

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

MALIK FAISAL HALL, PETALING JAYA, 24 August 1993

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. I would like to thank the Board Members and academic staff of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for inviting me to share with you some of my thoughts on the role of IIUM as an Islamic international university.

2. I feel honoured to be with you today as you commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the International Islamic University Malaysia. Alhamdulillah, the University is now well-known as a reputable institution of higher learning in Malaysia as well as in the Muslim world. The International Islamic University Malaysia has shown that an Islamic university, properly conceived, could achieve a level of excellence which is on par with the more established universities in this region and elsewhere. There is no doubt that this achievement is due, in large measure, to the vision and wisdom of its academic staff and management. They have made what the university is today. I would like to congratulate them all for their dedication and achievement.

3. The idea of an Islamic university in Malaysia has been expressed by many Muslim quarters since Independence in 1957. As a Malaysian Muslim I shared this vision and I am glad to be able to contribute in a small way towards its founding. I was much encouraged by the support of Almarhum Professor Ismail Al-Faruqi.

4. There has always been within the Muslim country a belief that an Islamic university must be concerned exclusively with the study of the religion of Islam. One can perhaps understand this narrow view where other religions are concerned, for they do not regard religion as a way of life. Islam is not just a belief, a faith. Islam is a way of life. A way of life that encompasses all that one does during one's lifetime must include command of all the knowledge that can contribute to it. Such is the importance of all knowledge in Islam that we are enjoined in Surah Al-Ghashiyah that we must observe the mountains and the camels. Obviously these are examples of the creations of Allah and equally obviously, they have a bearing on life. To observe is to study. No limits are placed on the extent of our study of these creations of Allah. Surely Islam is a religion that positively exhorts us to study what surrounds us, and constitutes a part of our life. Such studies constitute the sciences, for what else can result from our observation if not scientific knowledge. Yet there are Muslims who would have us confine learning and knowledge solely to the

study of the teachings and the interpretations of Islamic theology and Islamic laws.

5. And so the Islamic university must not confine itself solely to theology. All the subjects that are being taught in other universities must be taught with equal thoroughness in the Islamic university. The students who graduate from the Islamic university must be well-rounded and knowledgeable and must be able to live and contribute to the way of life of Muslims in all aspects. They must know how to administer themselves and the Muslim ummah, to develop and to defend them as much as they must know and perform the rituals of Islam.

6. But then if an Islamic university teaches subjects which are no different from those which are being taught in other universities, what makes it an Islamic university? This is a cogent question. A way of life is not just based on knowledge. It must also be based on a set of values, a culture. In other words it must form a part of a distinct Islamic civilisation. If Islam is to be a way of life, then that way of life must be based on Islamic values. To know these values it is necessary to have at least a working knowledge of the religion of Islam, particularly that which affects our thinking, our evaluation and reaction to the problems affecting our life.

7. Not everyone in a Muslim community must have a thorough knowledge of Islam. It is sufficient if there is even one or a few who have a thorough knowledge of the different aspects and parts of the religion. For the rest they must have sufficient knowledge of the creed so as not to deviate from the essence of Islam. In an Islamic university, every student must be taught sufficient knowledge of the religion as to make him a good practising Muslim, to guide him so that in the use of the knowledge that he has gained, he will not deviate from the teachings of Islam and from the Islamic way. Thus he will be not only knowledgeable of his subject but he will not misuse it or employ it in a way that is forbidden by the religion. Since Islam does not just forbids but enjoins the faithful to do positive things in life, he must know the right way to do this, to employ his knowledge in the way and the cause of Islam.

8. The question is how much knowledge of Islam is sufficient? It is here that the scholars have always differed. Some want the knowledge to be so deep and extensive as to exclude other knowledge. Some would have their knowledge so shallow that there is real danger that the religion will be neglected entirely.

9. The people who planned this university can only say that it should produce graduates steeped in the teachings of Islam

while they acquire knowledge that will contribute to their own betterment in life and so to the betterment of the Muslim ummah. It is up to the academics to determine the levels. What is desired is that the graduate of the Islamic universities is not only knowledgeable in his subject but is a well-rounded Muslim whose faith is not merely inherited but is fortified by his understanding of the teachings. He goes forth into the world well equipped to create and live a way of life that is truly Islamic.

10. Today we cannot say that Muslims in general, practise the Islamic way of life. How can we claim that when we see them disunited, even at war with each other, weak, backward and almost totally dependent for their safety on the goodwill and whims and fancies of others? Despite the injunctions of the Al-Quran to be prepared to defend ourselves, it is obvious that we are quite incapable of doing so. Everywhere we see Muslims being oppressed without any Muslim nation or people being able to play any real role in preventing the oppression, in restoring justice and in bringing about peace.

11. There is not a single Muslim superpower. Nor is there a Muslim nation which is at the leading edge of knowledge, of technology, of organisational and administrative skill. Yet we know that Islam stresses the need for knowledge and skills in those fields which can strengthen and protect the ummah. Far from strengthening ourselves, we are dissipating our resources by splitting ourselves and quarrelling over minor issues. Instead of solving our problems through the application of Islamic principles and teachings we resort to getting help from those who cannot possibly have any sympathy for Islam or the Muslims. Truly we cannot claim that we are practising the Islamic way of life.

12. While the performance of certain prescribed ibadah is essential to the practice of Islam and the expression of our faith, the practice of the Islamic way of life is equally an expression of that faith. We believe in life after death and in the rewards and punishments which will be meted out then. But Islam, more than any other religions, is about life before death. That is why Islam is a way of life. That is the only way that Islam can be a way of life. If now, if life is solely devoted to death and to hereafter, then Islam cannot be a way of life as we all acknowledge it to be.

