

Fluorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria

FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR WAHAB O.A. NASIRU



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The Concept of Islamization of Knowledge according to Isma'il Raji Al-faruqi: A Critical Appraisal

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Introduction

The fulfillment of Allah's promise of guidance to mankind could be said to have taken different dimensions. Apart from prophetic guidance, there were reforming movements whose aim was to sanitise the corrupt community and rid it of its dirtiness. The weapon used in most cases was jihad and sometimes the attainment of political authority. The attainment of political authority by these reformers facilitated the use of education as a major vehicle of socio-cultural transformation of their community. This is true of Shaykh 'Uthman Dan Fodio, his brother Shaykh Abdullah ibn Fodio and Shaykh Muhammad Bello all in Nigeria. Apart from this, the intellectual contributions of such scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Muhammad ibn Wahab and many others have no doubt awakened the spiritual and intellectual consciousness of Muslim communities. However, their contributions were eroded by the colonialists' imposition of alien system of education on the Muslim world, which consequently bred bifurcation of education which produces two distinctive sections of people in the society – secular and religious. Thus secularization, which al-Attas described as a major threat to Muslims gradually permeated into the mainstream of Muslim personal and communal lives and it continues spreading like bush fire during harmattan to the extent that Muslims virtually forget the concept and philosophy of their own system of education. Their attention was later drawn to this by some Muslim intellectuals such as Rashid Rida (d. 1935), Syed Jamaluddin Afghani (d. 1897), Sayyid Qutb (d.1966), Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi (d.1979), Hassan al-Banna (d.1949) and some others.

The sage, Professor Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi's name would also remain indelible in the memory of scholars for his serious struggle in ensuring the movement of the *ummah* from the base of her backwardness in all spheres of life to the limelight of knowledge and forefront of creativity which Allah had predestined for it. His instrument of change was intellectualism – a weapon which is capable of revolutionizing the *ummah* by bailing her out of the imposed alien system of thought which was incompatible with her worldview philosophically, conceptually and operationally.

Just as Albert Einstein (1879-1955) is popular for his theory of relativity with which he revolutionized the study of physical sciences, the history of the modern Islamization of knowledge programme will remain incomplete if the name of al-Faruqi is omitted. It is on this note that this paper shall examine his *ijtihad* towards this concept with a view to appreciating his concern for the deplorable condition of the *ummah* and his efforts in finding lasting solution to it.

His Educational Background and Career

Isma'il al-Faruqi was born to the family of Abdul-Huda Al-Faruqi - a jurist and judge (qadi) in Palestine on January, 1, 1921. At his tender age, he received his religious education from his father. He later attended the French Dominican College des Freres (St. Joseph) in 1926. His brilliance, competence, devotion and dedication to learning led to his graduation from the College of Arts and Science of the American University in Beirut in 1941 with a degree in philosophy. Between 1942 and 1945, he was appointed a Registrar of co-operative societies under the British Mandate Government in Jerusalem. In 1945, he became the District Governor of Galilee, the office he held till 1948 when he was forced out of his land as a result of the Jewish occupation of Palestine.

Al-Faruqi's expulsion from office was meritorious to him, as he turned to rigorous pursuance of his academic programme. In the United States, he enrolled at Indiana University's Graduate School of Arts and Science where he obtained his Master of Art degree in Philosophy. He equally attended Harvard University where he received another M.A in Philosophy. He later returned to Indiana University where he worked on a thesis entitled "Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value" and obtained his Ph. D in 1952.

The deep and wide horizon of Al-Faruqi's knowledge was extremely remarkable. His thirst for knowledge further led him to continue with his studies in Muslim countries. From Syria, he left for Egypt where he studied at al-Azhar University and mastered all the traditional Islamic sciences. In 1958, when he finally returned to the United States, he was invited to Mc Gill University where he was recommended for the award of Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship. He equally joined the School of Divinity as a Research Associate on Christianity and Judaism.

The 'guerilla scholar' as members of the School of Divinity at Chicago described him, earned international fame with his prolific writings. In 1963, he was offered a year contract by the University of Chicago as a visiting professor of the history of religion attached to the Faculty of Divinity. After the expiration of the contract, he lectured at Syracuse University in the Department of Religion between 1964 and 1968 where he worked as an associate professor of Islamics and history of religion. In 1968 he joined the Department of Religion at Temple University as a full professor. He also served as either consultant-advisor or external examiner in such universities as University of Libya, the Jami'a Milliyah Islamiyyah (India), the university of Durban-Westville (South Africa), the National University of Malaysia, Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud University (Saudi Arabia), the University of Jordan, the University of Qatar, the University of Alexandria (Egypt), the Islamic University of Qum (Iran), Mindanao State University (The Philippines), Yarmuk University (Jordan) Umm Durman Islamic University (Sudan), the University of Karachi (Pakistan) and some others.

