hybrids of these.

Thinkers of Post Modernism Philosophy

Michel Foucault asserts that "Language is oppression". He says that language was developed to allow only those who spoke the language not to be oppressed. All other people that don't speak the language would then be oppressed. He is also critical of all types of systems and institutions including the institution of family. He is in favor of sexual freedom and permitting homosexuality and Incest.

Jean-François Lyotard opposed universality and generality. Tofler thinks of Post Modernism as a 'Future Shock'. Fromm (1955) argues against consumerism and late capitalism in "The sane Society". Marcuse

(1964) in "One Dimensional Man" is very pessimistic about the future of the secular society after it has even though achieved remarkable milestones in science. Fukuyama (1992) argues in his book "The End of History" that we have achieved a divide and independence from past and history.

Roslyn Wallach Bologh & Leonard Mell (1994) argue that the postmodern theory of language constitutes a form of nominalism that parallels the nominalism of speculative, monetarist capitalism and that postmodernism's understanding of language as a "play of power" corresponds to the political realism of contemporary international relations. This metatheory of postmodernism helps to undermine the development of any rational alternative to contemporary political economy and the current world disorder.

Few thinkers have also criticized Post Modernism philosophy as well. James Fowler argues that Post Modernity is characterized by the "loss of conviction", and Grenz concurs by saying that Post Modernity is a period of pessimism contrasting with modernity's optimism. Post Modernism is a counter enlightenment philosophy whereas modernism is a pro-enlightenment philosophy. Bernard Smith (1998) argues that 'Post Modernism' is unlikely to survive as a general description of contemporary culture in 21st century.

Jürgen Habermas argues that without both critical and rational traditions, society cannot value the individual, and that social structures will tend towards totalitarianism. He favors universalism as the fundamental requirement for any rational criticism, and to give it up is to nullify the liberalizing reforms of the previous two centuries.

Thesis of Religion: Islamic Epistemological Perspective

Morality is very eloquently discussed by Kant (1785/1789). He said that intentions define actions and not the consequences and not even compassion. He said that because compassion is temporary, a particular state and is not absolute. However, intentions best define the existence of morality in actions.

But, Kant did not give the method by which we could prioritize Maxims. For instance, truth and justice both are important moral values. But, what should we do if there is a conflict between the two? For

illustration, if a person is known to us as murderer, but if we do not have witnesses to prove him as murderer in the court of law, should we give false testimony to convict that person?

Islam helps us to prioritize Maxims. Islam shows us that this world is not fair in all respects. A morally upright man is not necessarily the most honorable man in the world. A morally upright trader is not necessarily the richest in the world. Not all murderers have been or will be convicted in this world. Even if all murderers could have been convicted, it will not be 'naturally' possible to give equitable punishment to the murderers who have killed more than one human being.

Even if it was possible, it will not be possible to reverse the immoral actions. What happened has happened and cannot be reversed. Death is the plainest truth and if justice cannot be provided in the life of a person; then, is it not rational to believe in life after death where everyone would be given equitable rewards and punishment for one's acts and Allah by His infinite wisdom would be able to judge without any doubt the intentions behind the actions and justice will be provided to each and every one?

One can decide to do an act morally as an end in itself and not merely as means to a material end only with the knowledge of life after death and the belief in Allah. Moral act in Islam is also a means to an end i.e. to achieve eternal success and blessings of Allah. But, it is not a material end confined to this life only. In this way, the utilitarian mind is also satisfied as happiness is a relative term not achieved only by material things. The fact that moral actions even if they are not rewarded in this world will be rewarded in life hereafter satisfies the utilitarian mind.

We know what is right and what is wrong through our conscience. In matters where our conscience does not guide us, Allah intervenes and guides us through His prophets. Therefore, Prophets (peace be upon them) guide us in matters where we might not have reached the right decision about right and wrong through our conscience. For instance, interest, gambling, liquor etc. might seem useful and right; but, Allah tells us in Holy Quran that there is more harm in these things than good (Al Baqarah: 219).

