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Obituaries, Maulana Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, Ferdinand Smit, Wilfred Cantwell Smith

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Maulana Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (Ali Miyan)

The recent death of Maulana Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, known by the simple title Ali Miyan, has been mourned not only in his home of India but among the many Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the world who knew him and his contributions as a scholar and public figure. He was widely respected as a scholar of *Qur'anic* commentary and other traditional knowledge; he was a prolific writer of biography, history, and contemporary commentary; and he was a renowned leader in numerous institutions focusing on the political, educational, and social life of Muslims today. He is credited with writing perhaps a hundred books in Urdu and in Arabic, many of which have been translated into English and other languages.

Born in Rae Bareli, India, in 1914, Ali Miyan was associated, from his student days, with the Nadwat al 'Ulama in Lucknow, an institution founded early in the century to bridge the gap between the Western and the classically educated elites. A further goal of the Nadwa was to foster interaction with the Arab world and to cultivate a high standard of Arabic learning. Ali Miyan's own life richly fulfilled those objectives. His grandfather was among the founders of the institution; his father, the eminent scholar 'Abd al-Hayy Hasani (d. 1926), was its rector, as was his elder brother, whom Ali

Miyan succeeded as rector in 1961. One significant dimension of Ali Miyan's scholarly work was to help shape a historical heritage of Muslim political, intellectual, and spiritual leadership by writing histories and biographies of the great figures of the Indian Muslim tradition from Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi in the 17th century to the leaders of the contemporary Tablighi Jama'at movement.

His connection with the Tabligh movement began in 1939, and he supported the movement through his writings and also by his own participation in *dawa* as well as his influence on those associated with Nadwa to participate as well. It is as someone whose energy was focused on spiritual and educational matters that he became an influential spokesman for Muslims in India.

Those who gathered in Lucknow, Rae Bareli, and elsewhere to condole his death included Muslim leaders from India and abroad and Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian luminaries who lauded him for his compassion, tolerance, and vision as well as for his extraordinary scholarship. ◆

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Ferdinand Smit (1959-2000)

During the first week of March, the shocking news that Ferdinand Smit and two friends were brutally murdered in North Mali was made known. The three were on a motoring trip from Amsterdam to Bamako. A proficient Arabist and knowledgeable Middle East expert, Ferdinand worked as a diplomat for the Dutch Foreign Office and had extensive field experience in the Middle East. In the early 1980s, during his studies (Arabic at the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden and Middle Eastern Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam), he served several times in South Lebanon as an interpreter and intelligence officer for the Dutch Battalion in the UNIFIL. Moreover he participated in a number of archaeological campaigns in Syria. After finishing his studies, Ferdinand entered the Dutch Foreign Service in 1986. He was posted in Cairo and Damascus and worked for some time at the Middle East and Africa Desk in the Hague. His last posting abroad was on secondment with the United Nations in Gaza.

Ferdinand was fluent in Arabic. A keen observer of Middle Eastern political affairs, he also had a great

interest in academic pursuits. In his position, he was several times instrumental in setting up and finding funds for academic research projects. In spite of his busy and demanding job, he was able to complete his PhD research and write his thesis. Just before he left for Mali, he had handed in his dissertation, *The Battle for South Lebanon: The Radicalization of Lebanon's Shi'ites (1982-1985)*. It is for a large part based on documents that he was able to acquire during his work as a UNIFIL intelligence officer. The Catholic University of Nijmegen, where he was to defend his thesis, has now decided to award the doctorate posthumously.

For many of us, it is difficult to realize that Ferdinand is not amongst us anymore. We will remember him as warm friend, a solid scholar and an expert with varied and multifaceted interests in Middle Eastern and Islamic affairs. ◆

RUUD PETERS

Ruud Peters, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000)

On the 7th of February, W.C. Smith died in his native Toronto, Canada, aged 83. To many readers of the *ISIM Newsletter*, Smith's name will be associated with the founding of the modern discipline of Islamic Studies. At the age of 33, he established the distinctive Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, where he taught until 1963. By this time his first four books - and for some, his best known - had already appeared: *Modern Islam in India: a social analysis* (1943) and *Islam in Modern History* (1957), *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), and *The Faith of Other Men* (1962). Each of these books reflected the author's special relationship to the study of Islam as well as his deep concern for the personal, individual quality of faith inspired by the world's religions as key to their being vital, living traditions.

The Smith years still marked the Institute's ethos when I became a graduate student there shortly after his departure from Montreal for Harvard. Scholars and students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, shared in a joint venture of scholarly enquiry formerly dominated by Western orientalists. Here, understanding a religious tradition entailed a degree of empathy with its participants but without surrendering critical and historical analysis. This was in fresh contrast with the vestiges of a colonial, orientalist mind-set which lingered on at the

School of Oriental and African Studies, London, where I had just completed an undergraduate degree. Smith, although ordained to the Presbyterian ministry and who had taught at the Forman Christian College in Lahore, brought to the study of Islam a broader, sharper vision of a modern, pluralist world that previous generations of missionaries to the sub-continent had lacked. His sensitivity to other cultures and languages also informed his approach to Christian theological debate, possibly best expressed in his book *Towards a World Theology* (1981) which had built upon his earlier *Questions of Religious Truth* (1967) and *Religious Diversity* (1976). Writing a new preface for his *Faith of Other Men* (re-issued 1998 as *Patterns of Faith around the World*), Smith expressed his irenic approach to comparative religion in these characteristic terms, 'Classically the Church, or similarly the Muslim world, was right that faith is fundamentally one, wherever it be found. They were wrong that its only form is a particular pattern with which they were familiar.' ◆

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