KALAM AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION:
A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

HASLINA IBRAHIM (et.al)
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This work would not be materialised without the help of few individuals and agencies that have rendered me with intellectual, physical and material support. I would like to thank Associate Professor Dr. Amran Muhammad, the Chairman of the Islamic and Strategic Studies Institute (ISSI) as well as Dean School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (SAHUSS), Asia e-University for the encouragement and physical support during my fellowship at the institute. My appreciation also goes to the members of Interreligious Studies and Dialogue (IRSYAD) (who are also the contributing authors in this book) for bearing with me in this long journey. My earnest gratitude goes to the International Islamic University for the funding and the research leave which granted on me for embarking on this research. I dedicate this work to my beloved department; the Department of Usul al-Din & Comparative Religion, the department of which I completed two of my postgraduate degrees and serving as an academic member to date. To all my teachers who have inspired me, and to all my students who have been struggling with me in this intellectual journey, may Allah bless you for every bit of your presence that has inspired me in bringing this small work into reality.
Preface

This work seeks to provide an answer to one of the thought-provoking reminders made to a student of comparative religion “Leave your religion outside the class!” A student of comparative religion is asked to detach from his own religion to avoid from being judgmental to the religion under study. Being judgmental is methodologically wrong as he is required to be neutral. There is some logic in it. But, “Are we supposed to put on the religion again after leaving the class and put it off once more when resuming the class, or should we put it off altogether?” As a graduate of Usuluddin, such a method left me with a sense of awkwardness and hesitation. Since then, I have been searching for a satisfactory answer to those questions. Three years ago, I managed to convince some colleagues to join me searching for answers to my questions which led to the inception of this book. It is unfortunate that this book is long-due, and I take full responsibilities for its delay. Many reasons have contributed to the delay. Nevertheless, there was one reason that kept this book on hold. Much have been written pertaining to the traditional versus modern debates in the study of religion. What gap is left so it can be filled by this book? Were the authors who contributed a chapter in this book aware of the gap at all? Hence, I found myself searching for the hidden clues in their chapters that help to unravel the answers to those questions and the gap which I aspire this book to rectify. This book may not give the complete answers to those questions I had. I regard this book as my first attempt to explore for more potential research in future for getting the best answers and enlightening my path in this intellectual journey. I believe a journey should not be done in solo; hence I invited my colleagues to share some of the experiences with a hope they too are called so that a collective effort can be executed thus leave an impactful outcome in the way study of religion to be taught at the Islamic universities

Haslina Ibrahim
29 April 2020
(Mobility Restricted Order 18 March – 12 May 2020)
Introduction

Fifteen years ago, the author embarked a research on *epoche* or *epoch*, a fundamental method in phenomenology of religion according to Ismail Ragi al-Faruqi, which was the highest point the academic study of religion has reached in the West (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 20). Notwithstanding the compliment, he contested the application of *epoche* and its association to neutrality and objectivity as the rule of thumb of what being regarded by scientific in the modern study of religion. *Epoche* literally translated as suspension of judgment is an academic term epitomised in the colloquial phrase of “leave your religion outside the classroom!”

*Epoche*, in being a concept introduced in 1933 by Gerardus Van der Leew in *Phenomenologie der Religion (Religion in Essence and Manifestation)*, propagates the idea of ‘holding back’ that recommends one to abstain value judgment in the study of religion. It is also known as ‘bracketing’. Hence the phenomenological school requires someone who studies other religion to abstain from making judgment but rather to be purely an impartial observer without the aim of discerning between the truth or falsehood. *Epoche* can be regarded as an advanced form of scientific approach in the study of religion. Another important concept is ‘eidetic vision’, which means ‘that which is seen’ by the observer, as opposed to what it has been, might have been, or ought to be. Sharpe interpreted it as a form of subjectivism and it is quite an irony when the phenomenologist claimed to achieve objectivity by the very idea of eidetic vision. This in his opinion, is literally a contradiction and a sort of contradict in term of its methodology (Sharpe, 2003, p. 224).

It was Friedrich Max Muller who initiated the need for *Religionswissenschaft* or the Science of Religion that is based on “an impartial and truly scientific comparison of all, or at all events, of the most important, religions of mankind”, which in his opinion the path towards its realisation, was only “a question of time.” (Müller, 2005, p. 26) Muller was right as it did not
take a long time for his school of Religionswissenschaft to posit an influential role in the modern study of religion.

Muller pioneered his scientific attempt via the philological method. He viewed that studying religion is impossible without studying the language of the religion as he stated “What should we think of philosophers writing on the religion of Homer, without knowing Greek, or on the religion of Moses, without knowing Hebrew”(Müller, 2005, p. 27). He was convinced that one of the ways to understand the language of the religion is by studying her sacred text. He demonstrated this in the study of Rig Veda and later edited the great compilation of Sacred Book of the East. Muller made it clear that the study of other religion should not meant for “lowering Christianity by exalting the other religions of mankind nor to lower all other religions in order to exalt Christianity.” He was convinced that “Science wants no partisans”(Müller, 2005, p. 28).

Post Muller Religionswissenschaft, there were many other modern methods in other disciplines that adopted and adapted the study of religion. Jacques Waardenburg has made an excellent review of the development in Religionswissenschaft In Continental Europe(Waardenburg, 1975). Earlier, Eric J. Sharpe acknowledged that Religionswissenschaft later evolved and it was subdivided into history of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, phenomenology of religion. Some scholars followed the path of Muller while some other adopted comparative reductionist approaches (Sharpe, 2003, p. xii).

Students of Comparative Religion may have been introduced with the idea that Muller was the father of Comparative Religion. That, he was admired and praised for the breakthrough in the way religion(s) was/were studied. Nevertheless, an extensive discourse on Muller gave another side story of his labour. He was never spared from criticism.(Molendijk, 2016, p. 28) Despite his extensive works on the sacred text of Hinduism and dedication on oriental religions, he was
severely criticised for his theories on the origin of language and mythology (Molendijk, 2016, pp. 34–37). He was also blamed for exaggerating the importance of Philology and giving it a determinative place in the framing of one’s ultimate theory of religion, and this has misled him (Jordan, 1986, p. 172) Eric J. Sharpe also noted that it would be an exaggeration to say that Muller’s work is held in high esteem nowadays. Louis H. Jordan provides an extensive anatomy of Comparative Religion. He viewed that the science did not exist until 1850. Prior to that, the science has been constantly under review and provoked to more discussion (Jordan, 1986, p. 117). Muller, however, had Comparative Philology as a stepping stone to study in Comparative Religion and he was criticised for exaggerating the former as the “open sesame” of the most complex religious subtleties (Jordan, 1986, p. 172).

Whether or not, Muller’s impact is felt in the discipline of Comparative Religion, it is beyond the scope of this research. This work is much interested in exploring and comparing between the modern approaches to the ‘traditional approaches’ ventured by the Muslim scholars in the study of religion. The former claimed to propagate a scientific approach, whereby neutrality and suspension of judgment are mandatory to secure the objectivity of the discipline. Ironically, traditional method attempted by the Muslim scholars were plainly critical of the religions. As a matter of fact, their venture was mainly to decipher truth from error in the form of defending the creeds of Islam from false allegation or rectifying the flaws of other religions. This, in the view of modern scholars of religion, is prejudicial, biased and non-objective.

This book is written to address such a methodological dilemma facing by Muslim learners regarding Comparative Religion. Muslim students who are well exposed in the Islamic traditional studies, which primarily includes fundamental courses such as the Qur’an and Sunnah, Usul al-Din and Kalam, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh; and supporting courses such as Firaq and Maqaranah al-Adyan, Ulum al-Quran and Hadith, Maqasid al-Syari’ah and Qawa’id al-Fiqhiyyah, found that suspension of judgment is impossible as all these sciences required them
to be ‘judgmental.’ It is a real confusion for a Muslim student of Comparative Religion to treat his own religion as a mere phenomenon since his conviction for Islam is not simply by carrying out of the five pillars, as his conviction for Iman includes ‘al-tasdiq bi al-qalb, al-iglar bi al-
lisan, wa al-amal bi al-jawarih’ (Affirmation of the heart, confession with the tongue and perform with the limbs.)

Muslim students who study Usul al-Din and Kalam, were exposed with the fundamental works of Muslim theologians such as Al-Ash’ari, Al-Baqillani, Al-Juwayni, al-Ghazali Ibn Hazm, al-Shahrastani and al-Beyruni. Some of these theologians have written significant works on the study of other religion and their intellectual contributions are presented in the chapters. It is also important to emphasise the term Muqaranah al-Adyan, which is a literal translation of Comparative Religion as only emerged later in the 20th century in the work of Ahmad Shalaby and became widely accepted at present. Muslim theologians did not introduce any specific discipline for the study of other religion. The most familiar phrases in used were ilm al-milal wa al-nihal or a more controversial title as Kitab al-radd – The book of refutation, which criticised as polemical by Jacques Waardenburg. It is also important to highlight that Muslim theologians did not use the word din or adyan (plural) in the title, and this is probably because the word has a more profound meaning in the Qur’an. On the other hand, milal refers to the path or system of religion and nihal refers to the sectarians within a religion. Ghulam Haider Aasi’s work is an excellent work that differentiated between the meanings of din and millah (Aasi, 1999).

The ultimate objective of this work is to demonstrate the wide range of approaches in Usul al-
Din and Kalam in the study of religion and from the classical time until at present. Usul al-Din and Kalam, by being the major framework for the study of religion to transpire, posed a great challenge especially for contemporary Muslim scholars to juggle between upholding the traditional approaches and benefiting from the modern approaches. In addition, since the
decline of *Kalam* for the past seven centuries, and the rise of modern philosophy and sciences, the discourse of *Kalam* has been limited to the classical studies of theological issues and sects in the history of Islam. The chapters in this book however attempt to offer a dynamic range of titles related to *Kalam* and the study of religion. Some chapters argue on the problems of methodology, while some others examine the contributions of *Kalam* scholars. There are authors who approached the discussion from a contemporary perspective, and this is consistent with the aim of this book which is to uphold the relevance of *Kalam* in contemporary Muslim discourse of other religion.

Haslina Ibrahim in *The Crisis of Intellectual Veracity in The Study of Religions*, opens the chapter by highlighting the challenging gap between the contemporary study of religion and Islamic theology. The former demands for neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity in the study of religion. In contrast, Islamic theology demands the Muslim learners to be able to decipher between the truth from falsehood in religion. Such intellection process and verification of religious truth is indispensable in the traditional study of religion namely *Kalam*. This chapter, therefore, sets the pattern of this book in propagating the viability of *Kalam* in the contemporary Muslim studies of other religion.

Alwani Ghazali presented an extensive discussion on the different facets of dialogue in *The Qur’anic and Sunnah Foundation of Dialogue*. She started off by introducing the meaning of *jadal* and *hiwar*, as there have been interpretations that regard the two words as synonyms to dialogue. She however, subscribed to generic meaning of dialogue instead of referring it to a particular method in communicating the teaching of Islam. She believes that the Qur’an is dialogic in nature and she has illustrated exhaustive instances to substantiate her belief. The author had underscored in her discussion, that the dialectical style own by the Qur’an is also one of the traits of *Kalam* which is indeed dialogical in nature. Therefore, in addition to *jadal* and *hiwar*, *mutakallimun* has also adopted dialogical approach when communicating with
adherents of religions other than Islam. Some of the *mutakallimun* subscribed to confrontational or polemical approach in the dialogue, while some took more empathic approach when conducting the dialogue. This is consistent with the different facets of dialogues taking place in the Qur’an and the *Sirah* of the prophet.

Wan Haslan Khairuddin and Indriaty Ismail authored *The Tradition of Kalam And Interreligious Discourse*. The chapter makes an excellent introduction on the science of *Kalam* by stating the field as part of the intellectual tradition in Islam. The authors deliberated at length the definition, meaning, historical background, the objectives, the themes, the schools, the scholars and the works of *Kalam*. The authors have also managed to substantiate the relationship between *Kalam* and the study of religion in its classical outlook, given that many of the works on the study of religion were written by the scholars of *Kalam*. Based on this strong relationship, they denied the attempt to separate between the two intellectual ventures. In the authors’ opinion, it was the science of *Kalam* that helped one to articulate his faith with subtlety instead of remaining a blind follower of a religion.

*Kalam And Study of Religions: The Diverse Approaches and Methods of Ibn Hazm, Al-Biruni and Al-Shahrastani* is a complimentary discussion of the earlier chapters. Haslina Ibrahim reinforces what she has established formerly regarding the verification of the truth and the different approaches adopted by the *Mutakallimun* in the process. She chose to discuss the three scholars due to their diverse contexts and approaches within the tradition of *Kalam*. Interestingly, they were also theologians who were divided in terms of propagating the best method to study other religion, but they were all guided by the bigger framework of *Kalam*.

Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali exposed the narrative of one controversial figure in the chapter titled *Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq and the Debate Over His Identity and Works in The Study of Religions*. Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq (889-994 CE) is largely known because of the debate against
Christianity prevalent in his work. Regrettably, not much have been propagated in terms of his works and intellectual merit. One of the disturbing reasons for it was due to his association with the Shi’ite scholars, thinker and leaders that left suspicion over his identity and sincerity. The author also demonstrating the examples of his debates with the Christians whereas this capable to enrich the discussion. Furthermore, the author interested to expose an uncommon example of a mutakallimun in the study of other religion, whose identity and scholarship remain fertile for future research.

Rosmizi Abdul Rahman’s chapter titled Imam Al-Ghazali: Scholar of Kalam & Comparative Religion is a brilliant demonstration on the imperative link between Kalam and Comparative Religion particularly for Muslims who are interested in the study of other religion. Mohd Rosmizi provided concrete examples of what ‘objectivity’ means in the Muslim scholarship of other religion. Modern scholars charged Kalam as a biased discipline that incompatible to Comparative Religion. However, al-Ghazali was not only critical to religions other than Islam. He was mostly critical to deviant movements within the Muslims as well as to elites’ scholars ranging from the philosophers, mutakallimun and jurists who were obsessed with their own specialisations. As far as Kalam is concern, being objective is achieved when analysis is made within a certain framework in examining the subject matter under study. Whereas in modern study of religions, objectivity is achieved when analysis is made by presenting the subject matter under study as it is.

Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Bin Wan Razali wrote the chapter titled Ibn Khaldun’s Study of Other Religions in The Muqaddimah: An Overview. His exposition on Ibn Khaldun may raise an issue with regard to the theme selected for this book. Ibn Khaldun was not a theologian nor a mutakallimun. He is mostly famous as a historian or a social scientist. However, his worked was published in the 15th century, and that was almost six hundred years after the demise of Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl ibn Isḥāq al-Ash‘arī; c. 874–936; when Kalam was at its peak
of success. By the time of Ibn Khaldun, Kalam has been losing its impact. Ibn Khaldun was brilliant enough to take up the discourse of other religion in al-Muqaddimah without which, the absence of such discourse would create a big gap in the intellectual tradition of Islam. The author has brilliantly underscored how the discourse manage to survive itself in the new discipline that was emerging with Ibn Khaldun, certainly with a different orientation and lack of systematic treatment compared to the more established form of Kalam. Khaldunian historical approach indeed, epitomised the diverse methods adopted by Muslim scholars in the study of other religion. However, they remain committed to the truth verification as part and parcel of the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil’s chapter titled Kalam Scholars in Malay Archipelago and Their Approaches in Interreligious Discourse: Nur Al-Din Al-Raniri (D.1658) And ‘Abd Al-Ra’uf Al-Sinkili (D. 1693) deserved a recognition. This chapter has greatly contributed in underscoring the evolution of Kalam discourse in the study of religion during the 16th century of the Malay Archipelago. The written works were mainly to safeguard the faith of the people from foreign belief system. Indeed, al-Raniri has taken the right measure as he extensively discussed and rejected the Wujudiyah teaching, given that Muslims in Archipelago were introduced with Islam via Sufism. He was also stern towards the Christians as he was furious over their missionary activities in the Malay Archipelago. The work of Al-Sinkili is another testimony on the intellectual struggle of the Muslim scholars to counter the Christians particularly their missionary activities to the native people who were dominantly Muslims.

Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman and Haslina Ibrahim wrote Meta Religion as Principle of Evaluation in The Study of Religion According to Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi. They presented an interesting discussion on al-Faruqi’s attempt to introduce a breakthrough in the study of religion. Al-Faruqi introduced meta religion, a universal principle of evaluation in the study of religion despite knowing the fact that evaluation has been omitted from the modern discourse.
for more than two centuries. Al-Faruqi’s credibility in the study of religion was due to the fact that he was fairly exposed with the Islamic traditional studies as well as in modern sciences. He deserved the title as ‘modern mutakallimun’ for his courage in reviving logical argumentative method in the study of religion with the help of philosophical reasoning. Just like the classical mutakallimun, al-Faruqi started off with profound ideas on Islamic epistemology before he applied the details in the study of religion. Meta religion is known as his novel method in the study of religion, which unfortunately received little attention from his contemporaries.

Mohd Farid Hafez Mhd Omar presented his ideas on one of the most controversial interreligious disputes in Malaysia in the chapter titled Name of God in Muslim And Christian Traditions: Reviewing the Scholars’ Approach and Lesson for Malaysian. This chapter epitomises the role of Kalam in discussion that involves theological analysis. In the tussle for the right use of the word Allah in Malaysia, there have been many responses that offered different solutions to solve the struggle. Some scholars traced back to the semantical use of the word, some refers to the historical use while some resorted to the exegetical perspective. Without doubt, these have contributing to explaining the meaning of the word Allah. Hafez however, demonstrated the Kalam argumentation style to verify the meaning of the word. It is interesting to note that several modern Christian scholars agreed that such theological meaning is hardly found in the biblical commentaries. This implies that the use of the word Allah in Christianity is lacked theological basis. In comparison to Christianity, the word Allah in Islam, found its origin in the Qur’an along with other names and attributes. Their articulation was presented profoundly in the Kalam discourse that justifies its meaning and significance epistemologically, ontologically and axiologically.

