Al-Wasatiyyah as Understood and Defined by Islamic Scholars in Contemporary Singapore and Its Consistency with Ismail Al Faruqi's Vision of *Ummatan Wasatan*

by

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Abstract

This article delves into Professor al Faruqi's understanding of the role of Islamic Ummah as being the ummatan wasatan – "the median among the peoples of mankind" (Qur'an 2:143). For Professor al Faruqi, the concept of al-wasatiyyah (the middle way) explicates the concept of al-tawazun (Islamic balance and "golden means"). This mode of Islamic moderation as stressed by Professor al Faruqi is today in 2011 employed by the Singaporean Muslim community in its response to the government's concern about Muslim radicalism in the republic. In this way, they do not stoop to the pressures of the country's secular or religious authorities to compromise any of their religious convictions or beliefs, however much these were distasteful to the authorities.

Al Faruqi's Moderation

The notion of religious moderation has become increasingly popular since the last decade as an antidote to religious fundamentalism and extremism, which seemed to have gained momentum worldwide in a post-9/11 world of turbulence. Muslim religious leaders and scholars, in particular – under

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the prevailing circumstances of mutual distrust, heightened xenophobia in some parts of the world, and interreligious discord – have been urged or felt obliged to appeal to their coreligionists and radically oriented groups or organizations to adhere to the middle path of Islamic moderation and the avoidance of the extremes of either religious bigotry or secular liberalism. Professor Ismail al Faruqi was one such scholar, who I have known since 1970 when he came to Columbia University in New York City to deliver a talk to the Muslim community there. His personality and his intellectual discourse, whether in the United States or in Malaysia, which he used to consider as his "second home," portray the rare quality of integration be-tween a deep and sincere commitment to religious beliefs, on the one hand, and profound conviction in the need for interreligious dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance for religious differences, on the other. To many of us who admired his scholarly discourse and activism, and were always inspired by his eloquent and animated intellectual exchanges with people of other religious persuasions, he was a model of the justly balanced Is-lamic personality, who is willing to engage the contemporary world, and as he used to say, determined to "intervene in time and space to change the course of history" – without sacrificing the Islamic *adab* (ethical con-duct) of respecting "the other" and repulsion of any form of injustice to the followers of other religions. In his most influential and widely-read book, *Tawhid: Its Implications For Thought and Life* – which, since its publication in 1982, is still one of the most well-known reference books at the International Islamic University Malaysia – he emphatically expressed in the first page of his preface his concern with the Islamic Ummah being designated as "the median among the peoples of mankind," or as *ummatan wasatan* in the Qur'an (2:143). He explains this concept of *al-wasatiyyah* (or the condition of being exemplary and in the middle position of justice, goodness, and avoidance of extremes) as follows:

> Islam is the religion of the golden mean: "And thus, We made you (the Muslims) an *ummah* of the golden mean, that you be an exemplary median unto mankind.... It is both general and particular, universal and specific, formal and contextual, monolithic and pluralistic, individual-istic and specialistic; and that is its strength.... Islam is the religion of balance ... its very axiology is always a delicate balancing between two evils or a subtle combination of disparate values ... standing between the doer of too much and the doer of too-little.[1]

Al Faruqi elaborates the concept of Islamic balance (*al-tawazun*) and the "golden-means" of Islam by referring to Prophet Muhammad's response

when he was told that some Muslims wanted to fast every day, pray all night long, and vowed not to marry:

> As for me, I shall fast some days of the year and shall eat on others; I shall pray and I shall sleep; and I shall take women in marriage. Whoever wishes not to follow my example should not be said to belong in my fellowship.[2]

"The golden mean," he says, "is obviously a mean between two disvalues; but it is also a balance between two pursuits of one and the same value, which happily combines it with all other values giving each its due."[3] The Ummah has to avoid the evils of individualism and collectivism because "Islam has prescribed *tawazun*, or balance, the golden mean and declared its purpose to be the achievement of felicity of the person as well as that of the group."[4] Rejecting absolute individualism as well as absolute tribalism, "Islam has indeed struck the middle ground, asserting both values in the middle, and denying both disvalues at the end of the spectrum of inter-human relations."[5]

