

## Contemporary Curriculum and the Future of the Madrasa

A diverse group of contemporary Muslim educators met at the Cambridge Muslim College on 2–3 May 2015 to begin a discussion on a contemporary curriculum for the Islamic sciences with particular focus on the “rational sciences” (‘ulum ‘aqliyya). The meeting was organized by Kalam Research & Media and Cambridge Muslim College in partnership with the John Templeton Foundation as part of the Islamic Analytic Theology Initiative.

The meeting was chaired by **Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad** (Dean, Cambridge Muslim College), who set the meeting in motion with the observation that the discourse of the ulema was not a “key-fit” to the modern mind. The question, he said, was whether there was any systematic rational framework that might give us both religious authenticity as well as philosophical authenticity in the modern world.

Other meeting participants included (in alphabetical order by last name) **Sheikh Talal Al-Azem** (Research Fellow, Oxford University), **Sheikh Usama al-Sayyid al-Azhari** (Al-Azhar University), **Sheikh Saeed Foudeh** (Anzar Institute and Ma'arij Institute, Amman), **Sheikh Amin Kholdwadia** (Director, Darul Qasim, Chicago), **Dr. Mahan Mirza** (Dean, Zaytuna College), **Sheikh Omar Qureshi** (Principal, Islamic Foundation High School, Chicago), and **Dr. Recep Senturk** (Director, ISAR, Istanbul). **Sheikh Faraz Rabbani** (Director, SeekersHub) was unable to attend because of health reasons and was represented by **Hamza Karamali**.

The goal of the meeting was to reflect on the curriculum of the traditional madrasa in light of the diverse contemporary educational experiences of the participants. These experiences included attempts at crafting contemporary curricula for a contemporary “maktab” (children’s education), a Muslim high school, a Muslim liberal arts college, an intensive weekend and evening course of traditional education for the brightest university students from a variety of specializations, a one-year diploma course in contemporary education for graduates of traditional seminaries, an innovative contemporary seminary for Muslim professionals, online courses in traditional Islamic studies for English-speaking Muslims, as well as the private and institutional instruction in the traditional Islamic sciences in conversation with modern social and intellectual currents.

**Professor David Ford** (Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge) made a guest address on the first day of the meeting, in which he described the critical importance for all faith traditions to do “academically-mediated religion” in higher education. He described the benefits that universities, living religious communities, and the wider society had to gain from such “academically-mediated religion”, particularly when it was done in an interfaith context because the modern world was one in which everyone must always be in conversation, and described his experiences as a Christian theologian in higher education.

The meeting concluded with proposals for next steps for all participants to move forward together, the most important of which was the authoring of contemporary textbooks in Islamic Theology.

The meeting will be followed by KRM visits to the participants' institutions, and then by a book that will describe the curriculum of the traditional madrasa, the challenges in implementing that curriculum today, a description of contemporary "best educational practices" today, and recommendations for the future.