Arfah Abdul Majid concludes the chapter by promoting inter-religious dialogue for public consumption in Inter-Religious Dialogue Model: A Design Consideration for The Grassroots.
She argued that the classical Kalam is highly philosophical and it dealt with issues posed by the interreligious and intrareligious groups existed during that time. Arfah is concerned that today, Muslims are facing no less ideological and philosophical challenges that even the public should be made familiar with logical reasoning to counter foreign ideas and philosophies. Arfah believes that interreligious dialogue is an alternative form of Kalam for the public to learn and practice reasoning skills in understanding religion. She claimed that such application is needed since Kalam and interreligious dialogue have similar concerns for the truth, humanity and morality.

Having argued and presented the viability of Kalam in different titles, the author admits that there is a need for constant revision and improvement in the way religions are studied. Particularly, the context we are living in present are way different from the past. It is true to state plurality as always been the reality. One can even choose to live in exclusion even though he is living in a pluralistic environment. What is essential in life is engagement, and engagement can take place in a variety of forms, casual and formal. Both are equally important and complementing each other.

This book however promotes the importance of intellectual engagement in the study of religion. Muslim scholarship of religion is craving for a subtle method of intellectual engagement as alternative to the modern method. It is impossible to abandon Kalam since it is rooted in the tradition. Nevertheless, there are also positive aspects to learn from the modern method. Some may think that the author is proposing for a reconciled method. This is quite inaccurate since the author is more interested in reviving the tradition and developing its capacity in order to make it more relevant to the current demand. Rejections are anticipated but they are part and parcel of research and intellection exercises that contribute to the body of knowledge as a whole.
In Defense of Religious Truth:
The Crisis of Intellectual Veracity in the Study of Religion

Haslina Ibrahim
haslina@iium.edu.my

Introduction

It has been almost two centuries after Friedrich Max Müller’s (1823-1900) influential school of Religionswissenschaft marked a breakthrough in the study of religion. He introduced many enthralling terms that are sustained in the forms of religious study that are taught today, such as neutrality, scientific, objectivity, and non-bias. Müller famous captions were “to study religion as it is” and that one has to study religions other than his own for “he who knows one knows none”. When the phenomenological school emerged in the early nineteenth century, it added another influential concept to the study of religion which is epoch or epoché, ‘bracketing’, or suspension of judgment. There are also several other methods and approaches which are claimed to be scientific along with these two influential schools. Despite the diversity, the methods share a common interest in making the study scientific, empirical, and the non-normative approach regarded as objective.

To date, there are a number of established nomenclatures which represents many forms of religious study based on their distinct methods and approaches. Francis X. Clooney listed them with a brief explanation: comparative religion, theology, theology of religions, interreligious dialogue, dialogical/interreligious theology, and comparative theology. (Clooney, 2010)

Prominent pluralists offered more defined nomenclatures: world theology,(Smith, 1989) global theology, (Ambler, 1990) and global ethic (Parliament of the World’s Religions, 1993) There are also unique nomenclatures formulated within an identified framework or premises such as meta religion (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986) and transcendent unity of religions. (Schoun, 1984)
In contradiction to all the above-mentioned modern study of religions is theology, a traditional and normative discipline peculiar to the Abrahamic religions. It was in theology that one’s religious truth is defended, and others’ religious truth is challenged. Jacques Waardenburg however accused theology as polemical (Waardenburg, 1999) and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi charged it as polemic and apologetic. (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, pp. 13–58) In fact, it is claimed that the rivalry between theology and study of religion can still be felt in some academic settings as in the case of the German-speaking academy. (Berthrong & Clooney, 2012)

Some Christian theologians are concerned with the methodological struggle between theology and the study of religion. From the Christian perspective, they seek to promote comparative theology as a reconciliatory discipline between the study of religion and theology. Thus, comparative theology is committed to intercultural study of religions while normative judgment will be embarked only after an extended and deep reflection on the texts and practices of the religion under comparison has been attempted. (Clooney, 2010)

This may not be the case in most of the Islamic studies faculties or departments. As the former establishes the gap between the two disciplines, the latter seems unaware of the gap. Mouhanad Khorchide and Ufuk Topkara challenged Muslim theologians to emulate al-Ghazali’s bold move in developing an epistemological and critical methodology in dialogue with others. (Khorchide & Topkara, 2013) In reality, almost three decades ago, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi adapted the Ghazalian revolutionary scholarship when he formulated the meta-religion principles and adopted them in his analysis of Christianity. (Isma’il Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967) Nevertheless, despite the bravery and the subtlety of his method, meta-religion fails to capture sufficient interest even among the Muslims academia.

A research titled *The Relevance of Kalam to Comparative Religion* has stimulated this analytical study of the *Kalam* legacies in the study of religion. The research is confined to
library research and it is qualitative and philosophical in nature. It adopts an interpretive and constructivist approach for its research paradigm. It seeks to demonstrate the best mean to understand religious truth. Therefore, it examines the viability of approaches in the study of religions in the past and at present. For data analysis, the research employed textual analysis to analyze the classical and modern texts on theology, *Kalam* and comparative religion. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the question of religious truth and intellectual veracity being the source of gap between theology and the study of religions. In doing so, it revisits *Kalam*, a distinct method in theology prevalent in the Abrahamic religions, be recognized as a credible method in defense of religious truth in the study of religions at a contemporary time.

**Modern Study of Religion: An Overview**

Religious plurality is an inevitable phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Physical mobility and information technology have accelerated inter-religious co-existence and connectivity. Nevertheless, religious plurality has indeed captured much scholarly attention since early modernity. In addition to the list of the nomenclatures presented above, it is discriminatory to ignore religious pluralism, a modern philosophy that seems to have a major influence in the study of religion since the late twentieth century. This philosophy frequently promoted as religious plurality (Ibrahim, 2016b) is laid on the premise that every religious truth-claim is human diverse interpretation of the Transcendent, hence, the numerous religions. (Hick, 1989) Since it is a bottom-up interpretation of the Transcendent (instead of top-down revelation), every interpretation is deemed subjective to one’s context, therefore, should not be taken as an absolute standard. At the minimum, Hick’s version of religious pluralism had to partake on skepticism and agnosticism in particular when dealing with religious dogma and myth. “Pluralism must take its stand on a grand negative: there is no certainty in any particular religion to enable its world-view to be the basis of a viable interpretation of religion.” (Bryne, 1995) Having briefly introduced religious pluralism as the philosophy of the day, this paper
attempts to demonstrate how delicate is the question of religious truth at the hands of modern and postmodern theologians and also scholars of religions.

Undoubtedly, the modern study of religion in their various titles, methods, and approaches are forms of intellectual attempt to examine and to make sense of the religious plurality phenomenon. Nevertheless, with an exception to theology, most of them are not interested in examining the truth-claim put forward by religions despite it being the most salient feature in all religions. For example, religious pluralism simply negated religious truth-claim and regarded it as a form of exclusivism, hence, intolerance to religious diversity. (Ibrahim, 2016a)

To elaborate further, it would be useful to introduce some of the nomenclatures used that fall under the purview of study of religions. Francis X. Clooney’s insightful description of the nomenclatures is worth summarized and presented to distinguish their unique and distinct traits: (Clooney, 2010)

Comparative religion: The study of religion – in ideas, words, images, and acts, historical developments – as found in two or more traditions or strands of tradition.

Theology: A mode of inquiry that engages a wide range of issues with full intellectual force, but ordinarily does so within the constraints of a commitment to a religious community, respect for its scriptures, traditions, and practices, and willingness to affirm the truths and values of that tradition.

Theology of religions: A theological discipline that discerns and evaluates the religious significance of other religious traditions in accord with the truths and goals of defining one’s own religion.

Interreligious dialogue: Actual conversations, sometimes formal and academic, sometimes simply interpersonal conversations among persons of different religious traditions who are willing to listen to one another and share their stories of faith and values.

Dialogical/interreligious theology: Reflection aimed at clarifying dialogue’s presuppositions, learning from its actual practice, and communicating what is learned in dialogue for a wider audience.

Comparative theology: Acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions.
For the sake of objectivity, it is essential to provide brief definitions of the remaining
nomenclatures mentioned earlier that escaped Clooney’s definition which include;

World theology: A transformed Christian theology that will interpret the history of
the Christians in a way that will give intellectual expression to the Christian faith and
its modern perception of the world. (Smith, 1989)

Global theology: The study of God as the source, basis, and ultimate context of
human existence and as refracted in human experience and history. (Ambler, 1990)

Meta-religion: A set of universal rational principles that acts as a standard of
judgment in the study of religion. (Isma’il Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967)

Transcendent unity of religions: A perennial wisdom that promotes an esoteric
interpretation of religion which is the underlying essential unity in the Transcendent
behind the plurality of religions. (Schoun, 1984)

With exception to theology, all the above-mentioned nomenclatures are the product of
modernity and postmodernity. A closer examination of the definitions reveals that there is
hardly provision for validation of religious truth except in theology of religions which set to
examine other religious truth using the standard of one’s religion; a state of affairs condemned
by Müller. However, meta-religion proclaims its commitment to judgment and evaluation
using a set of rational principles. If such is the case, would there be any possibility to defend
religious truth in the study of religion? How important is religious truth in the modern study
of religion? Given that neutrality is the fundamental trait of the modern study of religion; would
intellectual veracity be relevant at all? Does human awareness of plurality affect the way
religious truth is perceived and studied? Does objective religious truth exist in any way? The
answers to these intricate questions may lead to astonishment but it will at least assist in
providing insights with regard to the notion of truth in the study of religions.

Religious Truth and Intellectual Veracity

No matter how skeptical one can be at religious truth and on human ability to comprehend it
using all possible tools, Peter Jonkers maintains that the notion of truth cannot be dismissed as
it dominates the academic debate among the philosophers of religion, as well as the public. (Jonkers, 2012) Modern philosophy of religion, however, plays a significant role in seizing the question of religious truth away from theology. Jonker criticizes that modern theism in the philosophy of religion is too obsessed with the foundational and epistemological question instead of religious truth. In the end, modern theism abandoned many questions that pertain to religious truth on the view that they are not susceptible to the scientific proof. In his defense of religious truth, Donald Wiebe stressed that an ultimate divine truth is against the ordinary truth perceived by human intelligence and senses. Religious truth provides the ultimate significance for one’s meaningful existence. Hence, the only way to find it is primarily in religious doctrines and beliefs in the forms of metaphysical statement. (Wiebe, 1981) 

Ironically, philosophy or religion, speaks of proposition truth and not metaphysical truth. Wiebe speaks of religious truth as gained in intuition that concerns the divine realm and transcends the natural realm. Wiebe reclaims theology to find its way back in the modern intellectual undertaking. However, he further maintains that religious truth appears in symbolic statements that point to or induce the experience of the truth, hence, it is the personal truth. (Wiebe, 1981) The question is, if religious truth is personal then it is relative. Meanwhile, this conflict with the objective and universal character attributed to religious belief. (Sweet, 1998) Nevertheless, the notion of religious truth as personal and relative may exist in harmony with the postmodern philosophy of relativism. Jonker illustrates this by relating religion to the postmodern consumerism culture and religious supermarket. In such conditions, he imagines that religious belief is perceived as commodities displayed in the religious supermarkets to seduce the customers. There is no need to consult the customers in helping them to make the ‘right’ choice since choices are subjective affairs and there is no objective standard to the customers’ liking. (Jonkers et al., 2009)
Hendrik M. Vroom blamed that in addition to the philosophy of religion, the introduction of comparative religion has made the question of truth becoming a more complex issue for it denies the possibility of arriving at a conception of religious truth in terms of one’s own cultural and religious tradition. (Vroom, 1989)

Earlier, Wiebe condemned the founding fathers of the study of religion for tolerating religious truth, hence, inventing descriptivism in the study. As such, in his opinion, it is a form of methodological dogma. (Wiebe, 1981) However, he tried to reconcile this methodological uncertainty by exerting his view that religious truth has to be regarded as a tradition of wisdom owned by all religions and secular worldview. Such wisdom in his opinion is a trans-cultural and universally human character. (Jonkers et al., 2009) He seems to echo the perennials’ call for recognition of perennial wisdom submitted by the prominent esoteric scholars such as Frithjof Schuon, William C. Chittick, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Nevertheless, his proclamation of the shared tradition of wisdom though fascinating is outside the scope of this work.

The debate on the meaning of ‘truth’ may also possibly lead us into the loop of modern versus postmodern truth’s ontological debate. The postmodern philosophy affects the modern notion of truth in the sense that its ontological meaning and certainty is contested. Prominent scholars of postmodern philosophy such as Jean François Lyotard is known for his famous postmodern critic to modern philosophy as ‘the end of grand narratives or metanarratives. (Lyotard, 1989) The postmodern philosophy denies the possibility of objective knowledge and the possibility of truth. Lyotard accused modern sciences as a metanarrative and he challenged such a transcendent status. Ernest Gellner submitted that postmodernism is relativism uber Alles which means ‘relativism above everything’ and that truth is elusive, polymorphous, inward, and subjective. (Gellner, 1992) Given that the two philosophies as thesis and antithesis, the challenge for a subtle methodology in the study of religions is predictable, particularly as we
are dealing with its most sensitive issue which is the notion of truth. Would the modern and postmodern debate affect the notion of truth or the means towards achieving the truth? Having said that postmodern philosophy celebrates relativism, is there any room for religious truth in the postmodern intellectual discourse?

**The Quest for an Appropriate Methodology in the Study of Religion**

Francis X. Clooney’s proposal for keeping theology, comparative religion, and interreligious learning together has captured more of our interest given his vigorous attempts in reconciling theology and comparative religion. He introduced comparative theology, a discipline he regards as mandatory to the present theologians as they are expected to be inter-religioulsly literate and able to understand diversity with the eyes of faith. (Clooney, 2010) Hence, comparative theology is introduced as a discipline rooted in theological concerns with actual study of another tradition. It requires a combination of one’s intellectual and spiritual response to diversity. Its prerequisite is to omit the traditional and exclusive understanding of diversity. Clooney highlighted the importance of combining one’s intuitive and rational insight, reflective, and contemplative endeavor seeing the other in the light of one’s own, and our own in light of the other. (Clooney, 2010)

There may be some complexities with regard to the acceptance of this discipline as Ulrich Winkler recognized the differences between the context in the United States of America and Europe, in particular Germany. (Winkler, 2012) The former treats religion as a public item but officially separates it from the state unlike Europe and the German-speaking countries. In the latter case, despite the separation, there are concordats between the state and the Vatican and other forms of church leadership. For example, the government funded the education of the clergy in public university and also equips theological faculties. As a matter of fact, the church has the right to decide on the appointment of professors at theological faculties. (Winkler, 2012) In the latter context, the establishment of comparative theology in the academia is possible though it is still limited to
the Protestant and Catholic theologies. However, it is claimed that some efforts are taken to include other religious theologies.

Earlier in history in 1967, there was an initiative from a Muslim scholar, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, on reforming the method in the study of religion. He called it the meta-religion principle, a universal rational principle that goes beyond the different forms of religion. Unlike Clooney who sought to reconcile between theology and comparative religion, al-Faruqi tried to do away with theology for he regarded it polemical. Instead, al-Faruqi combined the phenomenological method and the meta-religion principle. In regard to its method, al-Faruqi demanded a temporal suspension of judgment or epoch in the course of learning religions and he has finally resorted to the universal rational principle to help in the judgment process on the religion being studied. He dedicated the method in his study of Christianity that led to the publication of *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*. Unlike Clooney who has received more institutional and scholarly support for his ideas of comparative theology, unfortunately al-Faruqi’s call for methodological reform failed to wake at least his fellow Muslims scholars.

The issue of methodology is, in fact, the real hurdle in the reconciliatory project between theology and comparative religion. This reconciliatory measure may not be the best solution. Theology being a traditional religious discipline is essentially dependent on metaphysics and logic. Although comparative religion is widely known as one of the brainchild of modern sciences, metaphysics is excluded. Theology acts as the armor of faith and the religious truth is its accountability. On the other hand, comparative religion abandoned religious metaphysics for it is only interested in the rational and empirical truth. Comparative religion bothers theology in the sense that the former conforms to religions’ plural truth-claim in the name of empathy and engagement. Theology bothers comparative religion in the sense that it is judgmental towards other religious truths. Both disciplines are antithetical to each other.
Having exerted these contradictions and the unfeasibility of reconciliatory method, it is perhaps advisable to recognize the disciplines as they are. Theology, being the traditional discipline of faith prevalent in the Abrahamic religions, it deserves recognition for the role it has played in defending and verifying religious truth. In this regard, *Kalam* which refers to a distinctive method in theology was in fact, a shared tool among the Muslims, Christians, and Jewish scholars in the vindication of their faith, metaphysics, and ethics. The following discussion seeks to deliberate on *Kalam* and its prospects in the study of religion. It is interesting to uncover that despite the plain contradicting truth-claim that religions demonstrate, they alluded to a common salient fact which is the Sovereignty of God; a neglected truth in comparative religion but found its advocate in theology through the traditional method of *Kalam*.

**Kalam: Returning to a Shared Intellectual Tradition among the Abrahamic Religions**

*Kalam* or loosely translated as ‘speculative theology’ refers to a systematic dialectical and argumentative method in theology developed in the form of dialogue to contest or defend one’s religious doctrines and creeds, by means of rational argumentation. On the other hand, comparative religion is a science of other religions that adopts ‘modern scientific approach’ in order to attempt a neutral and unbiased study of the world religions. Modern scholars regarded theological approaches as polemical, therefore, a biased approach to the study of religion. As a result of such allegations and the promotion of comparative religion and other modern approaches in the study of religion, *Kalam* and its legacies were side-lined from the intellectual mainstream of religious studies.

In reality, *Kalam* has been ventured by the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theologians from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Scholarly inquiries into inter-religious issues were attempted with a strong element of debate (*jidal*) instead of dialogue. In fact, *Kalam* is also embedded with the Greek logic and Islamic logic (*al-mantiq*) that stimulate intellectual openness in
interreligious discourses. Interestingly, some of the themes debated in Kalam are extensively discoursed today under a different academic purview. For example, the issue of free will and predestination, and the issue of good and evil were originally theological issues but are deliberated under moral/ethical issues at present time. The contemporary debate of human right and freedom, intrinsic values, and extrinsic values of morality when discussed under theology are geared toward theocentric objective, hence, the exertion on God sovereignty. In comparison, when they are discussed under comparative religion, they are geared toward anthropocentric objective, hence, the exertion on empathy and tolerance.

