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ABSTRACT – BANQUET KEYNOTE ADDRESS

“Studying Muslims in the 21st Century”

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Research on communities, organizations, political and social work, educational initiatives and conferences is critical to various discourses on Muslims in the West. We must develop methods and approaches that derive from the Islamic worldview and simultaneously critique our ineffectual use of Western theories and methods. It is critical that we recover our initiatives in scholarship and forge new ones. We have been held hostage to methods which have not been permitted to mature and have been shrouded in ever increasing obscurity. Muslim world power and authority have silenced the intellectual spirit of Muslims everywhere, especially in the United States. This state of affairs has been a boon to Western scholarship and a great sadness for Muslim scholarship of which there is little of quality in America. Post-Civil Rights and post Colonial Muslims have great difficulty entering 21st century global conversations as we are not able to think beyond our own ethnic concerns. The aim of the Islamization project was to begin a thought process but it brought too many to the table whose personal goals were to gain power and authority rather than engage the goal of the project. Although the premise of the project was also questionable by definition, the potential for intellectual products that would have reorganized much of anthropology, sociology and literary studies in particular promised new ways of analyzing world communities. As a result of negligence and lack of respect for intellectual prowess, Islam in America is a story defined largely by non-Muslims. The language of Islam that most Muslims know is slowly but concretely being redefined. Because some of us have hungered to be a part of interreligious dialogues, we have altered the Qur’anic story to fit the Christian story. In our haste to be accepted by the people of the most powerful country in the world we have foregone preparedness and reflectiveness. We have even shouted “how we all worship the same God” when that “God” for some Americans is understood by us to be an exemplary prophet. Few have even read the texts of those with whom they dialogue. We have not learned enough to act preemptively and are left to respond feebly or unintelligibly on events around the world. We must build viable think tanks and support the one we have in order to let our guidance mature for the 21st century. We did an excellent job of growth inhibition in the 20th century and are well on the way to further inhibition in the 21st century. We must mature and not continue to be hampered by local concerns. How can we move forward with a sense of urgency.