The revival of Islam in Al-Andalus, the Spain of today, has been a cherished ideal of many Muslims. After the fall of Granada in 1492, the brutal persecution, forced conversion and expulsion of the Andalusian Muslims (and Jews) by the Spanish Catholic Church and royal court obliterated a famed multicultural society. Today, Islam – and with it Islamic learning – is making a comeback.

In 1989 the government of Spain granted official recognition to Islam, thus acknowledging its roots in Spain. The government requested the Muslims to organize nationally, which they did under the auspices of the Comision Islamica de Espana (The Spanish Muslim Commission) which represents the Muslim community. The commission negotiated an agreement (signed in 1992) with the government over the rights of Muslims, the most important aspect of which concerns education. It stipulates the right to establish Muslim schools and universities. Moreover, the State committed itself to include Islam and Arabic in the curricula of the public schools for those students desiring to follow the courses. The Comision Islamica de Espana devises the curricula and recruits teachers.

The Universidad Islamica Averroes was established within the 1992 agreement. Named after the famous Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd, the university was opened in 1995 in the old medina of Cordoba, near the famous Mezquita Aljama, the Great Mosque (now a Catholic Cathedral). Attached to it, a new beautiful small mosque was built, with its Andalusian minaret on the street. Some neighboring buildings were purchased since then, allowing sufficient space for expansion in the future. The founders of this private Andalusian Spanish university consider it to be the resurrection of the medieval university situated in the Great Mosque (Mezquita Aljama) during Muslim times. The university is run by a board, which is headed by Prof. A. Mahtar M’Bow (Ex-Secretary General of UNESCO). The university is a member of the Federation of the Universities of the Muslim World and has cooperation agreements with several universities in Europe and the Muslim world.

The Universidad Islamica Averroes offers Islamic education to all those desiring it, be they Muslim or not. Its plans of education are adapted to the Spanish system by using credit hours. The academic year is divided into two semesters, giving 21 credit hours per semester, i.e. a total of 168 credit hours for the 4-year course. The courses are divided into three important themes: Arabic language and literature, Islamic studies and Andalusian studies. The languages of education are Arabic and Spanish, but Persian and Turkish are also taught.

In September 1996, the university initiated a correspondence course offering a programme identical to that which is conducted in situ. The university has a dedicated staff and faculty, most of whom are Spanish Muslims. Students have to pay a tuition fee; however, for the studies carried out in situ ($2000 per year) no valid candidate has been rejected on the grounds of inability to pay. The university has a scholarship programme to aid deserving students. The fee for the correspondence course is very modest ($400 per year), but no scholarships are available in this case.

For further information write to: Universidad Islamica Averroes 3, Calleja de la Hoguera 14003 Cordoba – Spain Fax & Tel: 0034-957-483235 E-mail: u.averroes@alcalvia.net

Ali Kettani is vice-chairman of the board and rector of Universidad Islamica Averroes, Cordoba, Spain.