Today, we are seeing interest based system and gambling (speculative financial instruments) causing severe disorder in the economy. Similarly, the greatest asset of a human is his power to reason,

his intellect, his use of wisdom and his ability to think. When we take liquor, we lose our greatest asset i.e. conscience and often do bad things which harm others also, besides us. For instance, we see people having accidents, people misbehaving with other women after taking liquor etc.

If one believes in this life only; then, that person will be more selfish to get everything in this life. If we restrict our existence confined to this world alone with no accountability in afterlife; then, I am "just" as long as I am "just" in front of the society even though there could be sins that society could have never seen me doing. Contrarily, I could be regarded as "unjust" by the society if it convicts me based on evidence which could have been untrue. Life hereafter gives all our actions the meaning by promising each and every soul the equal reward and punishment.

People can take justice in their own hands if they are allowed absolute freedom. We need institutions which can impose certain restrictions on all of us so that we can enjoy our freedom without denying freedom to others.

Islam is also such an institution which though put restrictions on one's absolute freedom (as do all other systems), but Islam not only safeguards the rights of the people, but, more importantly and fundamentally, gives meaning to the life and to our own existence.

We can use both reason and experience to believe in Allah. By way of reasoning, if we are creatures, then we are created by someone and that creator is Allah. The question that who created Allah is not valid as Allah is the creator and not the creature. Ultimate Creator needs not be created.

By way of experience, we can use empirical knowledge obtained from science to learn how the galaxies, planets, stars, rotation of the moon, rotation of the sun, rotation of the earth around sun works. How do millions of living beings sustain themselves in a universe in which even a tiny unusual interference can make life impossible on this earth? Why such a tiny interference does not happen and life continues to exist. All of this could not have been possible without accepting that this universe that is so perfect in its design was created and is being managed by Allah alone. Had there been more than one Allah, then there would not have been such 'uniformity' in the way we see universe and the way our planet earth works.

Furthermore, no meaning to life, world, man, his role and purpose can be explained without believing in Allah. Islam explains this by outlining our role that we have been created by Allah and sent in this world to be judged for our actions and will be rewarded in life hereafter if we follow the teachings of Allah i.e. to be just, kind, truthful, faithful, obedient and morally upright.

The fundamental value is freedom. Happiness results from it. Justice comes in to protect it. Humans, we see can become unjust using that freedom as speculated by Angels as well (Al Baqarah: 30). Can we provide justice and happiness in a paradigm of absolute freedom? Even when humans had little freedom in this world, we have seen them becoming unjust and then depriving the mission of providing maximum collective happiness for all.

The fundamental question is that can we provide perfect justice in this world. Can we have maximum happiness as we envision in this world. Are we or can we be absolutely free in this world?

What is of fundamental importance is the fact that this test has to be 'just'. According to Islam, everyone would be judged based on his intentions, general attitude, general behavior, and general tendencies and most importantly in matters in which one has choice clarifies that this test is just.

How can a creation like this universe, having millions of stars, reachable not within centuries even at the speed of light, all so perfectly interwoven to make life exist and that too for some time as we do not grow to be immortal by way of evolution, be explained? Not only us, none of the species can escape from natural constraints and become immortal.

Everything in this world has been created in pairs. If there is thirst, there is water. If there is moon, it needs a sun to have its light reach us. If there is man, then there is a woman. Each one alone cannot live in isolation. They are all interdependent. Similarly, this world is incomplete without a belief in life hereafter.

This world alone shows us that few people get rewards which they do not deserve, while few people do not get rewarded even when they deserve, some go through severe illness, while some live a very healthy life, while some are unjust and yet they are not given punishment, some are honest and they do not get rewarded. All these

incomplete events suddenly end when we die. Then, if no one will get equitable reward and punishment, then there will be no reason why they should wait for an afterlife. They can do all the wrong things if they can avoid the law. But, even if they can, they do not always do that, they have the ability to differentiate between right and wrong inbuilt into their souls. They would like to do good acts and avoid wrong acts.

Are we our own creators? Millions of species cannot just exist in such beautiful contrast without someone responsible for it. For someone to be an ultimate creator, the Supreme Being, He has to be someone beyond the constraint of this world and nature. If the premise is that Allah created everything and nothing exist independent of His will. Then, logical conclusion would be that This Supreme Being, Allah, has to be an independent personality having no constraints of nature.

