

Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 23th June 2012

Language and Revelation

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In his second lecture, Professor al-Attas discussed the importance of language in the human life in relation to the religion of Islām. A definition of human as *ḥayawān nāṭiq* or speaking animal given by past scholars such as theologians, philosophers, and *sūfīs* (high metaphysicians) has indicated that language is dealing with a way of how to express as to the meaning of *nuṭq* itself. From this very root the word *manṭiq* (logic) is derived which means to make a systematic logical thinking. However, on the contrary, western scholars especially sociologists disagree to use the word speaking rather it is a political or social animal, concerning chiefly with external aspects. Therefore, sociologists have classified religion with the external aspects only namely culture and tradition as to the case of Buddhism, which imitates the external aspects to make it looking like a religion. For Islām, since God Himself reveals to the Prophet through language, His *ayat(s)* and *kalimat(s)* are His words and signs as well. This means that this world is like a book which its *ayat* and *kalimat* are given by God. Hence, a language projects a worldview with its description to the external world. By and large, in this occasion Prof. al-Attas seems to have underlined that the crux of the religion of Islām rests on the revelation which takes the form of language. In other words, the reality of Islamic civilisation lies in its language by which it successfully transforms the worldview of its adherents, not in physical aspects. The Qur'ān has Islamised the Arabic language, when Islām came it changes the worldview of the language. For instance, the word *karama-kaīm*, in the *jāhiliyyah* period it was meant for honourable people with many sons, but when Islām came it applies to the quality of *taqwā*. Yet, through the very language, secularisation takes place in changing a meaning and putting it within the material perspectives. *Wa'LLāh a'lam.*