Nidhal Guessom made an interesting demand for the revival of Kalam making it necessary to engage Kalam with modern science. He challenged the contemporary theologians to deal with the scientific study of nature which falls under the purview of natural theology that discuss the problem related to the creation of the world via the design theory or the teleological argument. Such issue was well-deliberated by the Greek philosophers, Muslim, and Christian theologians in the past. This intellectual tradition, however, was suppressed by modern scientists such as David Hume and Charles Darwin. Both scientists relied upon the principle of methodological naturalism which insists that science only admit explanations of natural phenomena that rely solely on natural causes and leave out entirely any appeal to supernatural agents, be it spirits, angels, demons, or indeed God. (Guessom, 2011) It is also a tragedy in the history of intellectual tradition of Kalam in which modern science has abandoned it from its scope of any teleological considerations in the creation of nature. The more subtle claim put forward by Guessom is his proposal on the reconciliation between theology and modern science, thus, justifying the demand he made for the revival of Kalam. This, according to him, is not impossible as he pointed out in a work titled One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology by John C. Polkinghorne, a physicist-turned-priest that explored the possibility of relating theology to modern science. The latest work by Basil Altaie titled God, Nature and the
Cause reiterates the call made by Guessome and dismissed the allegation that Kalam is outdated or impractical in the current context. As a matter of fact, he insisted that Kalam has much to offer on contemporary natural philosophy. Altaie substantiated his claim throughout the chapters of his book which discussed the issues of laws of nature (daqiq al-kalam), laws of physics, causality from an Islamic perspective, the question of divine action from a modern Islamic perspective, and new perspective on the old debates on the size of the universe, and also the fate of the son were provided. (Altaie, 2016)

Guessom called for contemporary Muslim theologians to engage in dialogue with scientists, philosophers, and thinkers on issues ranging from the concept of creation (of time and space, of the world/universe/multiverse, of life, of humans); the question of evolution (of life, of humans, of intelligence, of consciousness, of morality), and God’s role in it; the place of humans in the universe; divine action in the world; the question of miracles; extra-terrestrial life and intelligence; artificial intelligence. He figured out potential issues that intersect between science and theology, prevalent at the contemporary western discourse mainly discussed by the Christians theologians. Those issues are:

i. Creation of the World/Universe/Multiverse
ii. The Place of Man in the Universe
iii. Creation/Evolution of Life and Humans
iv. Divine Action in the World
v. The Question of Miracles

Having listed the issues, it is necessary that we demonstrate the applicability of the issues in interreligious discourses and deal with the question of truth in religion. To further illustrate, taking the questions of free will and predestination and the justice of God, Muslims theologians of the competing theological schools; the Jabarites (the dominant position of the Hanabilites), the Qadarites (the dominant position of the Mu’tazilites), and the Asharites posed conflicting views on the action of man. The Jabarites held that man is absolutely compelled in all his
actions, that he has no power over his acts. In contrast, the Qadarites held that man decides and creates his acts (both good and evil) and that he deserves reward and punishment for what he did in the world to come. In this regard, God is guarded from association with anything evil or wrong or with any act of unbelief or wickedness because if He created the wrong, He would be wrong and if He created righteousness (justice), He would be just. (Sweetman, 1945) On the other hand, the Asharites tried to mediate the views between the Jabarites and the Mu'tazilites. The Asharites emphasized that man has freedom to act according to his will but it is God who creates (realizes) his action. The Asharites’ view is deemed as orthodox, perceived to assert freedom of action to men, was equivalent to claiming man as a second creator. (Sweetman, 1945) The Asharites coined the theory of kasb or iktisab which implicates the idea that “the action of a creature is created, originated, and produced by Allah but it is acquired (maksub) by the creature, by which it means its (the action) being brought into connection with his power and will without resulting any effect from him in it or any introduction to its existence, only that he is a locus (mahall) for it.” (Sweetman, 1945) This means that with regard to the actualization of the action, man is merely an agent and not the creator of the action. Despite the seemingly conflicting views, all these schools were defending the Sovereignty of God; the Jabarites insisted that God is the Creator of everything including man’s action, the Qadarites were defending God’s Justice, and the Asharites struggled to defend God as the Creator who is also just.

The debate over predestination among the Christian theologians was also as zealous as the Muslim theologians. Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine were in support of predestination. There was a slight difference in the way they interpreted predestination compared to the Muslims. According to these theologians, God knows what He predestines, and He always predestines good. It is the absence of the good virtue that constitutes sin. (Sweetman, 1945) The Pelagius School, however, took a different direction. Pelagius held to the justice of God
and that all He does is good, the knowledge of good and evil was obtained by reason not
predetermined by God. Pelagius was followed by the school of Antioch and the Nestorian. John
of Damascus (675/5-749 CE) plainly affirmed that even though God knows all things
beforehand, He does not predetermine all things. (Sweetman, 1945) He implanted virtue in
man for He is the source of all good. But, man has and uses his power to realize the virtue or
to withdraw from it. In reality, wickedness is the result of the absence of virtue. On the surface,
the two positions are against each other. A deeper analysis on both positions alluded to the fact
that both positions were defending God from being charged as the evil maker for if he does,
He is not a just God.

As for the Jewish theologians’ position on predestination, it is claimed that the dominant
position in Judaism is the belief in free will for they defended the unity of God and His justice.
It was also claimed that this position was due to the influence of the Mu'tazilites and the
Asharites. (Wolfson, 1967) Maimonides argued for human free will and condemned
predestination as pagan beliefs. Human free will justifies for human responsibility, reward, and
punishment. His expositions on the problem of free will and predestination are gathered in his
two works, namely, Misheh Torah and Moreh Nebukim which represent the views of the Jews
living in Muslim countries during his time. (Wolfson, 1967)

Having presented the diverse views from the Abrahamic religions on the question of free will
and predestination, it is interesting to infer that the Abrahamic theologians were more inclined
to uphold the Divine Sovereignty/Omnipotence/Justice in the way relevant to their religions.
Despite the conflicting details they held, it was in Kalam that the Abrahamic theologians
demonstrated a profound interreligious encounter within intellectual subtlety in the service of
God. Regardless of their religious affiliations, it is evident that the Abrahamic theologians were
constantly in defense of God. Such is a unique feature of the middle age theology shared by
the Abrahamic faith. In comparison to the contemporary study of religions in its diverse
nomenclatures, taking religious plurality as a posteriori, they set aside religious truth from the
domain of cognitive truth in the name of tolerance and coexistence. Hence, the growing ideas
and support for world theology, global theology, global ethic, and religious pluralism. It is
ironic that the study of religion today has become a subset to humanities study which
automatically takes into account the political, social, historical, economic, and even religious
background at the level of human experience as the point of departure.

One of the ways out from such a methodological dilemma is to restore *Kalam* on the view that
it has a more solid ground in terms of its history that are deeply rooted in the Greek civilization
and the religious tradition of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In addition, *Kalam* is in harmony
with modern science in the sense that it accepts rational and empirical inquiry and on top of
both is metaphysics. At this point, the famous saying of Albert Einstein that is “religion without
science is blind and science without religion is lame” is an eye opening. (Einstein, 1940)

**Reviving Theology and Kalam in the Study of Religion**

The gap between the study of religions and theology lies on the issue whether to be normative
or not. The former held that the religious truth is beyond cognition. It strives to be neutral and
it depends on a reduced version of methodological tools for knowledge inquiry. On the other
hand, theology maintains the dialectical method contesting against or in defense of one’s
religious doctrines and creeds, by means of rational argumentation. The modern study of
religion in its many forms are developed on the basis of modern philosophy is also vulnerable
to the challenges of postmodern philosophy in particular the philosophy of relativism. Its
failure to acknowledge religious truth and the insistence on neutrality and openness run the risk
of subjectivism which indeed, a matching partner of relativism. There were Christian
theologians who took the challenge to reconcile theology and comparative religion which led
to the introduction of comparative theology as a credible discipline in the face of plurality and
relativism. This, however, requires intervention from the state and formal institutions which may not be the case in many secular states in the world. Even philosophical subtlety and a tangible proof like the one attempted by al-Faruqi is not able to bridge the methodological gap or reconcile theology and comparative religion. Perhaps, the better alternative is to leave and appreciate the discipline as it is. This paper calls for a return to theology and also to revive *Kalam* in the study of religion considering its role, contribution, and commitment to religious truth are equally shared by the Abrahamic religions. As a matter of fact, theology is an established tradition within the Abrahamic religions, a witness of the intellectual tradition prevalent among its theologians. Theology and *Kalam* being its tool, makes intellection exercises possible and intellection verification mandatory. Despite the contested religious truth, such intellectual commitments pursue in the forms of dialectical arguments and survive throughout the history in the works of the theologians, most of the time with language sophistication and refined logical verdicts. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that the revisit of theology and *Kalam* in the study of religions should not be limited to the intellectuals from the Abrahamic religions. In fact, followers of other religions should learn *Kalam* in order to appreciate its practice of intellection exercise and verification in the service of God.

**Conclusion**

*Kalam* has greatly contributed in defense of religious truth even at the plane of interreligious encounter. Despite its ‘polemical and apologetic outlook’, the *Kalam* tradition is strongly built upon rational, empirical, and metaphysical tools. The revisit of *Kalam* is urgent not only to Muslims intellectuals but also anyone involved in interreligious discourse since *Kalam* is loaded with intellectual vocation that deters dogmatism in religion. In the context of Abrahamic religions, it is crucial that theology and *Kalam* being its component, to be taught, and applied in the contemporary study of religion. The fear that it nurtures biases should cease at it was in *Kalam* that the Abrahamic theologians developed their interreligious discourses with
intellectual openness and veracity. *Kalam* being the discipline that reconciles Islamic tradition with the Greek and the Christian intellectual philosophy has showcased the flexibility of (in the context of this discussion) Islam in accepting goods from other traditions and civilizations. Even the Jewish intellectualism could not resist the subtlety of *Kalam*. In addition, intellectual openness which is sought after in the discipline of comparative religion is, in fact, the trait of theology, and *Kalam*. Without intellectual openness, there can never exist a collection of theological treatises written by the Abrahamic theologians in defense of their religious truths. Intellection exercise and intellectual veracity are crucial in theology for otherwise, the notion of God will fall into dogmatism. Scholarly revisions on the definitions of intellectual openness and objectivity are direly needed for otherwise, the legacies of theology in the study of religions will remain marginalized despite the foundational role it has played in the early history of interreligious encounter.

**Acknowledgements:**

This paper is an improvised version of an article published earlier in *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences* in 2018. It is an outcome of a research titled *The Relevance of Kalam to Comparative Religion* funded by the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The author would like to thank the Islamic and Strategic Studies Institute (ISSI) of Malaysia for hosting the author as a Visiting Research Fellow during the period of her research leave. The same appreciation goes to the members of IRSYAD (Inter-religious Studies and Dialogue) for their contributions in the research and in the making of this book.

**References**


Introduction

The concept of the infusion of *al-ḥikmah* as stated in *al-Qur’an* and *al-Sunnah* enkindled the spirit of rationalism and intellectualism among the Muslim community. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: "*Ḥikmah*-filled words are a lost item that any mu’min from anywhere (i.e. whoever finds it) can take it and claim it as his own possession" (Al-Tarmīzī 1978, 5: 28, ḥadīth 2645). Al-Mubārakfūrī (n.d., 7: 458) wrote about Malik’s explanation that stated *ḥikmah* as the understanding of the religion, as Allāh SWT says in *al-Baqarah* 2: 269 that to whom wisdom is granted he has been granted wealth abundant. *Al-ḥikmah* also refers to knowledge whether it is categorised as *ilahī* or *tabī’ī*, *naqliyyah* or *‘aqliyyah* (Al-Farābī 1991; Ibn Khaldūn 2004, 2: 171), the knowledge of *fard ‘ayn* or *fard kifāyah* (Al-Nawawī n.d., 1: 49) and the knowledge of *al-wasā’il* or *al-maqāsid* (Ibn Khaldūn 2004, 2: 351; al-Fuḍālī 1409H: 26). Of all these fields of knowledge, Islamic scholars are focusing more on two areas which are *al-Fiqh* or the fiqh that discusses the knowledge related to practice (*al-*‘amaliyyāt), and *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, the knowledge of Tawhid or the fiqh that discusses the knowledge related to belief or faith (*al-i’tiqadiyyāt*) (Al-Taftāzānī 1998, 1: 164).

The legitimacy of *‘Ilm al-Kalam* becomes a matter of debate and polemic among the Muslim scholars. Because of that, there was a sense of vindication towards the Muslim scholars who accept, stand for, approve and defend *‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Abu Bakar, 2010). There is also ‘objection’ against Muslim scholars who disapproved and objected against *‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Abu Bakar, 2010). These reactions of the Muslim scholars in accepting and rejecting *‘Ilm al-Kalām* are in fact due to the methodology and the knowledge of discipline, which at the early stage
was dominated by groups outside the mainstream Islam charged as (*ahl al-bid’ wa al-ahwā’*) like the sects of *al-Rāfiḍah* (i.e. Syiah), *al-Khwārijj, al-Murji’ah, al-Qadariyyah, al-Jabariah* and others especially *al-Mu’tazilah*. The influential role of *Kalam* led by the *Mu’tazilites* was largely felt during the time of *Al-‘Abbāsiyyah* under rule of khalīfah al-Ma’mūn (198-218H), al-Mu’tasim (218-227H), al-Wāthiq (227-232H) and al-Mutawakkil (232-247H). The biggest polemic in the history of Islam was on the doctrine of the creation of the *Qur’an* propagated by the *Mu’tazilite* that led to the torture of Ahmad bin Hanbal (164-241H). It was Abū al-Hassan al-Ash’arī (260-324H), who decipher *‘Ilm Kalam* from the extreme infusion of Greek logics subjugated in the *Mu’tazilites* philosophy. Since then, the school of *Asha’irah* and *Māturīdiyyah* prominently led the *Kalam* school of thought then classified it under the framework of *Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā’ah*.

The legitimacy of *‘Ilm al-Kalām* under the framework of *Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā’ah* is justified based on the internal and external factors. As for the internal factors, they are as follows: [1] The *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* consistently call for the use of reasoning; [2] the subtlety of reasoning on the interpretation of issues pertaining to *aqīdah* for example on the anthropomorphic verses (*al-ayat al-mutashābihāt*), the explanation of God’s essence, characteristics and actions of *Allāh*, free will and predestination (*al-Qadā’* and *al-Qadr*), faith and absence of faith, doers of the major sins and so on; [3] position on certain doctrines that have political implications such as the doctrine of *al-imāmah* (i.e. leadership); [4] on intellectual and philosophical inclinations as well as *wijdāniyyah* (i.e. what one feels in one’s heart); and [5] conversion to Islam by people from different races and religions that caused the invention of new belief and culture in Islam. Among the external factors are: [1] the questions posed by other religions against Islam ; [2] the translation movement that translated the knowledge repository of human civilisations like the Greek civilisation and others; and [3] political, social, economic and civilisational interactions between the Muslims and the Muslims.
All the above factors were among the reasons for the emergence of ‘Ilm al-Kalām, and it was the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā’ah who were at the forefront in defending Islam against the intrusion of extreme rationalism of the Greek philosophy as well as the imposition of dogmas against Islam posed by other religions.

The acceptance of Kalam by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā’ah implies that there was a specific reason why it has been rejected by certain quarters of Muslim scholars. It was reported that the public involvement in the theological debate has made them vulnerable to doubt, confusion and deviation in faith. This situation happened due to the lack of intellectual credibility, too obsessed with logical reasoning or incompetent to counter the doctrines from other religions. Hence, it was the fiqh scholars who prohibited ‘Ilm al-Kalām from being used by the innovators (ahl al-bid’ah) and the deviationists (ahl al-ahwā’ al-dālah) (al-Ghazali, 1985, pp. 95–98), (Al-Taftazani, 1998), (‘Amuh, n.d).

‘Ilm al-Kalām in the Tradition of Islam


‘Ilm al-Kalām is not a new form of knowledge. It is synonymous to ‘Ilm al-Tawḥīd, ‘Ilm al-Aqīdah, ‘Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn, ‘Ilm al-Fiqh al-Akbar and ‘Ilm al-Nazar wa al-Istidlāl (Ḥassan Maḥmūd, 1991). These nomenclatures were chosen due to the overlapping themes and issues in their discourses. The difference perhaps lies in the details of the discourse. Nizār Ḥammādī (n.d.) tried to differentiate the nomenclatures. According to him, all these nomenclatures refer to ‘Ilm al-Tawḥīd, however, ‘Ilm al-Aqīdah only discusses the fundamentals of aqīdah without
the need to be supported by evidences and proofs. ‘Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn on the other hand, discusses every aspect of aqīdah supported by logic and revealed evidences without using the method of Kalām. Whilst ‘Ilm al-Kalām discusses aqīdah issues in more detail by explaining the confusion, doubt, elaboration, discourse, rejection and cancellation of claim made. As a matter of fact, what has been called is that the Kalām method has already existed at every level of the studies of ‘Ilm Tawḥīd. Al-Ghazālī (d.505H) for example wrote the books on ‘Ilm Tawḥīd for the public by using the basic method of Kalām in his book titled Qawā’id al-‘Aqā’id fī al-Tawḥīd, then he wrote al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah using intermediate method of Kalām and finally al-Iḥtiṣād fī al-‘Iʿtiqād (Al-Mahdālī, n.d) by using an advanced level of the Kalām method. Another example is the syllabus for the studies of ‘Ilm al-Kalām as designed by Muhammad bin Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d.895H) in his inter-related works of: [1] al-Muqaddimāt; [2] al-Kubrā; [3] al-Wustā; [4] al-Ṣughrā; [5] Ṣughrā al-Ṣughrā; and [6] Ṣughrā Ṣughrā al-Ṣughrā (Al-Sanūsī 2013). These works demonstrate that ‘Ilm al-Kalām has the general characteristics own by ‘Ilm al-Tawḥīd, and its peculiarity is due to the specific characteristics which reflected in its discourse and argumentations.