If Allah is powerful in one thing and not in another, then He is not a supreme being. If Allah is omnipotent, then, we as humans cannot predict the behavior of Allah using examples of ourselves because our frame of reference is limited and we are creatures and not ultimate creators and we have constraints.

The question arises, if Allah is omnipotent, can He be unjust. Allah knows everything, but it has nothing to do with us having a freedom to choose our way of action. A teacher sometimes knows the fate of the students, but it is the student who makes his destiny provided the teacher is just. Allah's knowledge about a person has nothing to do with the trial in question. I can, by way of my expertise, predict the result of a cricket match, but it was not me who decided the result of the cricket match in the end.

If someone is my teacher, he has the power to fail me for no reason. But, if he is just, he will do justice and will not fail me; however, it does not mean that he could not do so because of his inability, but it is because he can not contradict his own attributes and values if he was consistent (as Allah is).

Allah is just as it will only hold us accountable for our actions in which we have choice. We will not be held accountable for color, race, creed etc. Therefore, everyone has an equal chance to succeed in life hereafter.

Religion provides the answer that this universe was created by a supreme being Who created it for a purpose. Science also confirms that

because it has not at all provided answers to "Why it is". In fact, science has shown that life cannot mathematically and statistically exist by chance.

We, humans have not just come in this world today and are now looking for answers. We have history behind us that tells that the Prophets came with the message of Allah and the nations which were "direct recipients" who disbelieved were punished in this world. Christians, Muslims and Jews, all believe in that history and it is our common heritage.

Shops, factories, computer programs, machines etc, are systems and they run and are operated by someone. Universe is also a system and is the most complex and a grand system. How can it just be 'the only system' that does not require a creator. All the systems mentioned above have some purpose. How can only this most grand system have no purpose?

Why there exists so much contrast in species? Why not some species just by way of chance found nothing that they could eat? Found to have body structure that is suitable in land, but they existed in sea or vice versa. The limited knowledge we have about each and every living thing and how they live and exist is just fascinating.

How could all species exist in circumstances which suit them with respect to geography, climate, body structure etc? Why then they still die and not evolve into immortality. We could not do it. None of the millions of species could do it. The extinction of species and our death signifies that someone who created us (humans) and took our lives will indeed be able to bring us to life again and that life would justify the purpose of existence and give meaning to this worldly existence.

Why none of the species became selfish enough to evolve differently so as to become a little bit superior to others etc. They would want to if they were all different kinds of animals because we as animals (if we take the evolutionists' stance) know that we are selfish to some extent, and want freedom from natural constraints.

If humans were little smarter animals, then they would have at least made some progress to get out of the natural constraints and succeed in a millions of years of history of evolution that evolutionists support.

If I am standing close to another person and if I am hit with a stick, why would only I feel the stick and not the other person? If we cannot sense each other, cannot get through our independent existence (considering we are the same types of animals), how can distinct species, one existing and one not existing, make way for each other in such a magnificent and perfect way in every detail that life becomes possible without an ultimate creator?

Can we avoid the question 'why' in any other matter of life? If we think that evolution defines a why or even if does not define it, it defines the material dispensation in this world and the human struggle and evolution in this world intellectually and physically, then we ought to believe that all the bodies of knowledge are also one way or the other biological processes.

How do we differentiate between right and wrong? It has not gone through any evolution. Speaking truth is considered (I am not saying acted upon) a right thing throughout history.

If we are not creatures, just a manifestation of nature, then, there needs to be no reason to believe anything right or anything wrong, if we will just die without any accountability in life or hereafter for our actions, then, if we can avoid the court of law, we can kill, steal, hurt etc as long as no one can hold us accountable. But, we do not think and act like that. It is because we have conscience, ability to differentiate between right and wrong. Then, we have feelings and values, and in most cases, absolute feelings and values.

It makes this belief and argument very weak that this world and universe came out just other than by way of a creator creating it. Just like everything is created by a creator as we see it and observe it, this world and universe also has to be created.