Both Malaysian and Singapore students of the International Islamic University Malaysia, who had the chance to know Al Faruqi not only through *Tawhid* or *Islamization of Knowledge* (1982) but in person, were very impressed by his balanced personality and his special way of articulating Islamic perspectives. His comprehensive moderation has also made a lasting impact upon me, and I see the ideational link between the spirit of religious and social moderation of present-day Muslims of Singapore – among whom are those who have read some of his writings – and the intellectual legacy of positive engagement with the Other and the harmonious interreligious dialogue left by the brilliant thoughts and praiseworthy actions of Professor Faruqi. If he were to be alive today and witnessing the positive intellectual development of young educated Muslims of Singapore who speak English fluently and live as confident Muslims – albeit as a religious minority – in a Chinese-dominant secular state, he would recognize the ethos of Islamic moderation there as being akin to his understanding of *al-wasatiyyah* or the *ummatan wasatan*.

Curbing Muslim Extremism In the Secular State of Singapore

The arrest and detention of fifteen people from the Malay-Muslim community in December 2001, followed by a second arrest of twenty-one people

in August 2002 under the Internal Security Act – a few months before the bloody Bali bombing in Indonesia – not only alarmed the Muslim community but were a wake-up call that radical and militant elements had apparently penetrated the community before and after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.[6] The Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, echoing the concerns of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the Senior Minister, perhaps expressed the feelings of many non-Muslim leaders in Singapore when he said that "Within the Islamic world, some religious leaders are pushing Muslims down an extreme path, while others urge a moderate path. Which path Singapore Muslims choose will have an impact on the cohesion of our country."[7] Muslims of Singapore were therefore expected to reject all forms of religious extremism and also promote practice moderation if they wish to protect the image of Islam from being tarnished by the radical actions of a few extremist elements belonging to the Muslim community.

But the perception of moderation on the part of the government and the non-Muslim leaders may not be in complete agreement with the Islamic definition of the term *moderation*. For non-Muslims, "Muslim moderation" implies generally the acceptance of democracy, modernism, and secularism – and the rejection of "Political Islam," the rejection of the idea of an Islamic state, fanaticism, and a too strict of an adherence to religious practice.[8] Muslim scholars and religious leaders in Singapore understand moderation basically from the Qur'anic concept of *ummatan wasatan*, from which the term *al-wasatiyyah* is derived. Moderation, as such, is one important aspect of *al-wasatiyyah*, not the totality of it, but its perception by Muslim scholars is certainly not identical with the non-Muslims' understanding and perception.

The Commitment to the *Wasatiyyah* Nature of the Ummah by the Muslim Religious Scholars and Teachers in Singapore

On September 13 and 14, 2003, the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association (PERGAS) held the Convention of PERGAS *'Ulama* with the theme of "Moderation in Islam in the Context of the Singapore Muslim Society." After the above-mentioned arrests of several Singaporean Muslims, alleged to be members of the underground militant regional group called Jemaah Islamiyah, PERGAS felt the need to respond

to and address the issue of the Singapore government's concern as well as that of the non-Muslim majority population, concerning the potential threat of Muslim extremism in the secular republic.

The Association's scholars have observed that the non-Muslims and the government leaders have expressed in the recent years the view that, in general, the Muslims of Southeast Asia are peace-loving, tolerant, and moderate Muslims who are opposed to violent manifestations of religious sentiments. However, because the phenomenon of "terrorism" associated with small clandestine organizations of militant Muslims has emerged in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines during the last decade, people in Singapore were shocked by this development and wanted to be assured that the Muslim community in Singapore would not be influenced by, or show sympathy to, the few extremist or radical Muslims who may come from the neighboring countries (or from within Singapore itself) to create havoc or political instability in the secular nation. The Muslim community, on its part, has also felt the increasing government's pressure on the community regarding its need for the privately run religious schools (*madrasahs*) and for students to comply with the new government educational regulations and policies and to disallow young Muslim girls from donning the religiously required headscarves in government schools. There were obviously sufficient justifications for PERGAS to hold the 2003 convention to discuss and explain its stand on Islamic moderation and how such moderation fits into the multireligious society and secular state of Singapore.[9]

The first paper of the convention, entitled "Islam – *Ummatan Wasatan*, An *Ummah* Justly Balanced" gives the correct definition of *ummatan wasatan* and "moderation" as a comprehensive manifestation of the justly balanced attribute of Islam. The paper says:

> Moderation in Islam is neither subjective nor determined by rational thought alone. While thought ... may be taken into account when discussing moderation, in Islam, it is determined based on the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.... The teachings of Islam, as outlined in the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, advocate moderation in life.... On the other hand, moderation in Islam does not mean ignoring its commandments such as praying (*solat*), fasting or wearing the headscarf for women.[10]

As expressed by a number of Western intellectuals quoted in the paper,[11] obviously the concept of Muslim moderation does not do justice to the Islamic notion of *al-wasatiyyah*. After analyzing the views of non-Muslims in both the Western world and in Singapore, the PERGAS scholars merged the international and local perspectives on what they expect the Muslim

citizens to be. The following list summarizes the expectations of the non-Muslims [12]:

1. loyal to the country
2. reject terrorism
3. be tolerant
4. be open
5. accept democracy
6. accept the important role of women
7. accept universal values
8. love peace
9. love freedom
10. accept modernism
11. accept liberalism
12. work on economic development
13. voice out and debate against non-moderates
14. drive changes within Islam
15. traditional (in the American perspectives), non-conservative (in the local perspective)
16. reject Political Islam
17. focus on welfare and social activities
18. be involved in the country's development
19. contextual and local
20. accept living in a secular society and embrace secularism
21. recognize the importance of religious harmony
22. promote unity and national integration
23. mutual understanding
24. mutual respect
25. confident of each other
26. build close relationships across religious communities
27. prevent religion from being used as a source of conflicts
28. have the right stand on the implementation of the Shari'ah
29. reject militant Islam.
30. be flexible

31. avoid radical thinking

32. not inward-looking

33. not strict in the practice of religion

34. not fanatic

35. reject narrow interpretations

36. focus on content, not form

37. ready to adapt

38. remain relevant to current lifestyle

39. not inclined to misinterpreting jihad

40. not inclined to absolute hatred of non-Muslims

41. not inclined to use whatever means to achieve an objective

42. not inclined to consider killing as a religious responsibility and the means to Islamize others

43. not inclined to Islam of the versions of the Salafi, Wahhabi, and Shi'ah of Iran, Arabia and the Middle East

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Responding to these expectations, PERGAS scholars agreed in principle, or with some qualifications, with the great majority of the above expectations. They disagreed, however, in principle with the following expectations:[13]

- embrace secularism (no. 20)

- focus on welfare and social aspects (no.17)

- reject Political Islam (no.16)

- accept liberalism (no.11)

- avoid the versions of Islam of Salafi, Wahhabi, Shi'ah of Iran, Arabia, and the Middle East (no. 43)

Embrace Secularism

The scholars disagreed with this expectation because it contradicted the Islamic worldview of the comprehensiveness of Islam, as expounded by the Muslim renewalists, including al-Qaradhawi. They said that the "earlier Euro-Christians needed secularism to progress from the shackles of their religion, but secularism was never a critical factor in the success of

the Muslim *ummah*."[14] Accepting Singapore as a secular state and willing to coexist in it as peaceful citizens, they cautioned against the negative aspects of secularism should Singapore "adopt wholesale the Western model of implementation." To avoid the negative aspects of secularism, they suggested that "a formula which co-opts religion into the life of society" be conceptualized."[15] They recognized that the "Singapore government is basically not anti-religion" and "Secularism in the Singapore context is in the form of a non-partisan (neutral) government that does not take the side of any religion in order to ensure inter-racial harmony."[16] They reaffirmed their "commitment to defend, develop, build, prosper and be concerned about Singapore and its interests."[17]

As for modernism, the scholars said that they did "not reject modernism, if it means modernism in science, technology, economy, or even material accumulation.... The type of modernism that we reject is the one that contains [secular] humanism, relativism, permissiveness or other views which separate man from God, rejects the role of religion and treats everything as relative and subjective."[18]

Reject Political Islam[19]

The PERGAS scholars disagreed with this expectation because of the comprehensiveness of Islam that included politics. They believed:

> It is the responsibility of every Muslim to implement Islam in politics or to participate in politics in accordance with the principles of Islam. Hence, a Muslim cannot separate Islam from politics or politics from Islam.[20]