The naming of ‘Ilm al-Kalām is believed to be derived from the following reasons: [1] the linguistic style in the phrase “al-Kalām fī kadhā wa kadhā”; [2] the polemic of the speech of God (Kalām Allāh) among the Muslim sects (al-firaq al-Islamiyyah); and [3] the method of Kalām that requires for verification (taḥqīq) when there is criticism and opposition (Al-Taftāzānī 1998, 1: 164-165). Regardless of the definitions, ‘Ilm al-Kalām does not coincides with scholarly justifications on the possibility of taqlīd on issues pertaining to aqīdah as it has been defined as “the knowledge that discusses matters for which there is an obligation to have strong conviction that they belong to Allah SWT and His prophets” (Qabūl 2013: 10). Meanwhile, there is also definition that indicates Ilm al-Kalām as requiring possession of knowledge and evidences in tackling the issues of aqīdah: “The knowledge that gives one the
ability to provide proof for matters pertaining to aqīdah and it is done by supplementing the evidences and at the same time disallowing vagueness” (Al-Jurjānī 1998, 1: 40), or “The knowledge that consists evidences with regard to matters of aqīdah together with the evidences derived from logic and criticism towards innovators who deviate in matters of aqīdah of the salaf sects as well as Ahl al-Sunah” (Ibn Khaldūn 2004, 2: 205). Nevertheless, when we refer to the phrase ‘method of ‘Ilm al-Kalām’, then, the knowledge of evidences is a prerequisite whether it is the knowledge that is acquired in the form of ijmāl (brevity) or tafsīl (elaboration).

Topics and Issues of Discussion in ‘Ilm al-Kalām

The topics of discussion of ‘Ilm al-Kalām as summarised by Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895H) in al-Ṣughrā or Umm al-Barāḥin is related to the understanding of the content of the two faith professions (al-shahādatayn) which are, first, there is no God but Allāh SWT and this requires the person who professes it to know what is obligatory, impossible and permissible about Him. Second, the profession that Prophet Muḥammad PBUH is the messenger of Allāh and this requires the person who professes it to know what is obligatory, impossible and permissible about the Prophet and this includes matters concerning faith like the belief of the existence of the Prophets, angels, scriptures and the day of the Hereafter (al-Sam’īyyāt) (Al-Sanūsī 2013: 98). Al-Sanūsī’s outlined that someone who professed the shahādatayn should understand the 50 basic principles - 20 on the obligatory matters and 20 on the impossible matters to be associated with Allah SWT, 1 permissible matter to be connected to Allah SWT (al-Ilahiyyāt), 4 obligatory matters and 4 permissible matters to be associated to the Prophets as well as 1 permissible matter to be connected to the Prophets (al-Nubuwwāt). In conclusion, the topics of ‘Ilm al-Kalām are related to al-Ilahiyyāt, al-Nubuwwāt and al-Sam’īyyāt as shown in Figure 1.
Figure I

Topics/issues in ‘Ilm al-Kalām

(I) al-Ilahiyyāt or matters related to Allah SWT and divine matters.

(II) al-Nubuwwāt or matters related to Prophethood.

(III) al-Sam'iyyāt or the matters of the unseen.

I bear witness that there is no God except Allah SWT and Muḥammad His Messenger.

The general focus of al-Ilahiyyāt, al-Nubuwwāt and al-Sam'iyyāt in ‘Ilm al-Kalām is the explanation of al-the creator (Khāliq)- the creation (Makhlūq) and the understanding of Tawḥīd -Shirk.

The sources and references for ‘Ilm al-Kalām represent the three elemental sources of human’s knowledge which include intelligence (al-af'īdah), senses (al-absār) and revelation (al-sam') (Al-Nahl 16: 78; al-Taftāzānī 1987: 15). ‘Ilm al-Kalām, explained three types of laws: [1] the law of shar‘ (ḥukm al-shar‘) or the religious law based on revelation; [2] the law of nature (ḥukm al-‘ādah) derived from the senses; and [3] the law of the intelligence (ḥukm al-‘aql) derived from intelligence. The law of shar‘ includes [a] the law which is made up of what is obligatory (al-wājib), supplementary (al-mandūb), permissible (al-mubāḥ), not encouraged (al-makrūh) and prohibited (al-ḥarām); and [b] the law that comprises reasons (sabab), requisites (shart) and obstacles (māni'). Meanwhile, the law of nature or its modern term ‘sciences’ means the explanation for the relationship between the cause and effect which explain the relationship between existence-existence, nonexistence-nonexistence, existence-nonexistence and nonexistence-existence. As for the law of intelligence, it is bounded by the extents of obligation, impossibility and permissibility (Al-Sanūsī 2013: 29-38). The three sources of human’s knowledge are shown in Figure II.
"It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections: that you may give thanks (to Allah)"

(i) al-sum’ or revelation that produces the law of shar’.
(ii) al-abṣār or the senses that produce the law of the nature or sciences.
(iii) al-af‘idah or intelligence that produces the law of intelligence.

*When revelation and intelligence are mentioned, it means that senses are also taken as part of intelligence because they are considered to be the tools for intelligence.

Most scholars only mentioned two forms of sources for human’s knowledge, namely intelligence and revelation. This is because the senses are merely seen as the human senses of taste, smell, hearing, vision and touch. As a matter of fact, these senses are the extension or the tools of intelligence. Thus, the thinking process happens due the observation that passes through the senses. This explains why the sources and references of ‘Ilm al-Kalām are referred to as ‘aqliyyah and naqliyyah evidences.

The Position, Advantages and Benefits of Ilm al-Kalam

‘Ilm al-Kalām is given the title al-Fiqh al-Akbar literally translated as “the supreme knowledge”. In Islam, there are two kinds of knowledge mandatory to be learned which are; [1] knowledge about the core matter and belief (aṣliyyah wa i’tiqadiyyah) which refers to al-Fiqh al-Akbar; and [2] knowledge related to the branches or offshoots and practice (far‘iyyah wa ‘amaliyyah), which refers to the knowledge of Fiqh (‘Ilm al-Fiqh) (Al-Taftāzānī 1987: 9-10; 1998, 1: 164). In addition, there is a poem that describes other forms of knowledge as the ‘servant’ to ‘Ilm al-Kalām because the knowledge in the fields of science and social science,
human sciences and natural sciences are in fact the evidences used in ‘Ilm al-Kalām in providing the proof for the existence and oneness of Allāh Jalla wa ‘Alā. This poem uttered by Abū ‘Abd Allāh bin Mujāhid al-Mutakallim reads like this (Ibn ‘Asākir 2014: 265):

O those who leave home early in the morning (al-mughtadī), you will seek knowledge. Each knowledge is a servant (i.e. a necessity) to ‘Ilm al-Kalām. You seek knowledge of Fiqh so that the ruling is valid (of worship). Then you neglect (knowledge related to) the Extractor (Munzil) of the rulings.

In conclusion, ‘Ilm al-Kalām is the noblest form of knowledge because it discusses the attributes of Allāh Jalla wa ’Alā and His Prophets. Something that is connected to (al-muta'alliq) a noble matter (al-muta'llaq) will definitely be honoured (Al-Bayjūrī 2014: 39).

Among the advantages of learning ‘Ilm al-Kalām are (‘Āmūh n.d.: 4-5): [1] stimulating the thinking faculty and this will keep someone away from blind submission (taqlid) in the matters of faith; [2] acquiring subtlety in argumentations that keeps one away from doubts; [3] upholding purity of faith (religion) against distortion and confusion; [4] safeguarding ‘aqīdah and the law rulings; and [5] preserving purity of intention that transpires from the true aqīdah that leads to the blessing of Allah SWT.

Shari‘ah Ruling Concerning ‘Ilm al-Kalām

‘Ilm al-Kalām is the form of knowledge that demands for evidences and arguments for verifying the truth. When it comes to the question of truth, Al-Qur’ān demands for evidences and it also provides evidences (al-Baqarah 2: 111; al-Naml 27: 64; al-Anfāl 8: 42; Yūnus 10: 68). The method of sourcing for evidences in ‘Ilm al-Kalām can be found in the Qur’ān and it is used in the matters concerning proving the oneness of Allāh SWT (al-Anbiyā’ 21: 22), the authenticity of His Prophets (al-Baqarah 2: 23; al-Isrā’ 17: 88), the surety of the Day of Resurrection (Yāsīn 36: 79) and others. It is plain that the Qur’ān uses arguments against the infidels and the deviationists from the beginning until the end of time (Al-Ghazālī 1985: 91-
95). Hence, Abū al-Qasam ‘Abd al-Karīm Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 465H) quoted what was stated by Ibn ‘Asākir (2014: 266) that he found it strange if someone claimed that there is no ‘Ilm al-Kalām in the Qur’an.

Among the scholars who support for ‘Ilm al-Kalām are al-Muḥāsibī, al-Qalānsī, Ibn Kullāb, al-Karābīsī, al-Ash‘ārī, al-Māturīdī, al-Nasafī, al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī, al-Shahrastānī, al-Āmidī, al-Ījī, al-Taftāzānī, al-Jurjānī and al-Baqillānī (‘Āmūh n.d.: 89-10). Some scholars opined that learning ‘Ilm al-Kalām in a basic (ijmāl) manner is obligatory or farḍ ‘ayn. Meanwhile, learning it in a comprehensive (tafṣil) manner is a shared responsibility of all Muslims (farḍ kifāyah). Those who are qualified and capable of learning is made obligatory to learn when there are no other individuals who have the merit to defend the aqīdah with proofs and to reject anything that brings about doubt in faith (‘Āmūh n.d.: 8; al-Bayjūrī 2014: 40).

There are writings that justified the reason why the salafs derided ‘Ilm al-Kalām. Among the reasons were individuals’ obsession, lack of belief, intention to cause destruction to aqīdah and being too philosophical in unnecessary matters (Al-Taftāzānī 1987: 12). In reality, the salafi scholars did not prohibited ‘Ilm al-Kalām but the attitude of the person who uses it. As a matter of fact, ‘Ilm al-Kalām prohibited creating animosity, obsession and hatred. ‘Ilm al-Kalām is just like any other disciplines such as ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth, al-Tafsīr (Exegesis) and Fiqh that prohibited a person from being arrogant, ostentatious and obsessive in seeking and maintaining worldly position (Al-Ghazālī 1985: 91).

Perhaps that are perceptions that ‘Ilm al-Kalām is no longer relevant because the groups like al-Khawārij, al-Murji‘ah, al-Qadariyyah, al-Jabariyah, al-Jahmiyyah, al-Mu’tazilah and the rest are no longer in existence. However, are not ideologies that exist today similar to the Jahmiyyah and Mu’tazilah on the claim that al-Qur’ān is creation because it is written by human? Al-Bāṭinīyyah-like ideologies such as the ideologies of Sergey Nechayev, Karl Marx,
Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin accuse religions of being superstitious and intoxicating, the Messengers who were misleading, of mythical God and others ('Umayrah 1998: 41-43). In fact, atheism has become more prevalent today as the propagators openly denounce the existence of God and often posed questions that are meant to ridicule God. Is there a more effective method to face and address all these other than ‘Ilm al-Kalām?

Pioneers in ‘Ilm al-Kalām

The core issue in ‘Ilm al-Kalām is tawḥīd that is to attest the Oneness of Allāh, that Islam is His Revelation and its teaching has been brought by a successive of Messengers since Adam AS until the seal of all Prophets and Messengers, Muḥammad PBUH. Meanwhile, the pioneers of ‘Ilm al-Kalām are referring to the individuals who organise the method, write the treatises and have their own followers. They are Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī and the followers of his manhaj (i.e. method, way) and Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī and his followers (Al-Bayjūrī 2014: 40).

Discourses on Religions in Islam

Islam is a religion that recognises the existence of other religions and belief systems. This is because being religious is part of the natural instinct of man. In fact, the Qur’ān Holy mentions the existence of religions other than Islam, and those are Judaism, Sabian, Christianity, Magianism or Zoroastrianism and the religion of the polytheists or the people who ascribe partners to Allāh SWT (al-Hajj 22: 17). However, the recognition of the existence of the religions is to be distinguished from the issue pertaining to the truth and falseness and oneness or shirk (ascribing partners to Allah) in their beliefs for Allah that attested Islam as the only religion He approved (Āli ‘Imrān 3: 19, 85).

Discourses on religions in Islam can be seen from three aspects which are Quranic discourse, Sunnah discourse and the discourse of Islamic scholars about religions. Quranic discourse
concerning religions can be found in al-Baqarah 2: 62, al-Mā`ddah 5: 69 and al-Haj 22: 17. As an example, Allah SWT says in al-Haj 22: 17 that “Those who believe (in the Qur’an), those who follow Judaism, Sabian, Christianity, Magianism, and Polytheism, Allāh will judge between them on the Day of Judgement: for Allah is witness of all things.” Ibn Qayyim when explaining the verse said that religions and beliefs of the people around the world are not restricted to the religions mentioned in the verse. Ibn Qayyim later quoted a phrase from Ibn ‘Abbās RA: “The religions are six; one of them is the religion of al-Rahman (i.e. Allah SWT The Most Beneficent) and five the religions of the devil.” (1407H: 36-37).

In general, the themes which discussed in the Qur’an concerning religions other than Islam are related to the belief (aqīdah), worship (ibādah) and transaction (mu’āmalah). The theme concerning the belief deliberated on the concepts of tawḥīd and shirk, or the question of divinity (al-ilahiyyāt), prophethood (al-nubuwwāt) and the unseen (al-ghaybiyyāt or al-sam ‘iyyāt).

The Sunnah discourse concerning religions is looking at the interactions that the Prophet PBUH had with the believers of other faiths in the following matters: [1] the letters or correspondence (al-rasā’il); [2] ambassadors (al-sufarā’); [3] delegations (al-wuḍūd) representing a tribe, religion or nation in a treaty; [4] agreements (al-wuḍūd) between the followers of religions; and [5] wars which are either called al-sarāyā or al-ghazawāt. As an example, the letters (al-rasā’il) from the Prophet PBUH are a form of interaction between Islam and the top religious leaders at the time like Hercules the Roman leader, al-Muqawqas the Egyptian leader, al-Najāshī the Ethiopian leader and Kisrā the Persian leader (Fārūq Hammādah 2004). Examples of delegations (al-wuḍūd) that met Rasulullah PBUH happened when the leaders of the Meccan polytheists including al-Waﬁd bin al-Mughīrah, al-‘Āṣ bin Wālī, al-Aswad bin ‘Abd al-Muṭallib and Umayyah bin Khalaf appeared in an event that became the cause for the revelation of surah al-Kāfirūn 109 (al-Qurtubi 2002, 20: 449-452). Besides, Jewish figures like Ka’ab bin al-Akhbar, ‘Abdullah bin Sallām, Tha’labah bin Sa’yah, Usaid bin Sa’yah and Asad bin

The discourse of Muslim scholars on religions is seen in general through the works on Islamic aqīdah or to be specific in the studies of religions. Based on observation, there are four categories of treatises by early Islamic scholars ‘Ilm al-Kalām which comprises the field of aqīdah and studies of religions: [1] specific writing (maqālah) as a form of criticism towards the belief that opposes the belief of the author for example the work titled al-Radd ‘alā al-Yahūd wa al-Naṣārā (Criticism towards Judaism and Christianity); [2] the collection of articles and writings (maqālāt) written with the purpose of discussing the forms of beliefs and their respective followers (intrareligious) or intra-Islam like Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhilāf al-Musāllāyīn (1999) by Abū al-Ḥassan al-As‘ārī (d. 324H), Muruj al-Dhahāb wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawhār (1973) by Abu al-Ḥassan al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 346H) and al-Farq bayn al-Firaq (2001) by Abū Mansūr al-Ǧabhdārī (d. 429H); [3] the collection of articles and writings (maqālāt) written with the purpose to discuss the forms of belief among the followers of religions (interreligious) for example Maqālāt ghayr al-Islāmiyyīn by Abū al-Ḥassan al-As‘ārī (d. 324H) and Taḥqīq mā li al-Hind min Maqālāh Maqūlah fī al-‘Aqīl wa Mardhālah (1983) by Abū al-Rayhān al-Ǧirīnī (d. 440H); and [4] the collection of articles and writings (maqālāt) written in discussing the forms of belief of followers of the same faith (interreligious) and other faiths (interreligious) or a combination of two or three categories for example Jumal al-Maqālāt by Abū al-Ḥassan al-As‘ārī (d.324H), al-Milal wa al-Nihāl (n.d.) by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahratānī (d. 429H) and al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Nihāl by Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī (d. 457H) (‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 1999: 27-30).
Some of the examples of the first category and among the earliest works found are *Al-Radd 'alā Aṣnāf al-Naṣārā* (2005) by ‘Alī bin Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 240H). Ibn Rabban was a former Nestorians Christian (*al-Naṣṭuriyyah*) who converted to Islam and later wrote a treatise criticising his old faith. His work is very influential that the later authors of *al-Jadī al-Islāmī-al-Masīḥ* (dialogue between Islam-Christianity) like al-Ḥassan bin Ayyūb (d. 378H) (2006), al-Ḡāfī ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415H) (n.d.) and Naṣr bin Yaḥyā al-Muṭabbib (d. 589H) (1986) referred to his work and quoted him a lot (Thomas 1983: 58; Ibn Rabban 2005: 37). The main theme of the work is the doctrine of divinity of *al-Masīḥ* (i.e. Jesus). Ibn Rabban argued that the doctrine of divinity of *al-Masīḥ* proves that *al-Masīḥ* is a human. Among the issues raised are [1] despite the Christians doctrines of Trinity, the Bible acknowledges the oneness of God; [2] *al-Masīḥ* says that his position is insignificant while the Christians make him a God; [3] *al-Masīḥ* is considered the Creator but ironically to the Christians, there is only one Lord the Creator; and [4] *al-Masīḥ* cannot be God because he experienced pain and death, and lived in a place during a certain period (Ibn Rabban 2005).

*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (2001) by Abū Ḍaʾūsir al-Māṭūrīdī (d. 333H) is one of the examples for the second category of treatises that discusses the forms of belief among the followers of different religions (*intrareligious*) and the sectarians within the Muslims (*al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah*). In general, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* can be classified as a treatise on Islamic ‘Aqīdah that discusses the themes of divinity, prophethood, predestination (*al-Qadā*’ and *al-Qadr*), major sins, faith and Islam. In talking about these related topics, al-Māṭūrīdī criticises atheism (*al-dahriyyah*), dualism (*al-thanawīyyah*), anthropomorphism (*al-tashbīḥ* and *al-taṣīm*) and other opposing doctrines or a combination of different religions namely Magianism or Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity. Similar style, theme and method can be detected in the Islamic ‘Aqīdah treatises like *Kitāb Tamhīd al-Awā’il wa Ṭakhlīṣ al-Dalā’il* (2016) by Al-Qāḍī Abū...
Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 403H) and the greatest work in this field like *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (1998) by Sa’d al-Dīn Al-Taftāzānī (d. 793H).