It would be normal to believe like that as it will make us consistent. But, believing that every small thing, though insignificant, needs to be created by someone, but not applying this belief to the creation of the universe is erroneous. This universe could not have come about naturally. If species could co-exist naturally and fulfill their needs naturally, why they die?

A biological process cannot describe this complex set of choices we make through our conscience to uniformly identify right from wrong.

If we restrict the scope of evolution to some aspects; then, it cannot claim to take the place of religion which is a set of comprehensive doctrine i.e. a holistic system of beliefs and practices. If evolution is restricted in just describing how, then any description of 'how' (either correct or incorrect) does not in principle contradict with the thesis of religion. One cannot avoid the question 'why' though.

Social learning theory also cannot provide the wholesome answer because social learning requires for its acceptance and relevance, a history behind some of the values which gradually need to become sacred so that the society could force them on others to believe. In the start of life, nothing could be described as such.

Birds fly in winter to avoid cold. They have built-in map and take the best route to avoid flying over sea for most time. Birds few days old and doing it for the first time in life without access to books, journals and experience can never do that as perfectly as they do neither by way of evolution nor by way of social learning. Furthermore, the process, any process, may it be evolution or a sudden big bang, or whatever, does not give any answer to 'why'.

A question arises as to why we cannot just be able to see Allah and avoid having to solve this puzzle. We cannot see Allah, because Allah has sent us here for a purpose. That purpose would be meaningless if we could see Allah through our own eyes. But, we can observe, learn within ourselves and use our intellect to search for Allah and we will find the answer, but we have to be unbiased in our search.

Challenge of Post Modernism: The Islamic Perspective

Guiding at Muslim thinkers who responded to Modernism challenge, Habib (2000) in his article "Reconciling science with Islam in 19th century India" gave an account of two Muslim thinkers. He regarded Syed Ahmad as a re-constructionist who tried to reinterpret the Quran to assimilate modern scientific knowledge. He commented on Afghani as a pragmatist who stood for the cultivation of modern sciences, but did not approve of the aping of the West. He criticized the Ulema for the strange divide they had created between Muslim science and European science.

It needs to be appreciated that history does not give us a regular pattern of human struggle towards a just and fair political, social and economic setup as described by Marx. Kant also did not tell when we will be able to say that we are living in an enlightened age. These views of Marx and Kant were more relevant to Europe only. Muslim world provided a socially, economically and politically just system to the world for at least 50 years in the rule of Caliphates. In the period after caliphates too, Muslim world provided most things Kant asked for in an enlightened age.

However, one clear difference has to be appreciated between Muslims and Islam. Most of the laws in Christianity were mainly developed by humans themselves like St. Paul. Therefore, when thinkers of 15th century and afterwards criticized the church and the clergy, their criticism was also on religion and it was justified as the Christianity and the Clergy were the one and the same thing.

This is not the case with Islam and Muslims. Islam was not invented or created by Muhammad (P.B.U.H). It was the message of God as was Christianity with the difference that the divinity of Christianity was obscured and later modified by Christians. Islam as a message of God remained pure. However, Muslims as all other human beings have not been and are not perfect in their acts and systems. But, the acts of Muslims cannot said to be representative of what Islam is as Islam was not invented by Muslims.

Therefore, a distinction is to be made between the Muslims and Islam. Muslims may or may be acting truly on Islam and hence their actions do not determine what Islam is. Islam's decline was geopolitical and economic (referring to decline of Muslim states), but it was never epistemological.

When we study the 'Pure Islam', we will find that there is not a single thing in Islam that is irrational or unjust. This notion answers both the modernists and also fills vacuum observed in post modernism thought. In the following lines, I will just give the brief highlights of Islamic teachings which may or may not be truly present or found in Muslim world as Islam is the word of God and not how Muslims act and lead their lives.

Answers to Misconceptions About Islamic Faith

In the following lines, some of the most controversial and misunderstood issues relating to Islam are briefly clarified:

Rights of Women in Islam

As per Islam, Muslim women like men must educate themselves. They can own property and wealth. They have the right to choose their husbands and the right to separate from their husbands.