His Involvements in Institutional Set-up

The involvement of the Professor in the activities of the Muslim Students Association was an important landmark in his character as well as in the programmes of the association. His activities in the association culminated in the birth of the Association of the Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS). He became the first president of the newly-born professional association between 1972 and 1978 and from 1980 to 1982. The association was inaugurated with the objective of encouraging members to conduct research and studies in their areas of specialization within the social sciences and the humanities, and to assist members in developing an Islamic position on contemporary issues among others. The International Institute of Islamic Thought was later inaugurated and Al-Faruqi was one of its founder-members. He was elected as the secretary-treasurer of the association. The Institute was established with the main aim of "regaining the intellectual, cultural, and civilizational identity of the *ummah* through the Islamization of the humanities and the social sciences," as well as "to provide a comprehensive Islamic outlook through elucidating the principles of Islam and relating them to relevant issues of contemporary thought."

Al-Faruqi was instrumental to the establishment of the American Islamic College, an institution, which was designed purposely for the Islamization of the social and the natural sciences. He was the first president of the College. His contributions were enormous that he became consultant to many universities throughout the world. He is considered as the first Muslim scholar whose theory of Islamization of knowledge was transformed into reality. The International Islamic Universities of Islamabad and Malaysia and many schools and colleges have been inspired by his Islamization programme.

Al-Faruqi was a prolific writer. More than one hundred articles were written by him in various reputable national and international journals. In addition to this, he published up to twenty five books. Prominent among such books are *Our Beginning in Wisdom* (1953), *From Where We Start* (1953), *'Urubah and Religion: An Analysis of the Dominant Idea of Arabism and of Islam as its Heights, Moment of Consciousness* (1962), *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (1986), *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (1982), *Toward Islamic English* (1986) and *The Life of Muhammad* (1979), a translated work of M.H. Haykal from Arabic, among others. Many of his publications have been translated into various languages.

Al-Faruqi's View on Western System of Education:

Like his predecessors such as Jamal-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh and Ahmad Khan who believed that education was a strong weapon to fight intellectual, moral and economic backwardness, and that, by reforming education, all reforms could easily be accelerated; Al-Faruqi equally believed that no tangible progress could be achieved in the Muslim *Ummah* until the problem of education was solved among them. He says:

The task confronting the *Ummah* in the fifteenth century *Hijrah* is that of solving the problem of education. There can be no hope of a genuine revival of the *Ummah* unless the educational system is revamped and its faults corrected. Indeed, what is needed is for the system to be formed anew (Al-Faruqi, 1987: 9).

He, however, faulted the reformation strategies of Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh on the basis of their failure to realise the harmful effects of the introduction of alien humanities, social sciences and natural sciences to the *Ummah* and their wrong assumption that such introduction could only strengthen the *Ummah*. He observed the shortcoming of the reformation when he says:

.....it succeeded in de-Islamizing the top layer of Muslim society and demoralizing the rest. The vision of Islam became clouded by another version which came to us with the colonial invaders. The alien vision survived, and indeed, grew more virulently after the invaders' departure. For many generations, the Muslims have seemed unable to get rid of it. It is evident everywhere – in the imported institutions, in the spread of the English and French languages among them; in the design of their offices, homes, and cities; in the recreation programs; in the economic and political practices they follow and in the very ideas of reality, of nature, of man, and of society that they hold. The prime agent disseminating the alien view has been the educational system, bifurcated, as it is, into subsystems, one 'Modern' and the other 'Islamic'. This bifurcation is the epitome of Muslim decline.

Rather than apishly imitating the West, Al-Faruqi called for the Muslims to develop the sense of originality based on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. With particular reference to the Islamization of arts and social sciences, he says:

How long are we going to content ourselves with the crumbs that the West is throwing at us? It is about time that we make our own original contribution. As social scientists, we have to look back at our training and reshape it in the light of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. This is how our forefathers made their own original contributions to the study of history, law and culture. The West borrowed their heritage and put it in a secular mould. Is it asking for too much that we take this knowledge and Islamize it? (cited by Ba-Yunus, 1988: 18).

Al-Faruqi frowned at the alienation of *wahy* and '*aql*' from each other. He therefore called for the unification of the Islamic and secular systems of education saying:

As disciplines, the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences must be re-conceived and rebuilt, given a new Islamic base and assigned new purposes consistent with Islam. Every discipline must be recast so as to embody the principles of Islam in its methodology, in its strategy, in what it regards as its data, its problems, its objectives and its aspirations. Every discipline must be remolded to incorporate the relevance of Islam along the triple axis constitutive of *tawhid* (al-Faruqi, 1988: 16-17).

