

## THE ADVICE OF PROF. DR. P.S. VAN KONINGSVELD FOR THE PROMOTION OF DR. MACHASIN, SEPT. 2, 1994

Dear Rector and colleagues of the IAIN in Yogyakarta, and especially you, Professor Mukti Ali and Dr. Machasin, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be the first to congratulate publicly Dr. Machasin and his whole family, with his newly acquired degree of Doctor of Islamic Studies:

نَفَعَنَا اللهُ بِعَمَلِكَ وَعَمَلِكَ وَجُهِدِكَ وَصَدَقَاتِكَ سِنِينَ كَثِيرِينَ! وَبَعْدُ ...

Enough has been said already about all the technical details of your work, during your discussions with your supervisors, during the closed examination and also during this open, official ceremony. I am very grateful that you have also given me the opportunity to study your work and to give you my remarks. Time will now come for you to prepare your work for its publication. This will give you the opportunity to think over everything that has been said and take it into account in one way or another. The INIS-programme has already written to you that it is willing, in principle, to include your work in its printed series.

When I try to do justice to the scope of your work, I would say that it contains two major *axes* or *points of orientation*. The first of these is the *purely philological and historical approach*. Your work mainly consists of an analysis of the *methods or methodology* applied by an important representative of one of the schools of Islamic theological thought, viz. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Baṣrī. For this analysis, you base yourself on a number of ancient Arabic sources and, in doing so, you take into account the studies of other scholars, both from the Muslim world and the West. The publication and sources you have quoted in your thesis are mainly written in Arabic, English, French and German. This proves, I believe, that your main ambition and concern were to present a study primarily concerned with the general history of Islamic thought taking into account the results of international scholarship.

However, one may also observe a second *axe* or major *point of orientation* in your thesis, viz. that of the personal commitment of a modern Indonesian scholar. You have said for instance that it is necessary to know the arguments of the various schools of Islamic theology, "*if we want to judge them impartially*". And you say also that we need that knowledge as well "to

draw [from it] arguments for one or another system of belief". In other words, the results of your study of an important figure of Islamic history would indirectly serve as a contribution to the *quality* of contemporary theological discussions concerning the interpretation of Islamic faith. I observe the same commitment in your reference to a trend in Indonesia nowadays "to understand Islam rationally". You state that a better understanding of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's rational arguments could be relevant for those who are engaged in Indonesia in this debate, nowadays. Yet, you indicate also that you are not yourself a blind follower of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār: "It is important to see what our predecessors have done in the past in order that we will *not* repeat the same thing. We can use our energy, instead, to develop what they have commenced and to correct what they have done incorrectly".

To me, your thesis contains the following central message: historical knowledge is very important, also for the present age, and also for Islamic discussions in the present age, --but only if this historical knowledge can be acquired with full impartiality, by studying all the relevant sources and taking into account all the relevant studies, both by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. With this view I agree wholeheartedly. It cannot be stressed enough that the quality of any civilization, including Islamic civilization in the modern age, to a large degree depends on the profoundness of its understanding of its own past. There seems to be no more efficient way of attacking the enormous superficiality of religious fanaticism and narrowmindedness than by providing to all those who are eager to learn, and especially to the younger generations, the instruments to study the history of their own religion and civilization; to enable them to delve into the past and learn the rich variety of achievements and attitudes of foregoing generations so that they, in the words of Dr. Machasin, may "draw [from it] arguments for one or another belief". Yes, indeed, for one or another belief, because such a historical study should not be confined to one or certain trends of Islamic thought or civilization only, neither should it be dependent upon one or certain modern theological, philosophical, or political trends, whereby it would lose its scientific standard and be degraded to sheer ideology or propaganda.

One of the major obstacles against such a free, scientific renaissance of Islamic civilization is the unavailability of reference-books and sources, both in manuscript and printed form, in the libraries of the institutes of higher Islamic learning in the Muslim world. It is no less than a tragedy that any first-year student of religious sciences in Western Europe or The United States has within his direct reach an incomparably larger quantity of published and unpublished materials on Islam than even a Doctor of Islamic Studies in most Muslim countries. If governments of these countries would be interested in a

long-term policy of stimulating the scientific standard of Islamic Studies, then they should start to morrow by filling the stacks of their libraries with scientific books from all over the world.

Dutch libraries and archives, especially those of the University of Leiden, are very rich in the field of Islamic studies in general and of Islam in Indonesia in particular. The cooperation between Indonesia and the Netherlands in the field of Islamic Studies, as it is crystalized in the INIS-programme, is useful for both parties. It is a chance for both parties involved to exchange ideas and materials and to give each other access to our institutions of education and research. You, Dr. Machasin, have used this opportunity to collect relevant materials for your study of the history of Islamic theology, and to meet Dutch and Frech scholars who had been working in the same field. Your thesis proves that this was an enriching experience, and I hope that many others will have the same opportunity in the near future. We shall welcome them cordially. We shall then have a growing number of the *ṣifāt al-waṣl* between Islamic Studies in Indonesia and the Netherlands.

And now my *naṣiḥa*, my personal advice to you. I believe that you must make an important choice between the two central axes of your thesis, purely historical research on the one hand, and personal, theological commitment on the other. I feel no hesitation in advising you to choose the first. Why? Firstly, because your thesis shows, I think, that the deepest motivation and inclination of your scholarship lies in the discovery and understanding of historical knowledge about Islam. Secondly, because there seems to be no better way for a scholar like yourself to serve the future of his own civilization than by guiding its young generation towards a solid and impartial study of its past!

In conclusion, I should like to thank the IAIN of Yogyakarta, and especially its rector, Prof. Dr. Simuh, as well as Prof. Mukti Ali, for the honour of the invitation to participate in this important event and also for the generous hospitality bestowed on me here. I take with me precious memories to Holland.

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