They are entitled to have 'Mehr' (wealth at the start of marriage), 'wirasat' (share in inheritance upon the death of husband, children and father etc). Islam does not make it obligatory on women to earn for their family. However, they can earn for the family and yet they are not obliged to spend their earnings on the family. They have a right to choose an occupation and earn their livelihood. However, men are obliged to spend their earnings on the family and they are made primarily responsible for earning the livelihood for their children and wives.

As per the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), a mother must be respected three times more than the father by the children. A husband is not a man in isolation; he is also a son of his mother and must obey and respect his mother.

No man is allowed to have extra-marital relationships with other women. Adultery is a severe crime in Islam. People who have indulged in adultery cease to have a right to marry a chaste partner in a Muslim society. Rapists are recommended for capital punishment in Islam.

Regarding 'women empowerment', it must be realized that the 'institution of family' is highly recognized and cherished in Islam. A woman has a central role in that institution. As per Islam, 'all power rests with Allah'. Mental and physical capabilities that are given to us are the blessings of Allah and we hold it as a trust. Therefore, based on the differences in these mental and physical capabilities, no one is superior in the eyes of Allah.

Rights of Non-Muslims in Islam

Non-Muslims can worship at their worship places. Government is responsible to safeguard their worship places. No non-Muslim can be forcibly converted to Islam. Muslims believe in all Prophets sent by Allah including Ibrahim (pbuh), Moses (pbuh) and Christ (pbuh). Hence, people believing in other Prophets do not face the risk of blasphemy in Islam.

The manner of Dawah prescribed in Quran in Surah-e-Nahl in verse 125 and 126 is as follows:

“Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation and debate with them in the most befitting manner. Indeed, your Lord best knows those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided.”

Jihad in Islam

Jihad i.e. to struggle is a broader term and is not limited to a specific meaning. Holy Quran says that Jihad (in the meaning of armed struggle) can only be for the sake of eliminating injustice [Al Hajj: 39]. It is not a fight against non-Muslims. It is a fight against injustice. It can only be undertaken as a last resort to eliminate injustice. It can only be undertaken by the government and not by the community on its own.

In all great battles of Badr, Uhud, Ihzab etc., Muslims in the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) fought a defensive war as the war was imposed upon Muslims.

Jihad cannot be undertaken for the expansion of the state, against innocents, against non-combatants, against the contract of peace if it has been signed and it cannot be sudden and unannounced. So, suicide bombing against civilians is out rightly unislamic.

Islamic Concept of Equality

All humans are equal. No white has superiority over a black. Only piety and righteousness are the attributes that will distinguish us before Allah in life hereafter (Al-Hujarat:13). No rich has superiority over a poor.

Verse 32 of Al Maida highlights that there are only two ways a human being can be given Capital punishment:

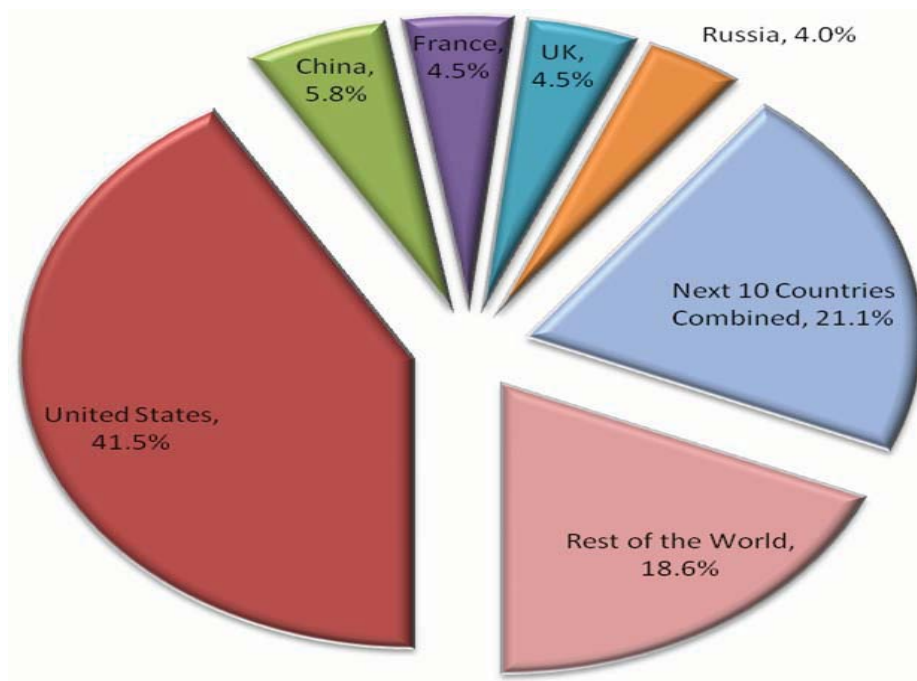
“If any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people”.