13. We are fortunate to be Muslims. We are Muslims because those who enter the faith at the time of the Prophet s.a.w. practised the Islamic way of life. They were not just strong in their belief but they practised the Islamic way of life. As a result these nomadic and backward Arabs became powerful and highly knowledgeable about the conduct of life as individuals

and as nations and were able to spread the religion well beyond their impoverished desert homeland. The teachings of the religion today stress rituals and those matters which are forbidden, no matter how trivial, that the exhortation of the religion which concerns acquisition of knowledge and skills is largely ignored. If at all, knowledge is translated as knowledge of Islam and the laws derived from its interpretation.

14. There is also a tendency to divide knowledge into the religious and the secular. This is actually in accord with the division in the Christian religion between the state and the church, the religious and the worldly, which resulted from the resentment against the excessive influence of the church in the affairs of state.

15. Is there in Islam a distinction between daily life and religious observation? If Islam is a way of life, can that way be separated from the practice of religion? We know that cannot be. Our life is totally governed by the teachings of Islam. And our life must include what we do for a living, what we do for our defence and the defence of the religion, what we do to enhance the position of Islam, its spread and the respect for it.

16. To do all these involves skill and knowledge. The Prophet s.a.w. was known for his business skills and his wisdom in worldly matters. This contributed to the respect the communities in Makkah and Madinah had for him and to his eventual success in carrying the Message. The Prophet was knowledgeable in the affairs of everyday life as much as he was knowledgeable in religion.

17. How then can we adopt the Christian thesis that religion should be separated from secular affairs? There cannot be this separation in Islam. And if there is no separation, there cannot be separation between what is secular knowledge and what is religious knowledge.

18. Hence the different disciplines that an Islamic university must focus on, teach, research and spread are a part of the teachings of religion. They are not secular. Knowledge regarding what is not concerned with religious rituals and laws must still be governed by the needs of Islam as a religion and a way of life and the values and objectives laid down by it. These knowledge are not secular. They are a part of the religion and must balance the knowledge of the rituals and the laws of Islam.

19. Failure to learn and master these subjects, which are not specifically religious, will expose the Muslims to the danger

of losing their religion. This happens spectacularly when, because of their material and intellectual poverty and weakness, they are subjected to outside pressures and even to conquest and oppression. But even if they are merely poor and lack various skills and knowledge they are in danger of being obstructed in the practice of their religion. Their acquisition of knowledge and skills, intellectual and material wealth is therefore a part of their means to preserve their faith a part of the practices of their religion and their way of life. The al-Quran is clear on the issue of poverty. Poverty is one step before losing faith. And we must remember that poverty is not concerned only with material things but intellectual and other skills also.

20. Again it is clear that Muslims must pursue all knowledge in order to protect their faith. It is because they neglect knowledge that is not manifestly related to the religious rituals and the laws governing their practice of the religion that they have become weak and easily oppressed, and in many instances disillusioned with their faith. It is therefore important that the faithful must correct this narrow view of Islam and to seek knowledge which can contribute towards the preservation of Islam and the Islamic way of life. And towards this end, all Muslims, male and female must contribute, for to exclude females is to halve our strength.

21. There is certainly no necessity for the kind of women's liberation that is corrupting the Western world, but it must be remembered that it was Islam which gave specific rights to women. Unfortunately in the attempt to avoid being distracted by women we have excluded women from intellectual pursuits and participation in public life.

22. The collapse of religion in the West should serve as a warning to us. If we are too liberal in our interpretation of Islam, it too can collapse. But fear of this possibility should not lead us to curtail or reverse even what Islam permits. We must always be aware and respectful of the true limits imposed by Islam and we must abide by them. Where Islam permits flexibility, these must be availed of. But at all times the interest and well-being of the ummah and the religion must be safeguarded.

23. The IIU is set up in order to safeguard true Islamic knowledge in the context of a world that has changed so vastly since the coming of Islam. It is meant to prepare Muslims to face the problems of the modern world with their faith intact. It is to ensure that the Muslim world-view is balanced between life and the hereafter. It is meant to perpetuate Islam as a religion for all times.

24. Clearly the task before this university and for all who are involved with it is very great. It is nothing less than to help in the resurrection of Islam and the Muslims. Of course it will not be alone in this struggle. It may just contribute one little bit to this effort. But even the little it can do is of great significance to the religion and the ummah.

25. I am aware that my views may not be shared by many. But as a Muslim I feel it is my duty to say all these even if I will come under much criticism especially by the orthodox. Islam and the Muslims have regressed. There are some who will not even admit this. There are some who will claim that there is a great resurgence of Islam at the moment. But in truth at no time in history has Islam been as greatly humiliated as now, at no time have the Muslims wavered more in their faith.

26. You in the university, whether academics or students, have a heavy responsibility. You are a part of the struggle to restore Islam, to restore the faith, to restore the respect and the dignity of Islam and to reinstate the role of the ummah in worldly affairs. You have to do this without neglecting akhirat. You always have to achieve a balance between the two.

27. This is not just any university. This is an Islamic university. It has a duty to the ummah and to Islam. And you have a duty to the ummah and to Islam.

28. It is with the hope and expectation that you will all bear this in mind that I now declare the Convocation Fiesta organised by the Student Representation Council and all student Association officially closed. Wabillahitaufig walhidayah wassalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.