*Maqālāt ghayr al-Islāmiyyīn* by Abū al-Ḥassān al-Ash‘arī (d.324H) that had been mentioned of its existence by Ibn Taymiyyah (2006, 1: 191) is an example of the third category that discusses the form of belief systems of the people of different faiths (*interreligious*). However, the physical copy of the work as had been said by Ibn Taymiyyah (2006, 1: 191) and reiterated by Muḥammad Maḥy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (1999: 29-30) has never been found. The work of Abū al-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. 440H) titled *Taḥqīq mā li al-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-‘Aql aw Mardhūlah* (1983) provides an in-depth discussion on the religions, philosophies, cultures and civilisations of the Indians. The credibility of Abū al-Rayhān in discussing the religions of the Indian community cannot be doubted because of his mastery of Sanskrit language that enabled him to translate two holy scriptures of the followers of Sānk (i.e. Sāmkhya) and Biyātanjal (i.e. Patanjali) (al-Bīrūnī 1983: 16; Kamar Oniah 2003: 43, 48).

The work of Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahratānī (d. 429H) *al-Mīlāl wa al-Nihāl* (n.d.) is an example of the fourth category that discusses the forms of belief of the followers of different faiths (*interreligious*) and of the same faith (*intra-religion*). In his work, al-Shahratānī discusses two categories of the faiths followed by man and the first one is, *Arbāb al-Dīyānāt wa al-Mīlāl* that refers to the followers of the Faith of Islam (*al-fīraaq al-Islāmiyyah*), people of the book (i.e. Jews and Christians) and those resembles the people of the book and their sects. Second is *Ahl al-Ahwā’ wa al-Nihāl*, which refers to followers of Sabians, philosophers, atheists, star and idol worshippers, pagan Arab religion as well as Hinduism. In short, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Nihāl* is an encyclopaedia of the thoughts and religions of the humankind.

As for the works of the first category specifically and other categories in general, many of them were discovered through the writings of biography authors like Ibn al-Nadim (2009). The
works of the first category were mainly found in the form of manuscripts or their names were only found inscribed in the works of biography author or western researchers. In the west, Pontificio Istituto at Studi Arabi e Islamici in Rome (Gaudeul 1990) and Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute in Hatfield, Pennsylvania (Newman 1993) are among the organisations that collect and document the said documents. David Richard Thomas (1983) is among the western scholars who specifically discussed the works of Muslim scholars in his study titled Anti-Cristian Polemic in Early Muslim Theology. Meanwhile, among the Muslim researchers with significant contributions in recording, researching and documenting the related documents are ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Sharafi (1986: 8, 123-170), ‘Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī, Aḥmad Ḥijāzī Al-Siqā, Yāsir Abū Shabānah ‘Alī al-Rashīdī (2009) and Ramaḍan Muṣṭafā al-Dusuqī Ḥasanyan (2004).

**Studies on Religions in the Tradition of ‘Ilm Al-Kalām**

In the tradition of ‘Ilm al-Kalām, studies on religions are one of the two main discourses [1] discourses related to belief among the followers of the same religion (intra-religion); and [2] discourses related to belief among the followers of different religions (interreligions). In the studies of Uṣūl al-Dīn, the subject al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah is a discourse on the belief of followers of the same religion (intra-Islam or intrareligion) that discusses the ideologies of al-Qadariyyah, al-Jabariyyah, al-Mu’tazilah and others. Meanwhile, the discourse of al-Milal wa al-Nihal concerned the belief systems of different religions namely Judaism, Christianity and others. This tradition of ‘Ilm al-Kalām discourse for both categories of belief has started since the early appearance and development of ‘Ilm al-Kalām, which discussing the discourses of Muslim scholars on religions based on the early writings. Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash’arī (d.324H) specifically discussed the belief of the followers of the same religion (intra-religion) or intra-Islam in his work titled Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhilāf al-Muṣalliyyīn (1999). While Maqālāt ghayr al-Islāmiyyīn discusses the beliefs of the followers of different religions (interreligions)
and *Jumal al-Maqlāt* the work of al-Ash’arī, according to the notes of Ibn ‘Asākir (2014: 107), is a discourse concerning both categories of belief. Another example is *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl* (n.d.), or the work of al-Shahrastānī that discusses both categories of belief by putting the focus on *Arbāb al-Diyānāt wa al-Milal* as a discourse on the belief of the followers of the same religion (*intrareligion*) and *Ahl al-Ahwā’ wa al-Nihāl* discusses the belief of the followers from different religions (*interreligions*). The tradition of ‘Ilm al-Kalām discourse continues when later scholars of *Kalam* (Mutakalimun) wrote treatises on various themes related to the belief of the followers of the same religions or followers of different religions and the combination of both categories.

However, there has been perception that ‘Ilm al-Kalām and the studies of other religions are two separate disciplines. This perception is only relevant for someone who has interest in learning other religions via a modern science of religion known as Comparative Religion without the need to learn ‘Ilm al-Kalām. This position has no ground in the intellectual tradition of Islam since ‘Ilm al-Kalām is a science that discussed the belief of the followers of the same religion (*intrareligion*) and the belief of the followers of different religions (*interreligions*). In addition, learning Comparative Religion without the mastery of ‘Ilm al-‘Aqidah or to be more precise, ‘Ilm al-Kalām will make the endeavour less meaningful as the comparison will be only done in descriptive manner without analysis whatsoever.

The author views that the studies on religions in the Islamic intellectual tradition shares the scope and object of ‘Ilm al-Kalām based on the three basics which are: [1] meaning and purpose of ‘Ilm al-Kalām; [2] themes of ‘Ilm al-Kalām; and [3] method of ‘Ilm al-Kalām. The Meaning and purpose of ‘Ilm al-Kalām are based on the definition by al-Jurjānī (1998, 1: 40) and Ibn Khaldūn (2004, 2: 205), which are the consolidation of matters pertaining to ‘aqidah with trusted and valid evidences and the removal of any form of doubt. In contrast, we can look at the conclusion made by Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭi about the meaning of the term ‘Ilm
al-Kalām, which is the academic discourses related to issues or the basics in Islamic ‘Aqīdah (Al-Būtī 1399H: 17). The studies on religions such as al-Mīlāl wa al-Nihāl, Maqālāt ghayr al-Islāmiyyīn, al-Dirāsaah al-Muqāranah li al-Adyān dan ‘Ilm al-Rudūd ‘ala al-Adyān discusses the issues of ‘aqidah or belief among the religions (Al-Sharqawī 2008: 5; Līndah 2015: 321).

The theme of ‘Ilm al-Kalām detailed the discourse and issues discussed concerning belief systems between different religions. The oneness of Allah - ascribing partners to Allāh and the position of Creator-creation are the main themes of the discourses. Other themes include the issues of divinity (al-Ilahiyyāt), prophethood (al-Nubuwwāt) and mysticism (al-Sam ‘īyyāt). An example of a theme of discussion based on al-shahādatayn (in a discussion of belief between different religions) is to profess that there is no god except Allāh SWT and Muḥammad PBUH is His messenger. Meanwhile, an example from an Islam-Christianity discourse is the discussion concerning the negation of the claim that al-Masīḥ is God and the assertion that al-Masīḥ is a messenger and Muḥammad PBUH is the final prophet and messenger sent down to mankind. Other detailed themes of ‘Ilm al-Kalām are the 6 pillars of Iman (arkān al-Imān), which are the belief in Allāh SWT, the angels, the scriptures, the messengers, the Day of Judgement or eschatology as well as the predestination (al-Qadā’ and al-Qadr). In the discourse of ‘Ilm al-Kalām-Philosophy, the theme of discussion is generally related to issues concerning Allāh SWT or the God, man and the nature. This is also discussed by the scholars of IIm al-Kalām (Mutakalimun) as they discussed matters which concerning of substance, matter, mass and characteristics or the term ‘arad. To summarise, the different versions of themes in ‘Ilm al-Kalām include tawḥīd-shirk, Creator-creation, al-shahādatayn, 6 pillars of Iman and Allah-man-the nature are discussed by concerning the belief of different religions.

Next, the method of ‘Ilm al-Kalām is based on intelligence and revelation or the evidences of ‘aqliyyah and naqliyyah. ‘Aqliyyah is the main method in ‘Ilm al-Kalām because the source is the same for any man and religion. Different from ‘aqliyyah, the source and the position of
naqīyyah evidences varies in every religion. Therefore, the law which is derived from intelligence or the term 'the law of intelligence' (which has three types: obligatory, impossible and permissible which have been there early in the discussions in ‘Ilm al-Kalām) is also a universal method used among the religions. Meanwhile, the 'scientific' method is not a new approach and it is termed as 'the law of nature' whereby the sources are from the senses. The two terms 'scientific' and 'the law of nature' give the same connotation through the sensorial observation looking at the relationship between cause-effect or factor-consequence of the object or subject of a research. However, the sensorial observation alone does not give any academic benefit if it is not complemented with reasoning of the mind. In short, the 'scientific' method is the method of the intellect, where the sources of information coming from the senses that cannot be separated from the sources of the mind.

Conclusion

‘Ilm al-Kalām is a discipline that characterised as being defensive and offensive in discussing issues pertaining to the system of belief. ‘Ilm al-Kalām is a necessity for every sane person (mukallaf) because it provides him with reasoning credibility that save him from blind submission in the matters of faith. In addition, ‘Ilm al-Kalām helps to substantiate arguments that cast someone’s doubt. ‘Ilm al-Kalām is indeed a tool used in defending the sanctity of Islam from any form of distortion and confusion. It is also evident that ‘Ilm al-Kalām deals with discourses related to belief among the followers of a religion (intrareligion) and discourses related to belief of religions other than Islam (interreligions). In this regard, the role of ‘Ilm al-Kalām in the study of other religions should be promoted and sustained due to the subtlety of its objective, methods and legacies developed within the intellectual tradition of Islam.

References


KALAM AND THE DIVERSE APPROACHES AND METHODS OF IBN HAZM, AL-BIRUNI AND AL-SHAHRASTANI

Haslina Ibrahim
haslina@iium.edu.my

Introduction

Kalam, is one of the theological methods of inquiry that receives little attention from the contemporary Muslim scholarship. Kalam found its stronghold and sophistication in the works of the prominent theological schools during the tenth to twelfth century; represented by the Mu’tazilites, the Asharites and the Maturidites. Ibn Khaldun views that Kalam started off when Muslims theologians debated on the right interpretation of the Quranic verses over the issue of the divine attributes. The debates initially revolved around fundamental religious issues such as the doctrine of God, religious scriptures, free will and predestination. These have entailed debates on the action of God, the action of man and the problem of good and evil. Basil al-Taie emphasized that the debates escalated into a more sophisticated discourse which includes the concepts of space, time, motion, force, causality and other issues concerning physical sciences (jalal al-Kalam) and extended to daqiq al-Kalam (the theology of nature) which landed the mutakallimun into five common principles of nature.(Altaie, 2016, pp. 11–17)

Kalam has also been instrumental in the theological debates between Islam and other religions namely Christianity and Judaism. The use of Kalam by Muslim theologians have indirectly influenced Jewish and Christian theologians(I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 2) who articulated in defence of their religious doctrines such as John of Damascus (c. 675 or 676 – 4 December 749) in Fount of Knowledge, Saadia Gaon / Rabbi Sa’adiah ben Yosef (882/892 – 942), Maimonides/ Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), and Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 7 March 1274). From the Muslims side, the use of Kalam in defence of Islam is rather remarkable in the hands of prominent theologians such as Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Said ibn
Hazm (994-1064 CE), Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khawarizm al-Biruni (973-1048 CE) and Abu al-Fatih Muhammad ‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (1086-1158 CE).

Unfortunately, from the fifteenth century onwards, the influence of Kalam has gradually weakened. There have been many contributing factors to its downfall. From within the Islamic intellectual undertaking, there has been dominant interest in legalistic approaches and a sense of intellectual stagnation in knowledge discovery. Needless to say, the poor condition of the Muslim countries that struggled with political stability and colonization has negatively impacted the strive for intellectual quest. The following centuries witnessed a constant development in the western intellectual enterprise. The emergence of comparative religion and philosophy of religion at the brink of nineteenth century, has led to the diminishing role of theology (and Kalam being its distinctive method) in the study of other religions.

This chapter examines the role of Kalam in the Muslims’ study of other religions. Three works of Muslim theologians; Ibn Hazm (994-1064 CE), al-Biruni (973-1048 CE) and al-Shahrastani (1086-1158 CE) are selected to examine and to compare the diverse approaches they held in their works. The comparison is deem important in view of the rising interest and the yearning for an approach that will does justice to the traditional and modern approaches. In addition, modern scholars of religions have been critical to theology on the view that it is non-scientific and bias. Ironically, it was in theology that the bulk of Muslims’ legacies in the study of religions remain.

*Kalam, Theology and Normativity*

*Kalam*, literally means “speech” or “word” is frequently translated as dialectic theology, scholastic theology or speculative theology. It is a form of defensive apologia that establish religious beliefs by producing proofs and casting aside doubts.(Holt, 1990, p. 583) Richard M. Frank presented an extensive discussion on its definition in *The Science Of Kalam* to justify its
scientific character. (R. M. Frank, 1992, p. 7) *Kalam* is embedded with philosophical sophistication; rational and logical argumentations in a systematic manner to rationalise the basic beliefs of Muslims based on the Qur’an and the Sunna in the way they are read and understood by orthodox believers. (R. M. Frank, 1992, p. 22) Generally, Muslim scholars regard *Kalam* and theology as synonymous even though the former deals with much philosophical metaphysics hence some scholars discern that *Kalam*, is the science of a small number of truly expert theologians. (R. M. Frank, 1992, p. 37) This discernment is necessary as it rules out the Hanbalites from such a generalization. Richard M. Frank however concluded that being the fundamental science of Islam, *Kalam* is a theology in the full sense of the term. (R. M. Frank, 1992, p. 37)

*Kalam* combines rationality and revelation and it uses distinctive dialectical techniques for the analysis of religious and philosophical problems. Its conventional expression are “If he says….he should be told….“ or “He said…and I answered….“ (Stroumsa, 2003, p. 72) Another indicator can be found in the title of the work authored by the theologians whereby the expression “*al-radd*” which means “a refute”, has been frequently used. Jacques Waardenburg refers these works as polemical that it featured all Muslims’ treatises of other religions and most theological treatises in general.

*Kalam* discourse in the past was mostly championed by scholars from the three Abrahamic religions; the Muslims, Christians and Jews. Waardenburg perceived the contradictions as a rivalry and ideological battle. (Waardenburg, 2004, p. 23) In reality *Kalam* discourse was rich with intellectual debate on the core issues of religion ranging from the meaning of God and His Attributes, creation of the world, causality, free will and predestination, good and bad, freedom of man and others.
Among the essential features of Kalam is normativity. Normative in the sense that there are standards for judgment which are revelation and its framework, norms and laws. (Waardenburg, 1999, p. 57) In addition, Kalam relies heavily upon profound rational judgment and systematic argumentation. With regard to study of other religions, two types of judgment are involved; first is concerning their doctrines, rites and laws, secondly, is concerning the way of life, culture and society. (Waardenburg, 1999, p. 57) Waardenburg claimed that such is a form of normativity and it has turned theology into an apologetic and polemical discourse. This, according to him, has nurtured a sense of superiority that promotes the idea of religious truth exclusive to particular religion. Waardenburg charged that such an approach has implicated ‘relation with others in negative manner. (Waardenburg - 2004 - Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Their Religions.Pdf, n.d., p. 23) He also blamed that theology is responsible for nurturing a sense of fundamentalism that directly affect the relations between the Christians, Muslims and Jews. (Waardenburg - 2004 - Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Their Religions.Pdf, n.d., p. 32)

Given such an allegation, it posed a great challenge to advocate theology in its traditional set up. However, would it be objective to denounce theology and Kalam unsubstantiated with empirical evidences that prove its link with fundamentalism? The discourse of theology/kalam has survived for more than thirteen centuries and espouses the role of intellectual elites of the Abrahamic religions in search of religious meanings. The fact is, theology/Kalam is dialectical in nature. Hence it required more than intellectual credibility in addition to intellectual maturity for safeguarding the right understanding of religion. Nevertheless, it is worth to examine the extent to which the sense of polemical and biasness and how much normativity does harm to interreligious relation. Unfortunately, as of present, there has yet any empirical research done to substantiate such a claim.

**Modern Study of Religions and Objectivity**
Study of religions in the Western context emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. It marked a total transformation in the way religions were perceived and studied. Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) heralded the transformation as he urged for a scientific approach in the study of religions. His school known as Religionswissenschaft advocated for epistemological, ontological and axiological reform of the study. Epistemologically, the study should be empirical and to rule out any reliance on metaphysics. Ontologically, the study is a quest for understanding religions as they are instead of a truth-seeking pursuit. Axiologically the study denied any need for normative approach since the only value it adhered to is neutrality.

Religionswissenschaft in its loose translation known as Comparative Religion epitomized the ‘modern versus traditional’ approach in the study of religions. It is however interesting that Müller initiated his study on Rig Veda by adopting philological method focussing on the meaning of the texts instead of verifying its authenticity. This, he believed, is the trait of neutrality and objectivity that would relinquish the biasness of the traditional study of religions. Following the school of Religionswissenschaft there emerged multiple approaches in the study of religions. Yet every single approach was reduced to a particular forte claimed as scientific to name some of them; philosophical, psychological, anthropological, sociological, historical and phenomenological.