They did not agree that the Muslim's acknowledgement or rejection of the idea that Islam had its own political ideals and vision of good governance be used as an indicator of whether a Muslim was a moderate or not. Governance based on Islamic principles and laws – popularly known as the "Islamic state" in the twentieth century – was part of the teachings of Islam, but the way the Muslims pursued such political ideals in the secular state of Singapore would have to be in accordance with the law and constitution of Singapore. Given the diversity of the views of the '*ulama* concerning the nature of the governance preferred by Muslims, the PERGAS scholars said, "we are inclined towards an Islamic State which has little difference from the modern [democratic] system of governance prevalent today."[21] But given the constraints of the present system and acknowledging the context and realities of a Muslim minority, there was no point in propagat-

ing the objective of establishing it in Singapore. The priorities had to be right, and this was part of the teachings of the justly balanced perspective of Islam. The PERGAS scholars reaffirmed their loyalty to the state of Singapore but wished to make it clear that "having aspirations for an Islamic state does not make one an extremist and a non-moderate."[22] It was important to contextualize the understanding of such aspirations as part of the characteristics of being realistic in the rightly balanced framework.

Accept Liberalism

They said that liberalism in the West was often associated with progress, development, and modernism. A person who was not liberal was therefore regarded as "backward, isolated from progress and inclined towards radical thinking, extremism and terrorism."[23] They did not reject "liberalism's agenda of being open and safeguarding human rights"[24] or associated with the ideals of greater individual participation in government, and constitutional, political, or administrative reforms aimed at achieving those objectives.

The Stand Regarding the Salafi and Wahhabi Trends

The PERGAS scholars noted that "there is a new tendency among non-Muslims to view the *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* negatively" with the assumption that their "teachings incline towards extremism, and inevitably lead towards terrorism." The scholars observed that these schools of thought "have long existed among Muslims" and there was diversity, as with other schools of thought, among them, "ranging from moderate to the extreme." They felt that it was not justifiable and overly simplistic to condemn both orientations indiscriminately. The right attitude was to "reject extremism no matter where it originates from, be it from the *Salafi*, *Wahhabi*, secularism, clerics or professionals." The Salafi or Wahhabi trends were part of the diversity within the Muslim community; it was the "extremists among then [that] need to be corrected...."[25]

Charter of Moderation in Religious Practice

It was significant that the PERGAS '*Ulama* Convention decided to formulate "the parameters of moderation as a guide for the life and religious practice of the Muslim community in Singapore" in a remarkable "Charter of Moderation in Religious Practice," which conforms to the golden-

meanness of Islam, as elaborated and articulated by Al Faruqi in his books. This kind of charter is most probably the first of its kind to be devised by a minority Muslim community in a democratic Asian country and could well serve as a useful model to be emulated by other Muslim minority communities living in democratic and secular Western countries, which are not hostile to Islam and Muslims. I shall quote below some of the articles of the charter:[26]

1. We are committed to respecting the principles of democracy in social interactions and in our efforts to achieve the aspirations of the Muslim community. It is on this premise that we commit to constantly abide by the laws and regulations in our actions.

2. We are committed to safeguarding peace. We are not harsh and violent in religious practice, nor in achieving our aspirations. We understand *jihad* in its broader meaning. Armed *jihad* is only against those who declare war on us.

3. Diversity is inherently created in nature by Allah Almighty; therefore, we face it positively. We are not hostile to differences and diversity, be it in matters relating to religion, nation or culture. We wish to establish synergistic relationships out of this diversity, via peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Our relationships are based on mutual respect and the desire to promote understanding, tolerance and confidence of each other.

4. We believe that Islam is a comprehensive way of life and reject the separation between worldly and religious affairs. However, we consider a secular state positively in that it guarantees freedom in religion, recognises the positive role of religion in developing the society, and it acts as a neutral structure within which harmony in social and religious practice may be secured. In reality, it is a practical choice for the minority Muslims in Singapore.

5. We love this country and it is in our mutual interest to ensure its progress, continuous development and prosperity, as guided by the principles of our religion. We identify ourselves as Singaporeans, as much as we identify ourselves with our race and religion. Having such multiple affiliations inevitably causes conflicts in certain situations, but we are committed to looking for a common and equitable meeting point. Whatever differences that arise should be handled according to the principles of democracy and legal procedures via a peaceful process.