All humans should have equal chance to earn their livelihood. Interest which results in concentration of wealth is prohibited in Islam. No discrimination is permitted based on ethnic, religious, racial or gender basis in all walks of life.

Does Islam have Bloody Borders?

Huntington (1997) raised the debate of clash of civilizations and argued that Islam has bloody borders. But, the figure below paints a very different picture and confirms that almost all major countries in the race to expend on military are not Muslim countries.

Figure 1: Global Distribution of Military Expenditure



Source: *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 2009*

It must be clarified once again that Muslim history does not determine what Islam is. The message of Islam comes from the Holy Quran and the Way of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). For this reason, Huntington may classify Democracy as an exclusive feature of western civilization. However, Islam, instead of discouraging democracy, directed Muslims to instigate democracy as a recurrent process and guiding principle for collective decision making in their systems [Al-Shura: 38].

Furthermore, Islam directs Muslims to uphold justice and directs that even enmity of a nation must not digress them from the path of justice (Al-Maida: 8).

Injustice is one of the main hurdles in bringing about peace in this world. Injustice in politics, in economics and in every sphere of life must be avoided as per Islam. Islam favors democracy, though it does not permit Secularism.

Maulana Maududi (1984) analyzing the consultative decision making principle in Islam as taken from the Holy Quran [Al-Shura: 38] deduced that democracy as a principle of decision making is not alien to Islam; rather it is most desirable as per the Islamic principles.

Secularism as a philosophy or comprehensive doctrine is not entirely democratic as it does not allow religion to prevail in public sphere of life even if democracy allows it. It confines religion to one's private life only and does not permit democracy to allow religion to expand into the public sphere of life. Hence, Islam favors democracy yet it also permits individual freedom in choice and practice of one's religion or comprehensive doctrine unlike in France and Turkey who claim to be secular and yet depriving Muslims and people from other religions to practice their religion and uphold their values and cultural symbols.

Responding to Post Modernism: The Islamic Perspective

Knowledge was the main reason why Muslims fared so well in history for almost a millennium. Knowledge is the basis of progress. Greek philosophers regarded Knowledge as virtue. Similarly, the west also took lead from east with progress in knowledge. By knowledge, I mean not only the knowledge of religion and its related fields, but also the knowledge in sciences including social and technical sciences.

Ijtihad was an important element in Islamic world in heydays. It kept Muslims updated and pace with the world. The decline in Muslim civilization resulted from refraining from Ijtihad later on.

Freedom of expression is necessary in Muslim societies to pave the way of Ijtihad. In revitalizing the process of Ijtihad, not only the Muslims scholars be given the chance to contribute, but the philosophers and experts of material sciences be given a chance to contribute in Ijtihad as well. Their viewpoints and contribution also matter and if needed, necessary correction can be made by Islamic scholars if their views diverge from Islamic principles and morals.

The institution of Family system is the basis of the social order in Muslim society. Muslims should not lose it at any cost.

Muslims should relate their philosophies with philosophies like Humanism, Liberalism, Democracy and show that they are in line with Islamic teachings and hence Islam is not opposed to liberty, human rights, women rights, minority rights etc, but the pioneer in putting them in light of civilization.

The economic teachings of Islam in a period when late capitalism is weakening can provide an alternative system to the world economy.

Extremism as a matter of principle be avoided and non-violence should be the strategy in domestic and international politics.

West has made trade blocs to unite and gain from synergy. Muslims should also need to be on one platform so that if future gives them the opportunity to give a new system, they can offer the Revitalized and Restructured Islamic thought from one platform.

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