The modern approach is called methodological neutralism or methodological bracketing. In its best it is adopted by the phenomenologists who called it as epoche or epoch, allegedly to mediate between dogmatism and reductionism. (Nmah, 2010, p. 106) The issue at stake is, taking objectivity as the ultimate criteria when it is conceptualized as a descriptive and value-free notion. The belief is that someone who study religion should maintain objectivity by avoiding making judgment on the religion he studies. It is called a non-confessional approach whereby he should not be influenced by his belief or conviction, neither he should be bother of its truth or false. This is because, the scientific approach requires him to avoid from being
normative. Hence theological debate and metaphysical speculation are undesirable. This is because, modern study of religion propagates to understand religious phenomena as an aspect of human life and social reality and not to increase anyone’s piety or spirituality. (Nmah, 2010, p. 107)

There has been debate against objectivity as the ultimate criteria. Anis Malik Thoha confronted that objectivity has become a dogma in the study of religions whereas it is epistemologically and practically questionable. Thoha questioned if ‘value-freeness’ is possible given that religion (or anything in its like quasi religion, ideology, belief etc) is one of the major suppliers of human values. As a matter of fact, Thoha argued that the state of ‘value-free’ is in itself a form of value. (Thoha, 2009, p. 86) The struggle for an accurate understanding of objectivity has also been the critics of Biilent Senay who regarded its major proponent; the phenomenologist, as challenging against religious worldviews. (Antes et al., 2004, p. 77) A group of contemporary theologians have also deliberated on the dilemma of objectivity in the study of religions and they inspire for the establishment of a new Comparative Theology as alternative to the modern study of religions. (Berthrong & Clooney, 2012).

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi critics to objectivity is rather profound. He insisted that if religion is taken simply as any other geological and biological object, researchers may face the risk of inaccuracy in his research findings. Faruqi exerted that religion consists of facts of religious life. If by scientific we mean mere rational and empirical, there is a possibility that we would fail to grasp its meaning whereas religious meaning must be ‘lived’ in order to be appreciated. (Ismail Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967, pp. 4 & 5) In particular, what the phenomenologists regarded ‘religious phenomena’ are life facts that belongs to spiritual phenomena. Therefore, al-Faruqi suggested that at the most, objectivity can only be realized during two processes in the study of religions; firstly, during the compiling of religious facts whereby a temporal state of suspension of judgment (epoch) is adopted. At this state, he concurred that judgment should
be avoided. However, once the religious facts are compiled, the process of judgment should take place. Al-Faruqi was confident that a fair judgement can be done and it can only be realized with the aid of several universal principles which he called as universal rationality and proudly termed as meta-religion principles. As a matter of fact, he applied them in his study of Christianity, and it is well presented in his work titled Christian Ethics (Ismail Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967)

With such reform introduced by the modern study of religions, significant changes were affected to the discourse. As it subscribed to an indifferent position towards religious meaning and truth, theology and Kalam were side-lined. There was also a sense of dynamicity in the modern study of religions for it is no longer exclusive to theologians but extended to anthropologist, sociologist, phenomenologist, psychologist and others. Without doubt, such development has greatly contributed to the discourse. Nevertheless, theology deserved a fresher analysis from an alternative framework that is able to reconcile between the traditional and modern framework. The following discussion is an attempt towards such a reconciliation.

**Muslim Scholarship of Religions: The Traditional Model**

To start with, the author begins with her own intellectual tradition. Having explored into an extensive title of theological works, it is plain to see that the Islamic intellectual treatises on other religions were pioneered by the theologians. Three important points deserved to be highlighted. First, it was in theology that Muslim scholars first ventured into the study of other religions. Second, a Muslim who wishes to study other religions, will find that escaping from learning theology is impossible as it is foundational. Third, there is a gap between the traditional approach in the study of other religions compared to the modern approach.

A closer study on titles that deal with other religions reveal a more justified perspective on the methodologies adopted by the theologians. To illustrate this idea, the author offered to discuss
and compare the works of three theologians, Ibn Hazm (994-1064), Al-Biruni (973-1048) and Al-Shahrastani (1086-1158). Their works are selected as they were contemporaries who lived in different regions under the Islamic empire and that despite using different methodologies, they remain intact with the bigger framework of Islamic theology. In addition, they lived during the time when there was great interest in religions and secretarian within and outside Islam. Hence, diversity was inevitable across the empire as the people were composed of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-religious societies.

**Ibn Hazm**

Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Ahmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm (994-1064) was an Andalusian born Arab from Andalus. He knows Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac. He was living in the middle of the Andalusian pluralistic society that consists of the Arabs, Berbers, Slavs, Tentons, and indigenous Hispanics i.e. Mozarabs (Arabized Christians), Muwalladun (children of Arab fathers by Hispanic, Slavic or other non-Arab mothers) and Mawali (Hispanic and Visigothic Muslims). There was also a sense of influence from the Greek thought, Arabic culture and Persian intellectual.

Ibn Hazm is known for his classical biblical criticism titled *Al-Fasl Fi Al-Milal Wa-Al-Ahwa` Wa-Al-Nihal* translated as *The Book of Sects and Creeds*. The title (*al-Fasl*) carries the meaning of ‘distinction between true and false and if read (*al-Fisal*) carries the meaning of compilation of sections and chapters.(Aasi, 2007, p. 80) In this systematic treatment, he studied and examined Judaism, Christianity, the Magians, the Sabians and Muslim sects. Among the theological issues raised in his critics to the Bible are abrogation, prophethood and Incarnation.

Ibn Hazm, is also known for subscribing to literalism. As a typical Zahirite, it is alleged that he was bound to textual, literal and linguistic approaches in his critics to the Torah and Bible.(M. Ahmad et al., 2011, p. 27) In explaining his method, he clarified that the evidences
were acquired from sensorial premises directly or indirectly (irad al-barahin al-muntijah an al-muqaddimat al-hissiyah min qurbin aw min bu'd) and this is to ensure that the data collected are authentic enough. He has also depended solely on the verbal description (bayan al-lafdz) instead of exploring into its intricate meaning. However, some believed that his literalist approach was limited to his legal interpretation of the Islamic law.\(^1\) This is fairly acceptable because al-Fasl is a blend of rational method of whereby Ibn Hazm used a lot of common sense, logical and systematic dialectical method along with the empirical method through observation and interview with the religious adherents.

His major critic to the Torah was that it is lack of coherence, authorship and authenticity, and that the doctrine of divinity was contrived by the elders of the church has no scriptural basis. To illustrate his style of argumentation, it would be useful to depict one of the theological issues he posed against Judaism. He started off with descriptions of the five Jewish divisions/secretarian prevalent during his time (Samaritans, Sadducees, Karaites, Rabbanites, al-Isawiyyah) which he derived personally from the Jewish respondents. Based on the data gathered, he found that the Jews can be divided into two on the issue of abrogation of the scripture; those who totally denied abrogation and those who accepted but denied its possibility. The reason for the Jewish dismissal of abrogation is because they believed that it is impossible for God, to command something and later to forbid it. In his refutation to them, Ibn Hazm said;

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\text{We do not know any other evidence for them besides this, and this is the weakest misrepresentation which has nothing to stand on. The reason is that the one who ponders over all of the actions of Allah Most High, and all of His rulings and commands in this world, will be certain of the falsity of this opinion of theirs. The reason is that Allah Most High gives life, and then gives death, and then gives life. He transfers power from people whom He honoured and then dishonoured, to a humbled people whom He honours. He bestows whatever He}
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\(^1\) (M. Ahmad et al., 2011, p. 245) He believed that people should obey the law of God in literal sense, hence he rejected legal rulings based on analogy, principals of personal evaluation, and consensus of scholars.
wills of good and bad character upon whomever He wills. “He will not be asked about what He does, and they will be asked” [Qur’an, 21:23].

In his refutation, Ibn Hazm confronted that the Jews are incapable of speculating the action of God as it is evident from the Qur’an that His actions are beyond human inquiries. Ibn Hazm then confronted the Jews for not being consistent in their rejection against abrogation as he found that there are instances of abrogation in the Torah. He alluded to the verses which reports that Jacob married Leah and Rachael, but this was prohibited later in Leviticus 18:18. Another example is that in Deuotonomy 20:15-18 Moses was commanded by God to destroy the cities and the living beings of the area of Jordan and Palestine. The inhabitants however deceived Moses and his followers and offered them a treatise of peace. Later, Moses discovered the trick, but he decided not to punish the people. (Joshua 9:27). In another instance, Torah reported that God changed his mind as in Exodus 32:9-14 the people of Moses, in his absence they had taken a golden calf as their god and worshipped it. God has told Moses not to interfere as he intended to torture them all. Moses then appealed on behalf of his people and this has made God changed his mind.

Ibn Hazm’s al-Fasl is one of the examples of the theological and polemical treatises of other religions. However, in terms of the reliability of data, he clearly acknowledged that he had sought them from the primary source that was from the Jewish respondents. He had also adopted a critical approach when analyzing the data. He wrote his critics in confrontational manner especially to Judaism and Christianity as he believed the two religions have parted from the original teaching of their religions.

Al-Biruni

Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Khwarizm Al-Biruni (973-1048) from Khwarizm near modern Khiva in Uzbekistan, Central Asia. He was well verse in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and probably Greek. He published an exhaustive account of empirical examination on the
Hindus tradition in *Kitab al-Althar* and *Kitab Tahqiq ma li al-Hind*. In comparison to Ibn Hazm, Al-Biruni, was rather emphatic in his approach and it is a mixture of sympathy and criticism, fair and without prejudice. (Florence et al., 2007, p. 132) He had also combined between empirical and philological approach in trying to understand the Brahmins by learning the Hindus’ sacred text from the Brahmins themselves. To realize his methods, he had to learn Sanskrit and study Patanjali which he finally managed to translate in Arabic. He denied that he subscribed to an antagonistic approach as he plainly said that he intended to provide historical record of the religion. He claimed to present the religions of the Hindus as they are.

Al-Biruni intended to conduct a fair study of the Hindus and its tradition; an aim made obligated in the modern study of religion. In fact, he acknowledged that one of his motivation in understanding the Hindus was due to the hostile relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus. He conducted field observation in certain Indian regions gathering the data from learned practicing Hindus as well as the non-learned Hindus. His quest for objectivity demanded him to avoid making unfounded imputations against the Hindus regardless of their antagonistic perspective towards Islam, and he regarded this as part of his obligation as Muslims, to let the Hindus to believe the way they wish and to defend it at their very best. (Latief, n.d., p. 30)

Al-Biruni discussed the Hindus belief system, metaphysics, cosmological doctrines, mythical heritages as well as the history and tradition of earlier nations and generations (*akhbar al-umam al-salifah wa anba’ al-qurn al-madiyyah*). (Latief, n.d., p. 29) When discussing the notion of God of the Hindus, he was able to acknowledge the different ways God is perceived among the educated and the uneducated Hindus. The former was more inclined to the abstraction ideas of God whilst the latter relied more on the sensual perceptions. In his effort to explain the abstract idea of God he had referred to Patanjali. The sacred text described God as eternal, unique, independent from human action, unattainable to human thought, beyond any possible form and
eternal. He cited from Bhagavad Gita that God of the educated was also described as having no beginning and end, has total freedom in his will and action, and he is beyond any classification. Al-Biruni had also cited from Samkhya that explained the action of God. On the other hand, the concept of God to the uneducated Hindus was rather anthropomorphic. Al-Biruni indirectly criticized this by invoking some prayers that reject any form of association to God. For an instance, when the Hindus described that the god was twelve fingers long and ten fingers broad, he uttered “Praise to be God who is far above measure and number!” When responded to the classification of gods and beings and their names as told in Samkhya, al-Biruni justifies the reason that Muslims were not able to comprehend such classification is because there are logical contradictions. It is plain that al-Biruni had also resorted to critical analysis when making conclusion to his study and because of this Hilman Latief acknowledged that al-Biruni works is a typical work of using the framework of Muslim mediaeval scholars.

Al-Shahrastani

Abu al-Fatih Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim Al-Shahrastani (1086-1158) was from Shahrastani. Typical to many other Muslim scholars of his time, he received his earlier education in Islamic sciences ranging from Qur’anic studies, Hadith, Fiqh, Kalam, Usul al-Fiqh, and Tasawwuf. Later in his life he acquainted himself with Asharite Kalam and philosophy. Some scholars sense that the influence of Asharite theology is quite plain in al-Milal and the main reason for this was mainly because prior to al-Milal he has authored Kitab Nihayat al-Iqdam fi al-Ilm al-Kalam, a work in defense of Asharite theology. When presenting the Muslim sects he divided them based on four fundamental principles in theology namely, the attributes and unity of god, Qadar and justice, promise and warning and finally, revelation and reason, apostleship and imamate.(Shahrastānī, 1984, p. 11) In the context of study of religions, He is regarded a
remarkable Muslim heresiographer who managed to publish the first every encyclopedia of religion that covers the religions, traditions, secretarian and philosophical ideas.

In comparison to al-Biruni, al-Shahrastani did not engage in field observation but rather gathered the data from several available sources of information. Lawrence however claimed that al-Shahrastani failed to acknowledge the sources in his work. Due to this, he was criticized by A.J. Arberry who said that he simply quoted from older writers without acknowledging them. (F. Y. Ahmad, 2012, p. 87) Lawrence postulated that he might have referred to the work of Zurqan, however he also thought that that link between the two is difficult to establish. (Latief, n.d., p. 29) Al-Shahrastani claimed that he was adopting a neutral approach in studying religions which he regarded as without favour and prejudice. He said he was not ever bother to identify the correct from the error teaching. This is because he believes that truth is plain and lies can easily be detected by human mind. (Aasi, 2007, p. 12; Latief, n.d., p. 12)

Al-Shahrastani work represented one of the earliest typologies and taxonomies of religions. In broader manner he divided religion (al-milal) from school of thought/ideologies/philosophies (al-nihal). He described and classified religions, traditions, cults as well as ideologies. He differentiated religions with and without scripture and law. However, he seemed not interested in examining religious practices and festivals. He was more interested in the divisions of theological doctrines and religious sects. He divided religions into monotheism, polytheism and other belief systems including philosophers. He regarded polytheism existed before the messenger was sent or because man deviated from the right teaching. He viewed that anthropomorphism has led men into polytheism. He alluded this to the narratives on the image of God in Torah of which God offered handshake, descended upon Mount Sina and established on the throne as a permanent resident.
In another instance, he presented the Hindus Idol worshippers and the spiritual worshippers as practicing idolatry. When presenting their system, he stated that those idols were merely representatives of god. Indirectly he criticized their system as he said:

“we are absolutely certain that a rational person cannot put his hand to a piece of wood and chisel it into a form and then believe that it is both his God and his Creator and the God of all; for its existence was preceded by the existence of its maker, and its form created by the craft of its chiseler.” (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 52)

The above citation indirectly questioned for the rationale of worshipping the idols crafted by the idol makers. Even when one is assuming that the idols were to satisfy their needs, this, according to Shahrastānī, is tantamount to asserting divinity to the idols. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 52) It is interesting to find the method he used when presenting the system of beliefs and the order of worship of the idol worshippers. He for example described them one by one, starting from the real idol named Mahakala, a tree idol named Barkashikīya, a woman idol named Dankiniya, and idolatry of nature such as water named Jalakahakiya, and fire named Aknīwātrīyali. In presenting them he refrained from making judgment. Rather he explained them in detail. As a matter of fact, sometimes he even explained the rationale held by the worshippers in taking those idols as their gods. Mahakala for example is worshipped for her praiseworthy and objectionable qualities. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 53) Water is the basis of every living. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 54) On the other hand, fire being the finest in body and nature is the most needed substance. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 55)

Due to the decent presentation of the religions of the Hindus, Lawrence regarded that his exposition is not a sui generis discourse on real or imagined aspects of Indian religions. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 265) However it is also interesting to see the way
Al-Shahrastānī managed to incorporate the Kalam approach in his work. Lawrence had brilliantly traced the elements of Kalam in the way Shahrastānī crafted his work. First, when making comparison between the Hindus rationalist (Barahima) concept of Vedanta to that of Neoplatonism, Shahrastānī exhibited a profound expertise on the latter being on of the topics discussed in Kalam. Secondly, when presenting the Hindus groups, he started of with the Sabians as a group that has lost in a mythical debate with the Hunafa’/Hanif. Hence every other groups within the Hindus cannot be understood descriptively or theologically except with reference to the earlier Sabian. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 266) Thirdly, when presenting the doctrine of metempsychosis, he also relates the doctrine to the Sabians. (Lawrence & Shahrastānī, 1976, p. 267)

The Traditional Model: Diverse in Methods, Unified in Framework

Taking Ibn Hazm, Al-Biruni and Al-Shahrastānī as models, the paper attempted to demonstrate the diverse methods in the study of religions by means of traditional discipline which is theology under kalam unified framework. These theologians have developed distinctive theological methods with the aids of Kalam and at the same time they feel obligated to gather authentic data on the religions under study. Comparing their works, one can discern the intensity and the extent to which they are ‘polemical’ particularly in their analysis and critics to the religions.

The works of these theologians showed that there are three phases involved in the study of religions. The first phase is during the collection of data of the religion under study. The second phase is the presentation of the data. And finally, the third phase is the analysis of the data. When it come to the sources, Ibn Hazm, Al-Biruni and Al-Shahrastānī declared that they remained open during the first and the second phase. Even though Shahrastānī has been criticized for making his reference anonymous he made it clear from the very beginning that he only quoted from the original sources, referred to the writings of the groups under study and
only followed their terminology after he had become acquainted with their methods, basic principles and conclusions. (Shahrastānī, 1984, p. 31) In terms of the sources, the theologians have resorted to the works written by the earlier scholars. They also subscribed to empirical data by means of observation and interview methods. As a matter of fact, these theologians had adopted restricted protocols when implementing the latter methods hence their respondents be it the learned or the public were practitioners of religions.

The issue raised pertaining to the works of the theologians and the kalam method revolved mainly on the criticism they made on religions. This took place at the third phase of the study when they criticize the religions and its' teachings. The intensity of their criticism may be different from one to another. For example, among the three, Ibn Hazm was the firmest in his critics. Al-Shahrastani made his critics rather implicit while Al-Biruni tried to be emphatic in his critics.

However, it is the last phase of the study that disturbed the western orientalist as well as modern scholars of religions. Among them are Wilfred Cantwell Smith, David Thomas, Jean Jacques Waardenburg and Camilla Adang. A more profound work that analyse this issue is excellently presented in a doctorate research titled The Other Within and the Self Without: Encounters of Muslim and Western Traditions in the Study of Religion. (Akram, 2012) The author compares between the Muslim and the Western study of religions in view of the distinct characteristics employed by them in the sense that could there be any possibilities of reciprocity. The author found that despite efforts done by both parties for reciprocity, there exists the need for maintaining 'self-identity' hence the ambivalence between the two traditions will continue to exist.