Before coming up with the above charter, PERGAS scholars discussed ten issues which had a bearing on the meaning of Islamic moderation in the context of the rising menace of extremism in the Muslim world and the misperceptions of many Muslims who could be influenced by extremist ideas and interpretations. The issues discussed were:

- issue no. 1 – The basis of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims

- issue no. 2 – classifying countries into *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (abode of war)

- issue no. 3 – residing in a non-Muslim country

- issue no. 4 – *takfir* (declaring a Muslim as an unbeliever)

- issue no. 5 – misperception of jihad

- issue no. 6 – holding positions in the government

- issue no. 7 – method of correcting the government or the authorities

- issue no. 8 – belonging to a *jama'ah* (group or society)

- issue no. 9 – *bid'ah* (innovation in religion)

- issue no. 10 – changing *munkar* (wrongdoing, vice, or disobedient act of Muslims) "with the hand"

On all these issues, the scholars' clarifications and conclusions were in harmony with the justly balanced positions and perspectives of Islam. The correct positions were arrived at after having analyzed the relevant authoritative texts and the different views of scholars, and as such, they served a useful purpose in educating the Muslims masses as well as the non-Muslim government authorities and fellow citizens of Singapore.[27] On the first issue, "relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims," the PERGAS scholars maintained that the original basis of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims was peace, although some scholars of the past subscribed to the view that war was the original basis. They explained that the concept of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* formulated by Muslim jurists was a reflection of the hostile relationship which existed in the past between the Muslims and their neighboring non-Muslim countries, and war was the preferred means of solving the interreligious conflicts. Yet, a third alternative was provided in the concept of *dar al-'ahd* (abode of treaty) or *dar al-aman*" (abode of peace and security) conceived by the later jurists.[28] All these concepts emerged from a premodern period in world history when

prolonged wars, invasions, internecine battles, and military raids were the order of the day and defined the relationship of interreligious communities. Even then, the prophetic precedents and Qur'anic provisions for peaceful relationship between peoples of different religions were always pertinent. They provided the legitimate basis for the peace-oriented religious perspectives of later jurists. The revolutionary changes in world politics, world economy, and international affairs in the modern period; the spread of the democratic system of government throughout the world; the internationally guaranteed freedoms of movement, expression, and religious beliefs; accelerated legal migration of peoples of all races and religions; the sovereignty of nation-states based on ethnicity instead of religious affiliation; the nationalistic legal systems with well-defined roles and safeguards for the rights of citizens, residents, immigrants, political refugees, and minorities; and, to top it all, the ironic situation in which persecuted Muslims in Muslim countries controlled by local despots or tyrants would find refuge and freedom and peace in a non-Muslim country – all these global changes made the *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* divisions of the world anachronistic, unrealistic, irrelevant, unjust, and therefore, indefensible. It is therefore understandable – and in keeping with the true concept of Islamic moderation – that PERGAS scholars came to the following conclusions:

1. Muslims should base their relationship with non-Muslims on a positive foundation, not on negative ones like war, hate, and revenge.

2. The least Muslims should do is to be neutral, and to avoid prejudice and suspicious toward those of a different religion.

3. This is the positive foundation upon which should be established various types of relationship such as cooperation, and feelings such as love and affection.

4. Islam recognises the natural tendency to form various types of relationships and alliances among men.

5. Islam recognises that not all non-Muslims are the same, and similar in their negative outlook towards Muslims. Each group should be appropriately assessed and dealt with accordingly.

6. A difference in religion alone does not warrant war being the basis of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

7. A difference in religion neither justifies hate for non-Muslims nor disallows feelings of love and affection for them.

8. Harbouring the belief that all non-Muslims are anti-Islam or *harbi* [hostile] and hence should be hated and resisted, is not conducive for the purpose of *da'wah* [propagation of Islam]. This is a prejudice and is similar to the misconception amongst some non-Muslims that all Muslims are terrorists and fundamentalists. Both these parties are actually closer to an extremist stand rather than a reasonable one.

9. For the benefit of *da'wah*, Muslims should strive for more positive relationships with, and feelings for non-Muslims, without condoning their disbelief, and as long as they do not work against Islam's interests nor involve immoral acts.

