

Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports

The Legacy of Isma`il Raji al-Faruqi: Thought and Institution

A two-day seminar on Isma`il Raji al-Faruqi (1921-86), jointly organized by the Centre for the Study of Democracy (University of Westminster), Prince al-Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (Georgetown University), and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT UK and USA), took place in London at the University of Westminster on 6-7 June 2010. Considering his intellectual output, academic agendas, and scholastic achievements, as well as to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, the organizers thought a seminar of this caliber would be most appropriate. John Esposito and John Voll write of a certain Christian acquaintance of al-Faruqi lamenting the latter's aspiration to become the "Luther" of Islam, believing that it is in dire need of reformation. This consideration guaranteed al-Faruqi a prominent slot in their "Makers of Contemporary Islam" (2001).

The group of experts who constitute al-Faruqi's colleagues, friends, and students, as well as independent researchers, came "to commemorate the legacy of [his] life and scholastic works; to highlight [his] programmatic approach to Islamization of knowledge and particularly the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), the Association of Muslim Social Sciences (AMSS) and international Islamic universities; and to present [his] contributions to the development of Islamic studies in American academia such as the establishment of the American Academy of Religion's (AAR) Islamic Studies Group and his contribution to interreligious dialogue" (Conference Programme, p. 3).

Aside from the dinner speech delivered by Dr. AbdulHamid Abu-Sulayman (IIIT, USA), each of the six main sessions was dedicated to a specific theme with several speakers. After the opening recitation of several Qur'anic verses, the first session opened with Imtiyaz Yusuf (Assumption University, Thailand; Georgetown University) welcoming the participants and explaining the seminar in relationship to al-Faruqi's legacy. Anas S. Al-Shaikh-Ali (AMSS; IIIT, UK) reiterated the significance of al-Faruqi's phi-

losophy and activities that culminated in establishing AMSS and IIIT, both of which came to embody al-Faruqi's approach by supporting the publication of critical works. AbdelWahab El-Affendi (University of Westminster) highlighted al-Faruqi's revivalist contribution to science and epistemology, which he claimed that have failed to receive enough attention. AbuSulayman sought to play down the praise and implored attendees to use him as an example and emulate him in the service of Muslims, particularly toward acquiring the "proper" understanding of Islam and developing young Muslims. This session was concluded by Dr. Yushau Sodiq's (Texas Christian University) supplication for al-Faruqi and his wife Lamy'a al-Faruqi.

The second session, "Islamization of Knowledge and Ijtihad" and chaired by Yusuf, commenced with Dr. M. A. J. Beg's (Cambridge University) recounting of al-Faruqi's intimate relationship with Malaysian academic and political figures and the thorough review of the latter's works published in Malaysia, such as *Islam and Culture* (1980) and *The Hijra* (1981). As an al-Faruqi protégé, Sodiq began his presentation by painting a benevolent picture of al-Faruqi in developing young Muslims and then moved on to present "*Ijtihad as Understood by Modern Islamic Scholars: The Case of Isma'il R. al-Faruqi.*" Dr. Hisham al-Talib (IIIT, USA) ended the session with an intimate look at the progress in al-Faruqi's academic and professional development from Palestine to the time of his death in America.

Presiding over the third session, "Islamic Humanism, Inter-religious Dialogue, and Ethics," was AbdelWahab El-Affendi. Ibrahim M. Zein (International Islamic University Malaysia) opened it with "Al-Faruqi's Theory of Value: A Plea for Islamic Humanism." This was followed by "Muslim Interfaith Dialogue in the 21st Century: Building on the Contributions and Legacy of Isma'il R. al-Faruqi" by Dr. Charles Fletcher (McGill University). Not directly related to al-Faruqi, yet informed by his call for ethics and science, Dr. Abul Fadl Mohsin Ebrahim (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) spoke on the "Ethics of Fertility Treatment: A Case Study of Nadya Suleman's Feat."

The fourth session, "Study of Religion and Science and Modernity," was to begin with Osman Bakar's "Some Aspects of Isma'il R. al-Faruqi's Thought on Islam and Natural Science." Instead, Kamar O. Kamaruzaman (International Islamic University Malaysia) led with her "From Theological Discourses to Interfaith Dialogues: Al-Faruqi's Inter-religious Engagements." Dr. Abdel Aziz Bouchair (Teachers Institute, Algeria) closed the session with "Al-Faruqi's Views on the Value System in Western Epistemology." The day ended with a dinner talk, initially to be delivered by Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim (former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia), but actu-

ally presented by AbuSulayman. He detailed al-Faruqi's role, alongside a few others, in establishing AMSS and IIIT by explaining the reasons, strategies, and methods behind specific short- and long-term decisions. He called on the participants to seriously consider learning from al-Faruqi's approaches and methodologies, to go beyond elaborating his ideas to actually developing and implementing their own.

The fifth session started the second day of under the chairmanship of Mehmet Asutey (University of Durham). Keynote speaker John Esposito (Georgetown University), the well-known student of al-Faruqi, passionately recounted his experience with the man, not only seeing him as a *mujtahid*, but also as a *mujahid*. He highlighted al-Faruqi's zeal in mentoring his students, in serving as an ambassador of mutual understanding, and as an agent of intellectual revival – all with an impeccable record.

The sixth and final session, "Tawhid and Aesthetics," was chaired by al-Talib. Gisela Webb (Seton Hall University, USA) led with her "Isma`il al-Faruqi on Art: Interpretation, Integration, and Inspiration." Mh. Salleh Yaaper (Universiti Sains Malaysia) presented "Cultural Encounter and Religious Engagement in Nurturing Peace: Lessons from Literature." Finally, Dr. Vivienne S. M. Angeles (La Salle University, USA) closed the session with her "Visualizing Islam: The Art and Architecture of Philippine Mosques."

These papers, in addition to others that were not presented, will be put together as *Isma`il al-Faruqi: Festschrift* to be published in mid-2011. AJISS 28:3, the special issue for 2011, will be dedicated to this remarkable scholar.

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