As a matter of fact, in 1993, Suleman Dangor had explicitly depicted the criteria that shaped the identity of Muslim scholarship of religions those are the objectives, the historical factor and the approaches. (Dangor, 1993) The main objective of any study in Islam according to him, goes
beyond mere understanding but rather to serve people. The relationship between the two (Muslim and western) discourses across the human history has certain impact on their nature. Having said that Dangor believed that orientalism has greatly challenged the Muslim scholarship at large. With regard to the approaches, Muslim scholarship in general have problems with the naturalistic approach in modern sciences. Such an approach failed to grasp the spiritual element imbued in religions whereas in the Muslim discourse it does not only shapes its framework, but most importantly became the anchor of its normativity.

Embarking on the idea of ‘self-identity’ we have so far presented a blend of methods adopted by the three scholars. Such a blended methods were feasible as the scholars were fully aware of when, how and why they were used. For example, when gathering and presenting the data on religions, the three scholars reported that they tried to be as accurate as possible in compiling and transmitting them in their works. As far as modern study of religions is concern, this is known as neutrality and objectivity. However, as they reach the analytical part of the research the three scholars employed a different approach in presenting their judgment. Ibn Hazm was bold and tacit, whereas al-Biruni was more emphatic in his criticism and al-Shahrastani preferred reverse psychology approach when trying to appeal to his readers’ common sense. All in all, the three of them went beyond mere descriptive approach to using the ultimate unified framework which is the kalam framework in analysing the data on religions. Indeed, it is the framework that contradicted the non-confessional framework embraced by the modern study of religions.

**Conclusion**

The paper had attempted to underscore the strength of theology and the Kalam tradition in the Muslim study of other religions which is paradoxical to the modern methods and approaches. The disparity between the two discourses is inevitable as they are contextually shaped by their ontological, epistemological and axiological definition that give meanings to their identities.
However, in terms of possibility of reconciliation, it is without exaggeration to state that the Muslim discourse is likely susceptible to the idea. This is evident in the combination of methods employed by the three scholars; textual, empirical, and rational guided with revelation. Even when judgment is passed, it was communicated in different tones yet remain faithful to the Truth.

It is almost impossible for a genuine Muslim scholar in the study of religions to neglect the ‘Islamic identity’ of the discourse whereby bulk of classical works in the Muslim study of religions subscribed to such identity. Ironically, he may applaud the modern study of religions, but he will be left with two options, either to suppress his inner quest for the meaning of knowledge or truth or simply to turn it off for the sake of being neutral and unbiased. The question now is, how can polemical approach benefit the scholarship in particular and human in general? To answer this, one need to track down the root of the term polemical itself. It was introduced in the late nineteenth century by modern scientist of religions who tried to do away with theology. Were they resentful to religion? This is way beyond the scope of our analysis. Nevertheless, the fact is, they have mistreated the contributions of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish theologians who bravely participated in a dynamic intellectual theological discourse during their time. Interestingly, the intellectual encounter between the three religious scholars took place during the golden age of Islam whereby knowledge was most valued and physical mobility was made at ease from one place to another. The Abbasid period marked the peak of intellectual dynamicity and it was a typical pluralistic nation given the physical inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious encounter. Hence the Muslim, the Jewish and the Christian theologians came into contact with each other intellectual tradition and theology in particular was one of the shared traditions. Indeed, as far study of religions is concerned, it was the dawning period, and theology was the foundation of the discourse. Given such a historical encounter, the author had also demonstrated the subtlety and the diversity of the *Kalam*
methods and approaches in the works of the selected Muslim theologians. The paper therefore concludes that such diversity of methods and approaches is inevitable in the intellectual study of religions. *Kalam*, being the foundation, is a science loaded with intellectual sophistication, and deserve a place in the Muslim contemporary scholarship of religions.

References


Introduction

The September 11 tragedy was the turning point for a global campaign on ‘war on terror’. After almost two decades, the aftermath of this campaign on Muslims and Islam is more profound. The emergence of ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’ or ISIS, an idea associated to an extremist group called Daesh, has further tarnished the image of Islam. This group has distorted the original concept of an Islamic state thus worsening the Middle East crises. (Hashim, 2014) In response to this, many writings have been produced from various perspectives in defence of Muslims and Islamic teachings.

This chapter continues the discourse mentioned above in light of Islam and dialogue, specifically aiming to answer two main questions: how has the concept of dialogue been portrayed in the Qurʾān? Had Prophet Muḥammad been dialogic in his interaction? The answers to these questions will provide the relevant data for developing a theoretical framework for inter-religious dialogue. On top of it, this chapter hopes to explore on the benefits of inter-religious dialogue particularly to improve the image of Islam and Muslims at this very challenging time.

Etymological Issue: The Terms ‘Jadal’ and ‘Hiwār’ in the Qur’an

Modern philosophers define dialogue as “…a way of exploring the roots of the many crises that face humanity today” (Bohm, 2013), “genuine exchange from communication to communion” (Buber & Smith, 2002, p. 5). However, in the Qurʾān, Arabic words that are synonymous to ‘dialogue’ are ‘muḥāwarah’ (root word: ḥa-ra), which means to return (Jirari, 2000). The basis of this definition is the meaning of the word ‘yaḥār’, the derivation of the word ḥāra, in the Qurʾān, 82:14. Yaḥār here means return. On the other hand, ‘muḥādalah’
The word \textit{ja-da-la} and its derivatives appear more frequently, that is 27 times, than the word \textit{ha-wa-ra} and its derivatives, which are mentioned only three times. 

LITERALLY, IBN MANZUR DEFINED THE WORD \textit{muḥāwarah} AS THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND SPEECH IN A CONVERSATION OR DISCOURSE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE WORD \textit{mujādalah}, through its root \textit{jadal}, may bring a negative connotation – dispute or quarrel – in addition to its neutral meaning – countering an argument with an argument.

However, the word \textit{jidāl} is closer to quarrel, even though originally it means dialogue, it can also be associated with argument or quarrel.

According to Ibn Manẓūr, \textit{mujādalah} is a debate or discussion, and an argumentation against falsehood. The debate happens when a person attempts to overcome falsehood by demonstrating the truth. 

Faḍl Allāh added that this debate takes place against the background of conflicting ideologies and doctrines. He further suggested that the word \textit{jadal} appears more repetitively in the Qur’an because of external and internal challenges faced by Islam throughout its cause. The challenges include ideological and traditional challenges. Simultaneously, internal challenges from Islam itself, an intellectual challenge to improve one’s conviction from time to time is present. The challenges force Muslims to explain themselves and the teachings of Islam while being under pressure. He considered a negative connotation of \textit{jadal}, with a tendency to ‘wrangle aimlessly’ as a new connotation of the term, which evolves through time.

Faḍl Allāh’s justification is considered acceptable to a certain extent, but lacks of accuracy. Upon a closer analysis of Qur’ānic verses which mention the word \textit{jadal} or its derivatives, it is discovered that most of the times, the words \textit{jadal} and its derivatives are mentioned in order to warn readers against it. This is because in most cases, disputes and argumentations bear more
vices than virtues. Moreover, as appeared repetitively in history, disputes and wrangling argumentations were barriers to guidance and many other virtues. ‘Jadal’ was in fact the common response of the previous nations, whom the Prophets invited to Tawhid.

From the perspective of daʿwah or invitation to Islam, Hammam Saʿid suggested that daʿwah cannot be carried out through argumentation. This is because the target of daʿwah is people’s heart, which is to gain people’s interest to Islam. Only when messages of Islam are clearly explained and reach the hearts, people may become convinced and accept the invitation. Argumentation, on the other hand, only brings about satisfaction for winning verbal exchange.

(Saʿid, 2010, p. 25) In this relation, Hammam quoted Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī who interpreted the verse 125 of Chapter 16 from the Qur’an, which saying that, “al-jadal or argumentation is not part of invitation to Islam, but its motive is other than invitation; that is to make other people dumbfounded. (Possibly) for that reason, Allāh does not say (in the verse) ‘Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in the best form of argumentation’; but He separates jidāl from invitation.” (Al-Razi, 2000, p. 287)

On the other hand, the word ḥiwār provides a wider meaning as compared to jadal. (Fadl Allah, p.37) It refers to clarification of an idea through questioning and answering, without any pressure to win the debate involved. Technically, al-Jirari defines ‘ḥiwār’ or ‘tabāwur’ as “examining, responding to another and contributing ideas in a discourse.” (Al-Jirari, 1997) As such, al-Jirari explained the word of ‘ḥiwār’ as involves two parties, which mutually respond to each other. (Al-Jirari, 1997) Muḥammad Abu Nimer (Abu Namer & Shafiq, 2007, p. 31) simplified that ḥiwār denotes conversation between individuals, groups and religions, whereas mujādalah refers to any attempt to convert others, based on interfaith relations between Islam and other religions. Apparently, Abu Nimer’s concept of mujādalah is different from Hammām, which is backed by Al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the concept. The former perceived mujādalah as a means to convert others, whereas the latter assumed it as a means of defence.
Etymological analysis for concepts related to dialogue in the Qur’an indicates the difference between the terms ‘ḥiwār’ and ‘jidāl’. On another note, while there is no definite meaning of dialogue, scholars generally agree that where there is a conversation taking place, communication and exchange of information or ideas happen. Through this simple process, people from different backgrounds develop mutual understanding and respect. In conclusion, this process, which is called dialogue, is more accurately expressed through the term ḥiwār, rather than jidāl. For that reason, I will employ the term ‘ḥiwār’ and ‘mubāwarah’ in this chapter, not ‘jidāl’. The concept of dialogic thinking will thus be represented by the term ‘al-taḏkār al-ḥiwārī’.

**Dialogic Nature of the Qur’ān**

Regardless of different views concerning the terms jidāl and ḥiwār, which might have been employed interchangeably through decades, when one reads the Qur’ān, he will notice that the Qur’an adopts a dialogical style. The reader is invited to converse with its Author, whom the Muslims believe to be the Supreme Being – Allāh, the Originator and the Creator of the whole universe. The dialogical nature is reflected in the first chapter which is al-Fatihah, of which Allah introduce to the Reader of Him as the Guide. In the second chapter which is al-Baqarah, He started off with a mnemonic phrase that invites for further reading with His conversational style.

**Dialogic Elements of Qur’ānic Verses**

Even without the assistance of Qur’ānic exegesis to explain the verse in depth, by reading the Qur’ān directly, one may find that the presentation of the Qur’ān is dialogic. For instance, the first revelation to Prophet Muḥammad pbuh in the cave of Ḥirā’, was ‘iqrā’ which means ‘read!’ . It is directed to him in the form of instruction, as a person talking to another. This is the style of the Qur’ān when it approaches human being, whilst introducing to the Creator, “Read! In the name of thy Lord Who creates. Creates man from a clot. Read: And your Lord
is the Most Bounteous, Who teaches by the pen, Teaches man that which he did not know.” 
(Qur’an, 96:1-5) Although this chapter of the Qur’an is in the form of instruction, it still depicts a form of communication between two beings. Thus, a simple element of dialogue, that is communication, still exists.

Similar style was adopted to address mankind, reminding the readers about their very existence in this life, “O man! What has made you careless concerning your Lord, the Bountiful; Who created you, then fashioned, then proportioned you? Into whatsoever form He will, He casts you.” (Qur’an, 82:6-8) In this example, the Author addresses the reader, “O man!”. Such an address shows that interaction is initiated and the effect that it brings about is as if it interrupts man from anything that busies himself with and resulting the man to heed to the call, then directing his focus on the message. Even if he does not respond to the call verbally, the call has made it sufficient to let him ponder on the message brought about, then think and make some positive change.

In some places, the verses of the Qur’an carry along questions and the use of the Arabic word ‘ka’, a pronoun in the end of the verb, which means ‘you’, such as in these verses: “The (Day) of Noise and Clamour: What is the (Day) of Noise and Clamour? And what will explain to you what the (Day) of Noise and Clamour is?” (Qur’an, 101:1-3) The use of questions accompanied by the word ‘ka’ or ‘you’ indicate that the Qur’an communicates its message to another being, who can understand the message. Question may stimulate eagerness for the reader so he/she will take heed to the rest of the message. This form of communication is also another feature of dialogic style of the Qur’an.

The element of dialogue is most noticeable when the first chapter of the Qur’an (al-Fātiḥah or the Opening) is recited hand-in-hand with a hadīth that interprets it. According to the hadīth, which was recorded by Muslim, Abū Hurayrah said that the Prophet said:

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“Allāh, the Exalted, said, ‘I have divided the prayer (Al- Fātiḥah) into two halves between Myself and My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for.’ If he says, ‘In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise and thanks be to Allāh, the Lord of existence.’ Allāh says, ‘My servant has praised Me.’ When the servant says, ‘The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.’ Allāh says, ‘My servant has glorified Me.’ When he says, ‘The Owner of the Day of Recompense.’ Allāh says, ‘My servant has glorified Me,’ or ‘My servant has related all matters to Me.’ When he says, ‘You (alone) we worship, and You (alone) we ask for help.’ Allāh says, ‘This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he sought.’ When he says, ‘Guide us to the straight path. The way of those on whom You have granted Your grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray,’ Allāh says, ‘This is for My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he asked for.”’ (Sahih Muslim: no. 365)

The ḥadīth demonstrates very clearly the dialogic nature of Qur’ānic verses. The first chapter is regarded as a prayer, whereby after each verse is recited, a response follows. This is similar to the process of dialogue or conversation which involves two parties, passing on messages, while the other is listening then responding. This is the dialogic style of the Qur’ān. The dialogic style of the Qur’ān is not only confined to verse-by-verse basis, or chapter-by-chapter basis. Apart from presenting dialogical verses and chapters, there are also significant issues being brought up in the Qur’ān by means of dialogue between two.

**Dialogues as a Means for Messages on Fundamental Issues**

In the Qur’ān, dialogues between Allāh and other beings serve, first and foremost, as an insight pertaining to fundamental issue – the question of identity of human beings against other created beings. Thus, in the second chapter of the Qur’ān (al- Baqarah or the Cow), the dialogue between Allāh and a group of angels is illustrated. In the dialogue, which took place prior to the life of human being on earth, the angels were being informed of Allāh’s plan to appoint a ‘representative’ on earth. It seemed that the ‘representative’ was not from the same class as the angels, hence they argued about the plan.
The ground for the argument posed by the angels was due to their presumption about the creature, a human being. They stated that human being, which is about to be appointed, was known as the one who is prone to shed blood. On the other hand, they assumed that they were better off than human being. Allāh responded, by indicating that His knowledge encompasses things unknown to them. Then, He taught the names of all things to the first among human beings, who was named Ādam, the one who previously had been the subject of critic. It was knowledge that made him distinguished from the angels, (Qur‘ān, 2:30-31) apart from the Spirit of Allāh that breathed into him. (Qur‘ān, 15:29) When Ādam became distinguished, Allāh ordered the angels to prostrate to him. All the angels obeyed the order, except one who refused, known as Iblīs. (Qur‘ān, 2:32-34) This dialogue indicates that human being is honoured above the angels and other beings. Because of knowledge, he is entrusted to be a ‘representative’ of Allāh on earth in order to establish His commands. It is through dialogue between Allāh and angels, when the fundamental issue on the creation of man is highlighted.

The significance of the issue is observed from the repetition of almost similar dialogue in the seventh chapter of the Qur‘ān. Here, the dialogue is between Allāh and Iblīs. It describes in depth the ground of Iblīs’ refusal to prostrate to Ādam, by relying on perception that his origin is superior vis-à-vis Ādam’s. This remark has given a great impact for Iblīs since Allāh expelled him from heaven since there is no room for arrogance therein. Thereafter, he became a disdained creature. But before Iblīs left, instead of offering apologies, he requested for a reprieve till the day of resurrection. Allāh allowed him the reprieve. In response, Iblīs blamed Allāh for letting him to go astray and additionally declared that he shall ‘lurk in ambush’ Ādam and descendants in order to keep them away from the right path, and that he shall use all means to deprive them from gratefulness. Allāh expelled Iblīs for the second time, announcing that Iblīs and those who follow him shall fill in the hellfire. (Qur‘ān: 7:12-18)
Continuing the two fundamental issues mentioned above is another dialogue between Allāh and the descendants of Ādam. The issue is concerning the confession made by Ādam’s descendants, which defines the relationship between themselves and Allāh – that nothing else, but Allāh, is their Lord. This dialogue was brought up in on the Day of Judgment, Ādam’s descendants will not resort to the excuse of being reckless of the confession, claiming that the fault of associating the Supreme Being with others in His Lordship is not theirs, but their ancestors who came before them. (Qur’ān, 7:172)

The examples of three fundamental issues are presented in the forms of dialogue. The first dialogue discusses the status of human being against other creatures and indicates his specialty. The second dialogue demonstrates the form of challenges that human being will have to face in his life and the consequence of failing to overcome the challenge. Finally, the third dialogue defines the Lord-servant relationship between the Supreme Being and human being. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of dialogue as a medium to deliver these essential messages indicates its importance in the communication of Islam and its teaching.

**Humanistic Messages of the Qur’ān that Invites for Dialogue**

The fundamental messages highlighted in the Qur’ān through dialogues define the purpose and nature of human existence and his life on this earth. These messages connect human beings with the metaphysical realm in the vertical relationship, emphasising that Allāh is the Lord of humans and other beings. This vertical relationship does not conclude in itself since the horizontal life, which involves relationship between human being and his/her fellow beings, is another fundamental issue in the Qur’ān.

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2 The use of this word in this thesis refers to the general and literal meaning of the word, unless stated otherwise. It does not denote the technical meaning of the word as defined by the Cultural Dictionary, i.e. “The term *secular humanist* is applied to someone who concentrates on human activities and possibilities, usually downplaying or denying the importance of God and a life after death.” *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. 3rd Ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.
First and foremost, the Qur’an invites human beings to deal with diversity, which is caused by either diverse nationality or tribal background, or both of them; by mutually knowing each other very well. The concept of knowing each other is known as ta’āraf, as mentioned explicitly in the Qur’an:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (li ta’ārafu). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allāh is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allāh has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (Qur’an, 49:13)

The verse implies that communication is inevitable. To know and understand each other better, human beings from different backgrounds, upbringings, cultures and traditions have to communicate with each other. Apparently, there are various means of communication, whereby a simple conversation or dialogue is one of them.