10. If Muslims are hostile to anyone who is non-Muslim, it should only be because of the hostility of the non-Muslim to Islam and Muslims. In the absence of such hostility, Muslims should not be hostile to them. The procedure in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) is; "Judgement is based on *'illah* (reason) when it is present, and when it is absent.[29]

Proposed Action to Nurture Moderation and Deal with Extremism

The scholars realized that the understanding of Islam's moderation or justly balanced nature is confined to the educated elites and those who studied the religion of Islam from the right sources. In order to spread the understanding and make it the dominant culture and discourse of the community, they decided to chart out the action plan to be followed up after the convention. They came up with the following plan:

1. Extensively educate the community on the accurate *tasawwur* (worldview) of Islam. May consider to include the study of Islamic *tasawwur* in *madrasahs*.

2. Popularise the learning of the *Shari'ah* decision-making tools and processes among Muslims. These include the sciences of the *Hadith*, *'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Sciences of the Qur'an), *Usul al-Fiqh* (theory of Islamic jurisprudence) and *Qawa'id Fiqhiyyah* (general principles of jurisprudence). This will open up their minds to the broader perspective of Islam on any one issue.

3. Popularise the learning of comparative *fiqh* to open up the community's minds to the diversity of opinions of the *'ulama'* on any one issue.

4. Popularise contemporary *fiqh* views.

5. Streamline the *'ulama'* viewpoints on important issues.

6. Engage and interact with extremist groups via dialogue and discussions.

7. Narrow the gap between the *'ulama'*, leaders and youth.

8. Clarify issues that arise.

9. Refrain from being harsh and extreme in dealing with extremism.

10. Safeguard *manhaj shar'i* (correct methodology) in *istidlal* (reasoning) and *istinbaÏ* (deducing a ruling from the sources of the *shari'ah*) before issuing any ruling.

11. Stay clear of creating controversies, confusion and antagonism within the community.

12. Stay clear of actions which create controversies, confusion and antagonism towards Islam and Muslims.[30]

The proposed actions number 2, number 3, number 4, number 5, and number 10 would have significant educational impact on the Muslim community – not just in Singapore but elsewhere, even in Muslim majority countries, because they involve major redesigning and review of the prevailing curriculum of formal as well as nonformal religious education of the Muslims. The proposed changes are, therefore, quite demanding and require the availability of qualified teachers and lecturers with suitable textbooks and references. The proposals are laudable because they emphasize the broadening of both the scope and the method of studying Islam by using integrative, holistic, and comparative approaches at the intermediate and advanced levels of education. It would be a great achievement if the *madrasah*s, the mosques, and Islamic educational associations in Singapore could cooperate in implementing the new and the revolutionary proposed plans. With the support of the Singapore Islamic Religious Council such cooperation would be forthcoming and greatly facilitated.

While proposed actions numbers 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12 have to do more with the ethics of Islamic brotherhood and etiquette in imparting religious knowledge aimed at minimizing or managing controversial and conflicting perspectives and divisive behavior within the Muslim minority community, the most significant proposal in terms of both the content and method of religious education is proposed action number 1. Placing it in the first position indicates that the greatest value and priority given by the PERGAS

scholars lie in the extensive education of the Muslim community concerning the Islamic worldview (*tasawwur*), with the emphasis on the "accurate *tasawwur*." This concern of PERGAS with the wider dissemination of the correct worldview of Islam as the overarching and holistic framework to guide the Muslim community – minority or majority – along the justly balanced path (popularly known as the path of moderation) is a major shift in Islamic thought in Singapore. The intention to include the subject of the Islamic worldview in the community religious schools was most timely and commendable. In this regard, the Malaysian Muslim scholars, educationists, and teachers would be able to share their experience and expertise in teaching the subject of "*Tasawwur* Islam" in the Malaysian secondary schools for the last two decades. Courses on the Islamic worldview have also been taught in some Malaysian universities, while in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) the course on Islamic Worldview has always been and still is one of the compulsory university courses for all undergraduate students. It should also be mentioned that the faculty members of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences of IIUM have been conducting short-term Islamic religious education programs designed for Muslim adults in Singapore for almost a decade. Given the experience of IIUM staff in teaching the subject of Islamic Worldview and the well-established cooperation between Singapore and Malaysian scholars, the noble intention of Muslim scholars in Singapore should be able to bear its fruit of "Muslim moderation" on a wider scale within the whole Muslim community of the island republic. The 2003 convention has underscored the importance and relevance of articulating the justly balanced worldviewof Islam by competent Muslim scholars in the context of the secular democratic Republic of Singapore where Muslims are the minority community, which has had to bear the burden of global and regional negative stereotyping of Muslims in the last one decade.

