

The 2nd international conference on contemporary scholarship on Islam: The legacy of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi

As part of its intellectual pursuits, the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), decided a few years back to conduct a comprehensive and critical survey of the Islamic intellectual history and contemporary scholarship. The objective was to identify scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of Islamic thought and comparative religion so that their works and ideas would be presented and discussed in international conference. The first of these international conferences was held in 2008 to celebrate the contributions of a Japanese scholar of Islamic studies, Toshihiko Izutsu, whose original and nuanced ideas left a lasting legacy, especially in the field of Islamic ethics. This was followed by the second international conference celebrating the contributions of a prominent Muslim thinker, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. The conference was held on October 22-23, 2013 at the Senate Hall, IIUM, with the theme “Infusing Creativity and Excellence of al-Faruqi’s Scholarship into Contemporary Islamic Thought”. It was organised by the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion in collaboration with Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah (KUISAS).

The conference saw a global gathering of reputed scholars, some of whom enjoyed close personal ties with the late al-Faruqi, to study and examine the relevance of al-Faruqi’s thought to a plethora of outstanding issues, and to regenerate the tradition of Islamic scholarship in academic disciplines. Conference papers were divided under five sub-themes: *Tawhīd*, Islamic Thought, Islamic Civilisation, Comparative Religion, and Islamisation of Knowledge.

Representing the Honourable, Prof. Dato’ Sri Dr. Zaleha Kamaruddin, Rector, IIUM, Prof. Mohamed Ridza Wahiddin, the Deputy Rector (Research & Innovation), called for excellence in contemporary Muslim scholarship while welcoming the honourable YAB Dato’ Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry Bin Abdul Kadir, Menteri Besar of Perak Darul Ridzuan to officiate the conference. In his inaugural speech, the honourable YAB Dato’ Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry Bin Abdul Kadir, Menteri Besar of Perak

Darul Ridzuan pointed out that Ismail al-Faruqi dedicated his entire life to reviving the spirit of Islamic civilisation based on his belief that human civilisation can only reach its zenith through intellectual and moral development. The opening ceremony continued with a welcoming speech by the Dean of the Kulliyah of IRKHS, Prof. Ibrahim M. Zein, who emphasised the depth of al-Faruqi's legacy and its importance in addressing contemporary issues through both study and practice.

Three keynote addresses were delivered by distinguished speakers. In the first keynote address, Tan Sri Prof. Kamal Hassan, explained the *Tawhīdic* worldview of al-Faruqi for which Prof. Kamal stated, "*Tawhīd*, as the principle of knowledge, is the recognition that Allah is the Truth (*al-Haqq*) that is indeed knowable, and thus scepticism that denies this truth is the opposite of *Tawhīd*. *Īmān* (belief), therefore, is not just an ethical category, but a cognitive category. The unity of God implies the unity of truth." Prof. Anis Ahmad, a close friend of al-Faruqi, offered a number of intimate insights into the life and thought of al-Faruqi. He emphasized the importance of a universal approach to issues challenging the Ummah and humanity. In the third keynote address, the renowned Muslim psychologist, Prof. Malik Badri, discussed the growth of al-Faruqi's personality.

A special panel discussion was held on the second day on the contributions of Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi in which two of al-Faruqi's students, professors Ibrahim M. Zein and Imtiyaz Yousuf, along with Zakyi Ibrahim delivered their speeches. Ibrahim M. Zein spoke on his personal experiences with al-Faruqi and claimed that al-Faruqi redefined Islamic studies in the West and asserted that al-Faruqi's development of Phenomenological Methods and Meta Religion Principles will continue to arrest the interest of scholars and students for some time to come. Imtiyaz Yusuf delivered his speech on al-Faruqi's contribution in Comparative Religion. He advised the audiences to keep ideological perspective out of the class room and pointed out the need to revive the student-teacher relationship as practiced by al-Faruqi. Zakyi Ibrahim, editor of the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS), identified the reformative and revivalist efforts of al-Faruqi and suggested the need for more think tanks.

One of the important features of the conference was the active participation of the audience who raised a number of important

questions and made relevant observations, and thus contributed towards the success of the conference. The importance of this conference rests in its being a platform to revitalize not only the views of al-Faruqi but also his spirit and commitment for scholarly contributions in Islamic thought.

The conference as a whole consisted of many well-researched papers. Discussions were robust and various positions were vigorously asserted and defended. There was an atmosphere of mutual respect and honest agreement and disagreement that permeated throughout the conference making for meaningful dialogue between the participants and presenters. With almost 200 participants and 70 papers presented, this conference proved to be an important event in the celebration of Islamic thinkers and an important conduit for the creative exchange, propagation, and further understanding of the many contributions of Professor Ismail al-Faruqi.

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