

Speech by

Professor Ridwan El-Sayyid

Winner of the 2017 King Faisal International Prize for
Islamic Studies,
39th KFIP Awards Ceremony
Tuesday 04/04/2017

None of us scholars understand why our minds and efforts are pre-occupied with this or that course, and this or that style. When I published my first three studies on political rationale in Islam, some of my colleagues and teachers commented that I was following the "trend," or the prevailing current, by focusing particularly on the political issue. I must admit that the question of "the State" in our Arabic-Islamic society has engaged me for a long time since the late 1970s. This attention has therefore occurred and was followed by stage-wise conscientious work. However, the issue that remained deeply buried in my conscious was what two of my mentors, in Egypt and Germany, told me. My Egyptian mentor Dr. Muhammad Al-Bahi didn't want me to pursue research on Islamic studies with orientalists in Germany, whereas my German mentor asked me, in a light sarcastic tone, "why do you come to us from *Al-Azhar* to obtain your degree in Islamic studies, while we don't need to go to you to pursue classical studies on Islam?"

Obviously, the question of reference, rationality and objectivity is a big, very big, question, especially when it comes to social, human and Islamic studies. It would take several generations to answer this question, and it is not intended here to refute or replace others; the real challenge is to reach equivalence and to participate actively and effectively in establishing and developing the science of Islam, and this is a magnanimous task undertaken by King Faisal Foundation whose Prizes have become certificates of qualification and merit.

What I have achieved over thirty five years of writings, verification and translations in the field of Islamic studies is primarily associated with only one aspect of the science of Islam and the

Islamic civilization, namely the concept of the State from a historical perspective. Since the 1980s, *Ustaz Al-Jabri* and *Ustaz Hanafi* told me that it was time, in the light of my studies and those of other colleagues, to establish the "Islamic Political Thought Group" as a field and a specific specialty suitable to develop as a specialized higher studies program.

From the structure of the network of concepts that can make up systems if its elements acted together, even for a limited time, it became apparent to me that Islam has always been the symbolic capital utilized by politicians, speakers and religious groups with regards to the theory of authority, and in political fields and general management affairs. These policies of "meanings" *per se* are not to blame; what to blame is the damage that occurs when management policies and those of "meanings" encroach upon each other. This has happened repeatedly in the past and is happening today.

Today we are facing three challenges: saving the national state, undertaking religious corrections and correcting relations with the rest of the world.

Thanks to the King Faisal International Prize for this major recognition; thanks to Saudi elites whose affection and care I cherish dearly.

{Then as for the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks, while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth}.