Conclusion

I spent a week in Singapore in July 2010 to gather more information regarding the Muslim community's response to the government's concern about Muslim radicalism in the republic, and after discussing with about ten leaders of the Muslim community – including leaders of PERGAS, independent academics, the Mufti, and a Muslim minister – I was impressed that in promoting the true perspectives, values, and standpoints of Islamic moderation, the Singapore ulama and Muslim intellectuals demonstrated

their commitment to moral and spiritual integrity and intellectual objectivity by being honest and transparent in exposing their true beliefs – such as their opposition to secularism as well as extremism; their commitment to jihad in its comprehensive connotation as well as to democracy and religious tolerance; their loyalty to the secular state as well as their unflinching faith in Divine Law; their rejection of Western liberalism as well as Muslim sectarianism, extremism, and literalism; and their espousal of the ideals of Islam with their sincere contextualization of those ideals against the stark realities of a secular state. I felt very strongly that they did not have to stoop to the pressures of secular or religious authorities of the country to compromise any of their religious convictions or beliefs, however much they were distasteful to the authorities. In the end, the September 2003 convention epitomized the moral integrity and rightly balanced quality of Islamic scholars in expressing their views without fear or favor. It should be mentioned in closing that many of the ideas and stands made by PERGAS intellectuals are in harmony with the views and standpoints of Professor Al Faruqi, including his rejection of modern secularism and his idea of the integration of political power with religious values.[31] Knowing his ideas quite well, I believe that if he were to be alive today, he would happily endorse the stand made by the Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals of Singapore as an extension of his own ideas and, perhaps, a particular way of operationalizing some of his abstract and idealistic vision in real time and space – in a secular democratic state of all places!

Endnotes

1. Ismail Raji al Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Kuala Lumpur: IIIT, 1982), 147–48.

2. Ibid., 152.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 154.

5. Ibid.

6. See Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, "White Paper – The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism," January 9, 2003, www. mha.gov.sg/mha/detailed.jsp?;http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/singapore_ embassies_attack_plot.

7. National Day Rally speech of the Prime Minister, on August 18, 2002 at the National University of Singapore, in PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, 51–52.

8. See PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore* (PERGAS: Singapore, 2004), 50–89.

9. Ibid., 43–87. On the PERGAS stand on the specific issues in 2000 and 2002 related to the Muslim community in Singapore, see the press statements of PERGAS in PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, Appendix 2, 329–361.

10. Ibid., 19. Cf. "Definition of a Moderate Muslim-updated," http://muslimsagainstsharia.blogspot.com/2008/01/what-is-moderate-muslim.html. See also Tarmizi Taher, *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Center for the Study of Islam and Society, 1997).

11. Paul Wolfowitz and Jeff Jacoby, "Islam's Unheard Moderates," *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2000; Francis Fukuyama, "Today's New Fascist," *Newsweek*, December 2001; and Joyce M. Davis, *Between Jihad and Salaam: Profiles in Islam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

12. PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, 19.

13. Ibid., 92–128

14. PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore,* 110.

15. Ibid., 115.

16. Ibid., 111.

17. Ibid., 182.

18. Ibid., 171.

19. The term *Political Islam*, coined by Western scholars and popularized by the Western media, is unacceptable to many Muslim scholars and revivalists because it distorts the true nature of Islam and tends to demonize the legitimate political values and perspectives of Islam.

20. PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, 115.

21. Ibid., 118.

22. Ibid., 127.

23. PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, 172.

24. Ibid., 131.

25. Ibid. It appears that PERGAS scholars do not wish to single out the Salafi or Wahhabi trends as the only manifestation of extremism, because they are not influential in Singapore. Besides, the notion of ex-

tremism from the Islamic perspective is dissimilar from the secular or non-Muslim perspectives.

26.   PERGAS, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, 315–23.

27.   Ibid., 186.

28.   Ibid., 216.

29.   Ibid, 210–11.

30.   Ibid, 323–24.

31.   Al Faruqi, *Al Tawhid*, 104–108, 170–86.

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