

'Islamic perspectives on higher education – revisiting scripture and historical facts' - USQ Panel Presentation

By Professor Shahjahan Khan

The University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba hosted a panel presentation and discussion on 'Perspectives on higher education and social harmony in the community' on 15 March 2016. The event was sponsored by the Pure Land Learning College (PLLC), Toowoomba. The global head of PLLC and a strong advocate of making Toowoomba a Model City of Peace and Harmony by UNESCO, Venerable Master Chin Kung initiated the program with his USQ Salon on 'the role of education in global peace and harmony'. His lecture was in Chinese but it was simultaneously translated in English.

The panel session was facilitated by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Services) of USQ, Prof Ken Udas, and moderated by Dr Krzysztof Batorowicz, former Director of USQ Multicultural Centre. The panel consisted of Venerable Wu Ping of PLLC; Prof Jan Thomas, USQ Vice Chancellor; Prof Tracey Bunda, Head of College for Australian Indigenous Studies at USQ; Prof Shahjahan Khan, USQ and Founding President of Islamic Society of Toowoomba; and Dr Mike Malouf from Church of Jesus Christ.

Prof Shahjahan Khan made a Power Point presentation on 'Islamic perspectives on higher education – revisiting scripture and historical facts'. The first part of his presentation covered some key words/verses of the Qur'an that emphasise on education and human status, eg *Iqra* – read, the first word revealed to Muhammad (pbuh), *khalifa* – representative, every human being, *karramna* – honoured, every child of Adam. Al-Qur'an says, 'Are those don't know equal to those who know?'

In the second part he illustrated a key verse of the Qur'an that inspired Muslims to engage in education and research: "Surely, in the *creation* of the *heavens and earth*; in the *alternation* of the *night and day*, in the *sailing* of the *ships* through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the *rain* which Allah sends down from the skies, with which He *revives* the *earth after its death* and *spreads* in it all kinds of animals, in the *change* of the winds and the clouds between the sky and the earth that are made *subservient*, there are signs for rational people." (The Qur'an, Ch 2:164).

As examples of scientific facts in the Qur'an, he mentioned about development of human embryo, and creation of heaven and earth. He referred the verse, "Then We made the *sperm* into a *clot* of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) *lump*; then we made out of that lump *bones* and clothed the bones with *flesh*; then we developed out of it *another creature*. So blessed be Allah, the best to create!" - (Al-Muminun 23:14)

He quoted famous authors/experts on the field such as (1) Keith L. Moore, University of Toronto, Canada and referred to his speech at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IObOzMAQ3hI> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC2_IMz9qcY Prof Moore was amazed at the scientific accuracy of some of the statements which were made in the 7th century AD. (2) Dr. E. M Johnson, Thomas Jefferson University, USA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMjecnhx_po (3) Sir Robert Geoffrey Edwards, Cambridge, UK and (4) Dr. T. V. N Persaud, Manitoba, Canada <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wGN3Zrtuv0> They all testified that the statements in the Qur'an based on their scientific knowledge.

On the creation of heaven and earth, Prof Khan referred to Dr Alfred Kroner, Geoscientist, Mainz University, Germany at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdrphWOTVb4> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75hI7YB07Uo>

"If you combine all these and you combine all those statements that are being made in the Qur'aan in terms that relate to the earth and the formation of the earth and science in general, you can basically say that statements made there in many ways are true. They can now be confirmed by scientific methods, and in a way you can say that the Qur'aan is a simple science text book for the simple man, and that many of the statements made in there at that time could not be proven but that modern scientific methods are now in a position to prove what Muhammad (sws) said 1400 years ago."

The sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that drive the Muslims for education and research include (1) Search of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim man and woman. (2) There is one reward even if your research outcome is wrong, and two rewards if right. (3) The wealth of knowledge is a lost property of Muslims, who acquires them gets them. (4) Spread even if you know one sentence. (5) The sleep of a learned scholar (alim) is more rewarding than the night long prayers of an ordinary worshipper. (6) **Every disease has a cure!**

Then he briefly touched the glorious history of Muslim civilisation of Al-Andalusia spreading over Spain, Portugal and southern France for a period of 800 years. Andalusia became the epicentre of Higher Education and Scientific Excellence where Jews, Christians and Muslims together laid the foundation of modern science.

The US historian, Samuel P. Scott in his book *The History of the Moorish Empire in Europe. 1846-1929*, published 1904 writes, "Yet there were knowledge and learning everywhere except in Catholic Europe. At a time when even kings could not read or write, a Moorish king had a private library of six hundred thousand books. At a time when ninety-nine percent of the Christian people were wholly illiterate, the Moorish city of Cordova had eight hundred public schools, and there was not a village within the limits of the empire where the blessings of education could not be enjoyed by the children of the most indigent peasant, ...and it was difficult to encounter even a Moorish peasant who could not read and write."

He also mentioned about the Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Established in 970 AD (1046 Year Old) as the oldest place of higher learning for the Muslims.

Finally, he provided a summary of some of the pioneering Muslim scientists and the fundamental contributions they made in the area of higher education and scientific research and laid the foundation of modern science.

Jabir ibn Hayyan, Abu Musa (721-815), alchemist known as the "father of chemistry." First hospital in Damascus, Syria in around 707AD.

Al-Khwarizmi (Algorizm) (770–840 C.E) - mathematics, algorithm, algebra, calculus, astronomy & geography. He compiled astronomical tables, introduced Indian numerals (which became Arabic numerals), formulated the oldest known trigonometric tables, and prepared a geographic encyclopaedia.

Ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi (Alkindus) (800–873 C.E) - philosophy, physics, optics, medicine, mathematics & metallurgy.

Al-Razi (Rhazes) (864– 930 C.E) - physical and scientist of medicine, ophthalmology, smallpox, chemistry & astronomy. Medical works: *Kitab al-Mansuri*, well known in the West in Gerard of Cremona's 12th-century Latin translation; and '*Kitab al-hawi*', and "Comprehensive Book".

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), (981–1037 C.E) - medicine, philosophy, mathematics & astronomy. He composed the *Kitab ash-shifa`* ("Book of Healing"), a vast philosophical and scientific encyclopedia, and the *Canon of Medicine*, which is among the most famous books in the history of medicine

Ibn Al-Haitham (Alhazen) (965-1040 C.E) - mathematician and physicist who made the first significant contributions to *optical theory* since the time of Ptolemy (flourished 2nd century). He published theories on refraction, reflection, binocular vision, focusing with lenses, the rainbow, parabolic and spherical mirrors, spherical aberration, atmospheric refraction, and the apparent increase in size of planetary bodies near the Earth's horizon.