He emphatically says further:

The present dualism in Muslim education; its bifurcation into an Islamic and secular system must be removed and abolished once and for all. The two systems must be united and integrated (al-Faruqi, 1987: 9).

His Islamization of Knowledge Policy

To Al-Faruqi, every branch of knowledge should be Islamized, including the language of communication in the English-speaking countries – English language. In his 'Toward Islamic English', he observed the chaotic nature of the English language when it expresses matters that have to do with Islam. He noted the nature of distortion of Islam-related issues in transliteration and translation. He was not satisfied with the translation of some attributes of Allah as well as the gross mutilation of Muslim names. He observed:

Muslims are particularly prone to having their beautiful Islamic names mutilated, because of the general ignorance of Arabic or the difficulties of transliteration. Names which have Western equivalent (Yusuf, Ya'qub, Ishaq, Yunus, Musa, Ibrahim, etc) are hastily changed into their Biblical personalities and so represent entirely different meanings of the Christian and /or Jew that the Qur'anic names do to the Muslim (Al-Faruqi, 1986: 11).

In the area of translation, he considered some vocabulary of Islam such as *taqwa*, *huda*, *qist*, *wahy*, *fiqh*, *siyam*, *hajj*, *hadith*, *salat*, as having much more meaning in their Arabic form than their English approximations are ever capable of carrying. He thus suggested rendition of such words in their original forms while translating.

To achieve the Islamization objectives, Al-Faruqi formulated a twelve-step work plan. These are:

- Step 1 – Mastery of the modern disciplines
- Step 2 – Detailed Survey of disciplines
- Step 3 – Mastery of the Islamic legacy: The anthology
- Step 4 – Mastery of the Islamic legacy: The analysis
- Step 5 – Establishment of the specific relevance of Islam to the disciplines
- Step 6 – Critical assessment of the modern disciplines
- Step 7 – Critical assessment of the Islamic legacy.
- Step 8 – Survey of the *Ummah's* major problems
- Step 9 – Survey of the problems of humankind
- Step 10 – Creative analysis and synthesis
- Step 11 – Recasting the disciplines under the framework of Islam: The university textbook.
- Step 12 – Dissemination of the Islamized knowledge.

The objectives of the work plan according to Al-Faruqi, are to master the modern disciplines; to master the Islamic legacy, to establish the specific relevance of Islam to each area of modern

knowledge, to seek ways for creative synthesis between the legacy and modern knowledge; and to launch Islamic thought on the trajectory which leads it to the fulfillment of the Divine patterns of Allah (SWT).

A critical Appraisal of his Islamization Work plan

The first step of Al-Faruqi's work plan is mastery of modern disciplines. This implies two connotations. First, the traditional Muslim scholars must be aware that unless they are trained in some western disciplines, they would not be able to function effectively well in the modern-day development. It is also a clear demonstration that he was directing his speech to elites who had initially acquired mastery of one of the social science disciplines, and who might probably be skeptical of Islam as a source of knowledge, or rather did not appreciate the intellectual heritage of Islamic civilization. This, in essence means that there should be close interaction between western-trained scholars and traditional Muslim scholars. That notwithstanding, modern scholars have hard nuts to crack, as steps 6 – 11 are their major tasks. They are expected to analyse and synthesise the modern disciplines and the Islamic legacy. In short, al-Faruqi attempted to bridge the gap between western secular and traditional Islamic systems of education. As observed by Yasien (1993), al-Faruqi's Islamization "is an attempt to present Islam as an alternative ideology on a scholarly level."

Scholars have opened al-Faruqi's Islamization work plan to criticisms. Safi accused the steps in the work plan of complication and lack of logistic and psychological practical considerations. He thus reduced the steps by merging steps 1,3, and 4 as one step; and then steps 6,7 and 10; and finally steps 2,5,8 and 9 to form another step thus reducing the whole step into mastery of substantive knowledge; mastery of methodological knowledge and finally production of university textbooks and other intellectual works for the Muslim community to examine, based on the Qur'an and sunnah. Like Safi, Maiwada equally considered the twelve-step work-plan as lengthy. He thus reduces it to seven by eliminating steps 2,7,8 and 9; and merging steps 3 and 4 to become one. He, (Maiwada) also saw the six discourses of Al-Alwani as having similarity with some steps in Al-Faruqi's work-plan.

