

## The Second International Conference on Contemporary Scholarship on Islam: The Legacy of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi

The International Islamic University, Malaysia's (IIUM) Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, along with the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (IRKHS), organized an international conference to analyze the work of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, a leading twentieth-century thinker who had had a significant impact on Islamic thought and comparative religion. Held at IIUM's Senate Hall on October 22-23, 2013, in collaboration with Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah (KUISAS), participants discussed the legacy of this influential scholar, who is best known for his pioneering work in the Islamization of Knowledge movement. One of his books, *Al Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1992) has attracted the attention of scholars and been introduced into various university courses worldwide as an important resource book.

The main theme was "Infusing the Creativity and Excellence of al-Faruqi's Scholarship into Contemporary Islamic Thought." The seventy-five accepted papers were divided into five sub-themes: *tawhīd*, the Islamization of Knowledge, Islamic civilization, Islamic thought, and comparative religion. The organizers invited scholars to (1) study and examine the relevance of al-Faruqi's thought, (2) examine his vision and mission in various areas of Islamic thought, (3) regenerate the tradition of Islamic scholarship in academic disciplines, (4) enhance the intellectual understanding of Islam's *tawhidic* worldview, and (5) develop a comparative approach to the study of Islamic thought in relation to modernity. This unique event enabled scholars, intellectuals, and academicians to meet and deliberate on al-Faruqi's intellectual and scholarly output.

This event began with three inaugural speeches. Zambry Bin Abdul Kadir (chief minister, State of Perak) pointed out that only intellectual and moral development can cause human civilization to reach its zenith. In the case of Islamic civilization, this development was achieved by grounding the civilization on the core values of research, criticism, and creativity. He stated that al-Faruqi dedicated his life to calling upon Muslims to revive that spirit. Ibrahim M. Zein (dean, IRKHS) highlighted the conference's importance and expressed his hope that it would be a resounding success. Mohamed Ridza Wahiddin (deputy rector, Research and Innovation, IIUM) called for excellence and innovation in contemporary Muslim scholarship and emphasized that *tawhīd* and the *tawhidic* worldview must be the base of Islamic discourse. He further remarked

the just as al-Faruqi claimed, a deep understanding of *kalimat al-tawhīd* in the contemporary context can engender an exemplary Muslim unity and lead humanity at large to success, for it is the “foundation of everything.”

These speeches were followed by three keynote addresses. Kamal Hassan relayed al-Faruqi’s worldview:

*Tawhīd* as the principle of knowledge is the recognition that Allah, the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) is, that the truth is indeed knowable, and skepticism which denies this truth is the opposite of *tawhīd*. *Īmān*, therefore, is not just an ethical category, but is firstly a cognitive category. The unity of God implies the unity of truth. The usual translation of *lā ilāha illā Allāh* is “There is no God but God” could be better translated as “There is no object of worship other than the One True God.” The unity of truth also means the unity and harmony of the two sources of truth: revelation and reason. The capability to know the truth is made possible by the *fiṭrah* is inherent in all human beings.

Anis Ahmad, a former student of al-Faruqi, spoke on his teacher’s life and thought, both of which stressed the importance of adopting a universal approach to the issues of the ummah and of humanity in general. Malik Badri discussed al-Faruqi’s intellectual development. According to him, al-Faruqi went through several stages before submitting to Islam as the real binding force of the ummah, in which Arabs are no more than a small minority. He recalled an oft- recounted event: Al-Faruqi was a patient at Johns Hopkins Hospital when he told Ilyas Ba-Yunus: “Until a few months ago, I was a Palestinian, an Arab, and a Muslim. Now, I am a Muslim who happens to be an Arab from Palestine.” Ba-Yunus attributed this dramatic change to the latter’s interest in Islamic spirituality, which causes all other gods (e.g., nationalism and worldly achievement) to disappear into thin air. In this psychological state, al-Faruqi realized his true relationship with his Creator and submitted to Allah who had, in His wisdom, created him an Arab from Palestine.

The following day, a special panel composed of Ibrahim M. Zein (Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, IIUM), Imtiyaz Yousuf (program director, Department of Religion, Assumption University, Bangkok), and Zakyi Ibrahim (associate professor, Department of Comparative Religion, California State University, Fullerton), reflected upon the “Contributions of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi.” Zein spoke on his personal experiences with the late scholar, emphasizing that he was a colorful man who produced diversified and profound writings. He redefined Islamic studies in the West, and his development of phenomenological methods and meta-religion principles will remain with scholars and academicians for a very long time. Yusuf recounted al-Faruqi’s

efforts in comparative religion and advised participants to keep ideology out of the class room. Ibrahim spoke on al-Faruqi's involvement with Islamic thought and on various aspects of his life and ideas. After pointing to his reformative and revivalist efforts, Ibrahim argued for the establishment of more think tanks. Along the same line, Yousuf urged that the student-teacher relationship practiced by al-Faruqi be revived.

During the first day's two parallel sessions, several papers on the conference's sub-themes were presented: "*Tawhīd* in the Discourses of Sayyid Qutb and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: A Comparative Study," "Methodological Dimensions of *Tawhīd* towards Understanding the Essence of Islamic Civilization: The Perspective of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi," "*Dīn al-Fiṭrah* (Primordial Religion): Nurturing Inter-Religious Dialogue and beyond in al-Faruqi's Thought," and "The Monotheistic Concept of God in Inayat Khan's and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's Ontology." The speakers talked about *tawhīd* as a comprehensive and all-embracing concept and process that includes sovereignty, guardianship, power, legislation, direction for human life, submission, and devotion to God. Al-Faruqi interpreted *tawhīd* as the principles of, among other things, knowledge, ethics, metaphysics, social order, economic order, the principle of political order, history, and the world order. All of the speakers stressed the late scholar's understanding that *tawhīd* needed to be reinstated as the basis of Islamic religiosity and spirituality.

Those who addressed the "Islamic Civilization" sub-theme contended that there is an urgent need to bridge misunderstandings between Islam and the West, as well as to study al-Faruqi's influence on Islamic thought in the West. The "Comparative Religion" sub-theme consisted of such papers as "Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in the Context of Muslim Scholarship in Comparative Religion," "Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and His Methods in the Study of Religions," "Meta-Religion and the Discipline of Comparative Religion," "Wilfred C. Smith and Ismail R. al-Faruqi on Religion and Religious Experience," "The Role of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Resolving Religious Conflicts," and "The Role of Islam in Global Inter-Religious Dependence." The "Islamization of Knowledge" sub-theme asserted that scholars must develop theories on various subjects according to this framework and contended that al-Faruqi's ideological approach to it must be emphasized.

In the final session, the conference director thanked the department's members for ensuring the event's success. Thameem Usama (head, Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, KIRKHS), thanked everyone who had helped to organize the conference. Ibrahim M. Zein (dean, KIRKHS) expressed his gratitude for the members of the organizing committee and the department

for their services and commitment. that was in the resounding success of the conference. Hanapi Hj. Mohd. Nor (associate professor, Department of General Studies, KIRKHS) closed the event with several *du'ahs*.

The lively question-and-answer sessions saw the airing of important questions and relevant observations. Not only did this event provide a platform to revitalize al-Faruqi's views and spirit, it also highlighted the need for scholarly contributions to Islamic thought. The well-researched papers, robust discussions, and vigorously asserted and defended points of view reflected the event's overall atmosphere of mutual respect and meaningful dialogue between participants and presenters.

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