

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S LEGACY:
ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

24-28 October 2001
ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur*

A five day international conference on al-Ghazālī's legacy, with special reference to the contemporary relevance of that legacy, was held at ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur, between 24th and 28th October 2001. The main objective of the conference was to make a meaningful contribution to a fresh evaluation of al-Ghazālī studies and to promote the relevance of al-Ghazālī's work to contemporary Islamic life and thought. Although the idea of holding an international conference on al-Ghazālī's legacy was conceived many years ago by Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Founder-Director of ISTAC and holder of the distinguished al-Ghazālī Chair of Islamic Thought, and although its date was fixed only a year ago, recent events render it not only relevant but also timely.

In the aftermath of the violent death of thousands of innocent civilians and the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on 11th September 2001, the mass media all over the world reacted by calumniating the entire Muslim Ummah by portraying them as fanatic extremists who have no respect for human life and property. Fully aware of the uncertain political future of especially Muslim countries, owing to the then immanent US invasion on Afghanistan, and possibly other Muslim countries, Professor al-Attas, his Deputy Professor Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, Chairman of the Conference Secretariat, disregarded the advice of some parties to postpone the

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Conference, and decided to continue with the original plan come what may. This was clearly because of their conviction that al-Ghazālī's thought is eminently relevant to present events. Properly understood, al-Ghazālī's thought can aid contemporary Muslims respond to and devise strategies for constructive engagement of vicious Western secularist thought and culture without having to resort to violence.

Fortunately, all the invited speakers and participants held a similar view. It is quite remarkable that most of the speakers—including those from the USA—managed to make it to the conference. Given the circumstances, it is interesting to note that the conference was fully booked. More than two hundred and fifty participants deliberated over twenty-four papers presented by renowned scholars and experts on al-Ghazālī's thought from all over the world.

The focus of the conference's attention was the opening ceremony held at the Hilton Hotel, Petaling Jaya, during which Professor al-Attas delivered his welcoming speech, followed by a speech by Her Royal Highness Princess Wijdan Ali of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Due to urgent political developments in the region necessitating his immediate attention, His Royal Highness Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was unable to attend the conference and deliver the keynote address as originally planned. The text of his speech was only received after the conference.

Based on his eminent scholarship and profound understanding of the problems and challenges facing Muslims, Professor al-Attas pointed out that the problems faced by contemporary Muslims are not different from those faced by al-Ghazālī. This being the case, al-Ghazālī's approach and the solutions he offered are relevant for contemporary Muslims. Unfortunately, besides the external challenge presented by the secular modern western philosophy and culture, Muslims are also facing an equally serious internal challenge arising from aberrations within the ummah and exacerbated by the spread of secular modern western philosophy and culture. This internal problem is manifested in three interrelated elements: the