It is our observation that attempts by scholars to shorten or present alternative option for the work plan have resulted in merging some of the steps together with little or no innovation whatsoever. One needs to commend the efforts of Al-Faruqi for presenting such a work-plan especially during the period when the programme needed a working principle to guide it. Al-Faruqi has undoubtedly opened up an 'uncultivated land' where others came to fashion out their own farm. Nevertheless, we observe that the work-plan needs some amendments in order to avoid putting the cart before the horse. It is our considered opinion that the steps 7,8 and 9 in the work-plan should chronologically be arranged from the rear. In other words, step 7 should be, 'survey of the problems of humankind; step 8 retains its status, while step 9 should be 'critical assessment of the Islamic legacy'. The basis of this observation is in accordance with references from the Qur'an. At the initial stage of the creation of man, he was as innocent as a babe. Despite his fall to temptation, Allah forgave Adam and his wife and even promised to be sending His Guidance for them to return to Him innocently. Man is raised to an enviable position of honour above the brute creation. With his endowment, he is able to explore the environment for

his benefit. Thus, he is able to manipulate the land, sea and air to his satisfaction. Soon, man, engulfed by meshes of customs, overtaken by superstitions, selfish desires and false teaching, and thus landed into the state of uncleanness and falsehood started perpetuating evil and mischievous acts on the earth (Q. 30: 41). However, the *Ummah* is regarded as the salt to the sour society (Q. 3: 110). The failure of the *Ummah* to offer solutions to the problem of mankind demands critical examination (i.e step 8). This in turn calls for a critical assessment of the Islamic legacy (step 7).

Conclusion

So far, we have been able to consider the life and works of late Professor Raji Isma'il Al-Faruqi and his efforts toward the programme of Islamization of knowledge in the contemporary period. There is no doubt that the able professor had been able to lay a solid foundation for the programme and his publications would continue to be a legacy for this generation and generations yet unborn. It is quite pathetic that the well-known professor of Islamic Studies and his wife Lois Lamya al-Faruqi were brutally murdered at their home at Wyncote, Pennsylvania on the fateful date of May 27, 1986 (Ramadan 18, 1406). The cause of his assassination was not clearly pronounced. However, his speeches against the Zionist state made him to be tagged as 'the most dangerous enemy of Israel' and this could largely be responsible for his sudden assassination. One needs to commend the efforts of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Association of the Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) for their strong determination to fish out the assassin of the professor, and for establishing al-Faruqi Memorial Fund. The Memorial Committee set up in his honour went to the extent of awarding scholarships, named al-Faruqi scholarship to college students with outstanding academic records and some other steps taken to immortalize the name of this great scholar. One also needs to salute the courage of the Nigeria office of the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Kano, for naming her bookshop after the sage. It is our hope that an annual conference be organized in honour of him as well. Above all, the programme of Islamization of knowledge is a legacy nurtured by al-Faruqi up to the point of his death and so should not be allowed to die with him. Efforts should be made by his contemporaries to pursue his work-plan up to the point of implementation.

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Amidu O. Sanni

Prelude

Synergy and collaboration among religious and political traditions are getting increasingly vibrant. Between 6 and 10 September 2006, a week-long conference on Dialogue of Civilisations was held at the UN headquarters in New York. Representatives of major world faiths, especially Islam and Christianity, brainstormed with political leaders on how to promote better understanding in the world through the instrumentalities of religion. Huntington's 1993 pessimistic if not mischievous theory of the 'Clash of Civilisations' has progressively faded into insignificance and the 'grove' stereotype which it represented has since been well established (Kazemi 2002). In his inaugural speech to the Islamic Consultative Assembly on August 4 1997, President Mohammad Khatami of Iran said: "In our world, dialogue among civilisations is an absolute imperative." Response and Voll (2003:250). This same message was repeated during his week-long visit to the USA in early September 2006. However, US President George Bush is wont to characterise his highly named 'war on terror' as another phase of this 'clash'. This was on the occasion of his speech to mark the fifth anniversary of 9/11.

It is therefore remarkable that the Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan and the (Catholic) Justice, Development and Peace Commission, Ibadan have come together to organise a conference under the general theme of 'Inter and Intra-Religious Conflict Resolution'. This is a reflection of a cardinal identification with the global spirit of inter-faith and inter-cultural interaction. This dispensation of dialogue and collaboration was remarkably pursued by the late Professor W. O. A. Nsamenang all through his life as a teacher of Islam and a community opinion moulder, and there can be no greater tribute to his memory than exposing this concept the way he would have loved were he to be around today. My intention in this presentation is to demonstrate how religious leaders have in the past promoted or condoned racial, religious disharmony, and communal strife either through mischief or ignorance and to suggest how best they can fulfil their divinely imposed duty of salvaging the community.