Another implication of the verse is equality of human beings before God, regardless of their physical outlook. The implication is a form of appreciation to individuals that put them at par with one another, not bounded by their rank in social class, caste or the likes. As such, the Qur’anic message prepares the ground for interaction by boosting every human being’s self-esteem, then appreciating his self-identity and simultaneously respecting that of the others.

The only factor that elevates the honour of a man is his righteousness (al-taqwā), which nobody has the rights to claim as having attained this state. (Qur’an, 53:32) The fact that nobody can claim his righteousness does not hinder him from striving to be a righteous one. For that reason, there is a strong encouragement to meet the criteria of the righteous. Among the requirements of al-taqwā can be identified by giving charity in ease or hardship, restraining anger, forgive all men, remembering Allāh when doing wrong deeds and repent afterwards, and not persisting in the wrong, when one is aware of committing an error. These criteria bind people of different personalities in the mode of interaction. Needless to say that without human interaction, it is
difficult to imagine how the act of giving and forgiving will ever exist. In other words, motivation to fulfil the criteria of a righteous man invites them to dialogue.

Apart from encouragement to attain righteousness or al-taqwā, in various places in the Qur’ān, a person is encouraged to enjoin actively good and forbid evil (al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar). ‘Good’ or maʿrūf, as mentioned in the Qur’ān, includes being very gentle, humble and watchful of one’s utterance to parents, (Qur’ān, 4:36, 31:14, 17:23-24) offering help to those bonded with kinship, (Qur’ān, 2:177, 4:36, 17:26) showing kindness to the orphans, (Qur’ān, 4:36, 90:15, 93:9) feeding the poor, (Qur’ān, 2:177, 93:9-10, 107:3) saying good things to people, (Qur’ān, 2:177, 2:83) relating nicely to one’s neighbours (Qur’ān, 4:36) and fulfilling promises. (Qur’ān, 2:177) Conversely, ‘evil’ or munkar, from the Qur’anic perspective, includes arrogance, (Qur’ān, 4:36) oppression and injustice, (Qur’ān, 14:42) all acts of selfishness – including, but not limited to being spendthrifts, niggardliness and concealing the good things that Allāh has bestowed upon oneself, (Qur’ān, 4:36-7) betrayal, and breach of promise. (Qur’ān, 13:20) These notions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is another portrayal of the importance of human relationship in the Qur’ān. In each act of enjoining good, or forbidding evil, there is indeed a positive human encounter, and there is a dialogue taking place.

Last but not least, to regulate and maintain social harmony, ethics in human relations are outlined in the Qur’ān. For instance, an individual should avoid from mocking others, or insulting anybody by calling nicknames, or holding suspicion as much as possible, or spying on each other and speaking ills about the other behind their backs. (Qur’ān, 49:11-12) These commands imply that an individual has to exercise more of self-scrutiny and aim for self-improvement now and then, instead of belittling others, or looking for other’s faults and imperfections, or worst in the scenario is criticising others in their absence by projecting negativities on themselves in order to feel good about one’s own self. This order requires the uplifting of pre-judgemental mind, or pre-conceived ideas, which may disrupt future encounter
between human beings. Repeatedly, the message behind this social ethics not only prepares the positive ground for a dialogue, but it also enhances the ongoing of positive encounter throughout the process.

In a nutshell, the Qur’ān contains humanistic messages. Specifically, the messages include those which call for knowing each other (taʿāruf), attaining righteousness (al-taqwā), enjoining good and forbidding evil (al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-naḥy `an al-munkar), and the ethics of interaction in social settings. These humanistic messages all invite for dialogue, directly or indirectly.

An Argument: Dialogic or Antagonistic Relationship?

To this extent, the significance of dialogue in the Qur’ān has been established through etymological explanation, fundamental issues and some humanistic messages in the Qur’ān. However, critics indicate that there is a dualistic tendency in Muslim’s ethics of human relation. It is argued that the illustration of good human relationship mentioned in the Qur’ān purports only for Muslims and that the Qur’ānic instructions discriminate non-Muslims by and large. Along the same line, it may be argued that significance of dialogue in the Qur’ān does not indicate that dialogue is also recommended between Muslims and non-Muslim. (Friedman, 2003, p. 4-6) This is alleged when referring to the verses in the Qur’ān that say, for instance: “...adhillah with the believers, aʾizzah against the rejecters...”, (Qur’ān, 5:54) and in another place “…ashiddāʾ against unbelievers, (but) rubānāʾ amongst each other...” (Qur’ān, 48:29)

There are three aspects to counter the argument against such allegations. The three aspects include linguistic, contextual and ethical aspects. The linguistic aspect is utilised for important terms in those verses. In the first verse mentioned, the Arabic terms are ‘aʾizzah’ as to describe the treatment towards the rejecters of Islamic teachings and ‘adhillah’, or lowly, that is towards believers. Whereas the second verse uses ‘ashiddāʾ’ as for the case of unbelievers, and
‘ruḥānā’ or compassionate amongst each other. Out of the four Arabic words mentioned above, two of them, namely aʿizzah and ashiddāʾ may be problematic since they may imply the superiority of Islam. These words would be taken more negatively if they were comprehended through colonial minds, whereas it should be understood from the root where the words originate, according to Arabic etymology. According to Ibn Manẓūr, the word aʿizzah originates from its root, al-ʿizzu which means strength, strictness and victory. (Ibn Manzur, 1997, p. 2925) Whereas the word ashiddāʾ originates from shadada and al-shiddah, which means rigidity, solidity, hardness and firmness. These meanings are referring to the observance of the main principles of Islamic tenets that are permanent. The notions expressed by both words (aʿizzah and ashiddāʾ) are unlike the notions of suppression and brutality, as both may be understood superficially. The difference in treatment between rejecters or disbelievers and believers is expected, as a normal human response to series of harsh oppositions, hostility, torture and brutality that Muslims suffered from the opposite groups. Despite that fact, the believers of Islam still adhere to the ethics of war’s root, which is to avoid bloodshed and destruction, but calling all people to worship the One and Only Creator with full mercy.

The explanation above is further justified by the second aspect of the counterargument, by studying the contexts in which both verses were revealed. Both verses are part of the bigger chapter or in the Qurʾān, which is categorised as Madaniyyah. The Madaniyyah verses of the Qurʾān are those verses that are revealed after the migration of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, or after the year 613 C.E. whereby the verse 29 of Chapter 48 is the concern, and it was revealed during the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah in the year 619 C. E. (Ibn Kathir, 1987, p. 196; Abu Hayyan, 1993, p.89) The Quraysh, the tribesmen in Mecca, obstructed Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his companions from Medina to enter their city for pilgrimage, not for war. This obstruction has led to the occurrence of Treaty of Al-Ḥudaybiyyah, thus proves a
middle ground negotiation between Muslims and the Quraysh, who were non-Muslims at that time, could be achieved. The time when the treaty was made was the time when enmity and hostility of the Quraysh towards Muslims were at their most, due to many losses in previous battles between them and the Muslims. Against this background, the Prophet Muḥammad PBUH and his companions’ intention for the pilgrimage was dismissed by the Quraysh and they were forced to return to Medina on the way to Mecca. (Ibn Ishaq, 2004, p. 463-6) (Guillaume, 1978, pp. 499-502)

Due to the said prevention to enter Mecca, Uthmān ibn ʿAffān, one of the closest companions of the Prophet, was sent to negotiate with the Quraysh. However, soon after that, a rumour was spread among the Muslims that ʿUthmān was killed. Following that was the Pledge of Riḍwān, which demands the Muslims to be prepared if the worst befell them and they should defend themselves by means of war. (Ibn Ishaq, 2004, 463-6; Guillaume, 1978, p. 503) On this occasion, the verse mentioned above describes the Muslim front: “Muḥammad is the messenger of Allāh. And those with him are hard (ashiddāˊ) against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves…”

The verse, therefore, was a warning against those who mistreat Muslims. Soon after that, Muslims discovered that the rumour regarding ʿUthmān’s murder was false. Subsequently, there was a treaty, between the Muslims and Quraysh, named as the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah. The Prophet Muhammad’s companions were reported to display various responses to the treaty since the contents of the treaty apparently sided on the Quraysh and seemingly inflicted injustice upon Muslims. Obviously on that occasion, there was no war that took place, but only a negotiation that did not put many Muslims at ease. In fact, in the opening of Mecca, which occurred in the two following years, there was no bloodshed at all. (Ibn Ishaq, 2004, pp. 513-27; Guillaume, 1978, pp. 540-55)
It must be noted that according to the teachings of Islam, war is an evitable choice or the last resort after all other attempts—including dialogue to reach understanding failed. That was why all wars during the time of the Prophet and his pious companions were preceded by dialogue. (Al-Mubārakfūrī, 2001, pp. 141, 329-37)

Even in the occurrence of war, there is certain guideline or ethical conducts of war that Islam prescribed. For instance, it is forbidden to attack places of worship such as churches and synagogues, or inflict any harm on children, women and the weak. (Al-Būtī, 1978, pp. 133-6; ʿAzzām, 1993, pp. 159-74; Ul-Qadri, 2011) The first Muslim generation in the life of the Prophet Muhammad passed on the noble values to successive generations after that. Thus, the war was approached in the same manner by leaders such as Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī and Muhammad al-Fātiḥ. In this relation, it is not surprising to read the words of Bernard Lewis, while he commented on justice and integrity of Muslims in protecting the Jews and the Christians under Muslim leadership:

“Unlike the Jews in Europe, however, the Jews and Christians of Islam were very rarely called upon to suffer exile and martyrdom for their faiths. They were not confined to ghettos either in geographical or in the occupational senses. They were no restricted occupations and, with the exception of the Holy places in Arabia and somewhere else, there were no restricted places. Violence was rare and atypical.” (Lewis, 1978, p.13)

Lewis acknowledged in the aforementioned quote that Muslims preserved co-existence with Jews and Christians better than the Christians in Europe. Muslims also treated them more respectfullty with a lesser degree of discrimination.

In conclusion, the spirit of dialogue in Islam is not confined only to Muslims, but non-Muslims are also treated as a member of the wider brotherhood in humanity. Islam celebrates peaceful co-existence among Muslim and non-Muslims in the spirit of dialogue. Hence, the critic that assumes Islam as holding a double standard treatments towards the non-Muslims is dismissed based on the three points analysis posited under this subtopic.
Dialogic Qualities from The Sunnah

A brief survey of the ḥadīth record is carried out to discover reports that describe the actions of the Prophet Muḥammad (p. b. u. h.) that are regarded as dialogic. The key determinant of his dialogic actions is the portrayal of a non-pre-judgmental attitude, engagement, and positioning of himself in the same status as the other. This section highlights some of the Prophet’s practices of dialogic thinking that contained in the ḥadīth.

Case-by-case Treatment

Firstly, the Prophet Muḥammad (p. b. u. h.) was found to deal with his companions, based on case-by-case treatment. The Prophet gave different solutions when he was approached by different people who had a similar issue. The different solution that he advised was appropriate and can be considered in any different situations they had. Few occasions indicated this form of treatment. For instance, there is a report which indicates that the Prophet said to Muʿādh ibn Jabal about the protection of the one who uttered shahādah (testimony of faith) against the hellfire. Muʿādh was overjoyed by the Prophet’s statement and asked his permission to spread the word to the public, but the Prophet forbade him. (Bukhārī, 1:225-227; Muslim, 1:240) The motive of his prohibition was to avoid creating the feeling of over-complacent in most Muslims, who might think that they do not need to perform good deeds anymore. Conversely, by not disseminating the message on this issue, the Prophet was trying to encourage most people for uncompromising hard work and strive for betterment at all times in order to attain paradise as a reward. The prohibition from spreading the specific message that the Prophet mentioned to Muʿādh was a very specific case. However, commonly and most of the times, the Prophet was heard to emphasise on passing on new knowledge to others and mutually learning from each other.

In another occasion, when the Prophet Muḥammad was sitting with his companions, a young and strong man came to the Prophet, inquiring whether kissing his wife was acceptable when
he was fasting. The Prophet replied that it was not acceptable. Not long after that, an old man came to him and asked the same question. His reply was different from the former. He did not see the latter as problematic, because it was deemed safe, looking at his condition, who had a stronger control over himself, as compared to the young man, who, in contrast, might end up nullifying his fast. (Ahmad, 2:180& 250)

In another instance, a man asked the Prophet’s permission to join the army troops on a mission to defend Muslims. The Prophet disallowed this man for the mission, although for other people, joining the mission was strongly encouraged and even made compulsory upon some others. (Bukhari: 1519; Muslim: 1885) The man actually had both parents who were still alive. Instead of letting him go, the order was for the man to take care of his parents and treat them in the kindest manner because taking care of his parents would lead to the best reward for him. (Muslim, 16:104) This case showed that the decisions made by the Prophet were based on the most appropriate solution depending on the circumstances of a person.

**Rectifying through Conversation**

Dialogue often took place between the Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h.) and the other person whom he wants to give advice. For example, one day, a youth came to the Prophet and requested the Prophet to allow him to commit adultery. This request was so annoying since adultery was so humiliating for the Arabs and had already been prohibited in the Qur’an. The young man’s request aroused the anger of companions around the Prophet at that time. They almost punched the youth for his unacceptable request. However, the Prophet stopped them from doing so. On the contrary, the Prophet asked the youth to come near him and they had a long conversation. The Prophet tried to make him aware of the bad consequence of adultery in a subtle but effective way. He let the young man consider whether he would accept if adultery were committed by some men with the ladies of his close family—such as his mother, daughter, sister or aunt. Rather than explaining the consequences one after another, the message was
conveyed in a lengthy conversation, involving a series of questions and answers. It was the Prophet who asked the youth and the latter answered. This conversation allowed the youth to slowly project and process the idea in his mind, pertaining to the effect of adultery over his personal life. By his own choice, he decided that he disliked it to happen. Simultaneously with his response, he comprehended the message of why adultery was prohibited and agreed that he could never plan or ask permission to do so anymore. (Ahmad, 5:257)

**Teaching via Inquiry**

Sometimes, the Prophet Muhammad (p. b. u. h.) taught the companions by asking them to define a concept. For example, he asked them, “Do you know who is considered a Muslim?” Then, the companions replied that Allah and His messenger know best. So, the Prophet defined, “A Muslim is the one whose tongue and hand are safe (from harming the others).” (Ahmad, 2:206)

In addition, through questioning, the Prophet introduced new connotation of a term, which might mean differently in common contexts. Once, he asked the companions, “Do you know who is a bankrupt?” The companions attempted to answer, “A bankrupt among us is the one who has no money and property.” The Prophet shifted their paradigm of thought by answering that,

> “Verily, a bankrupt among my nation is the one who comes on the day of judgement with the rewards of his prayer, fast and charity, but he had cursed the other (person) and slandered the other, and ate from the property which belongs to another, shed the blood of the other, and bit the other. So his rewards are given to the others (that he hurt), until he has nothing more left from his rewards before he could compensate to others, (eventually) the others’ sins are casted onto him and he was casted to hell.” (Muslim, 16: 135)

In this example, the term which the Prophet was describing about was originally financial. Nevertheless, he borrowed the term for ethical issue to illustrate the dreadful outcomes of
unpleasant behaviours. This style worked effectively to his companions, including Abu Bakr, ʿUthmān and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, who were successful merchants.

**Wisdom in Utilising Relevant Life Experience**

The Prophet always looked for the best situation to let the physical surrounding or physical subject explain an abstract message more effectively. In other words, he understood the psychology of people very well that he took every possible events and chance to educate them about certain issues. For instance, the Prophet passed by a market with a group of companions, who were walking beside him when they found a dead young goat with unusual little ears. So, he held the little ears and asked companions whether they would like to buy if it cost only the cheapest of price. They refused, considering that it worth nothing to them. Then, the Prophet offered it for them for free, but they still refused. They claimed that even if the young goat was still alive, it had a deficiency caused by the unusual size of its ears, but the fact that it was dead had belittled more of its value. Upon getting such response from the companions, the Prophet grabbed the precious chance to explain the value of this worldly life—it is lesser than the value of the goat’s ear in the sight of Allāh. (Muslim, 18: 93)

The issue that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) brought up in the aforementioned occasion was not a simple one, which could easily be understood by any common people. It was *al-Zuhd* or abstaining of oneself from indulging in the gain of this worldly pleasure, although physically one possesses the means for that. *Al-Zuhd* is an extraordinary topic which required not only external action, but it is more regarding the inner state of the soul. It was an issue which demands a higher cognitive process, a difficult issue. Therefore, using the proper situation to explain the issue was most appropriate for the psychological condition of the people.

**Encouragement to Learn Foreign Language**
The Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) was also found to have encouraged Zayd ibn Thābit to learn Jewish words and after he learnt it, the Prophet entrusted him to correspond with the Jews and read their letters to the Prophet. (Sahih al-Bukhari, 13: 185) In another report, Zayd said that he was ordered by the Prophet to learn the Syriac language. (Sahih al-Tirmidhi, 4: 167) This encouragement is another indication of the Prophet Muḥammad’s concern to establish understanding among different races and cultures.

To sum up, various examples from the ḥadīth records show that the Prophet Muḥammad (p. b. u. h.) applied many styles to make sure that his messages were delivered effectively. The aforementioned styles touched many aspects of dialogic thinking – appreciation of individual uniqueness by deciding on case-by-case basis, conversation, creating awareness in oneself through inquiry, the use of physical and environmental cues to explain abstract issue and the use of foreign languages as a ground of productive dialogue.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of Qur’anic verses indicates that against the commonly held view, the concept of dialogue is best represented from the Qurʾān by the term ḥiwār, not the term jadal or mujādalah. The findings show the importance of dialogue (ḥiwār) as a means of daʾwah vis-à-vis jadal. Based on the Qurʾanic verses’ analysis, the term jadal in Qurʾanic context could be associated to dialectical style which is prone to argumentation, and not regarded by some scholars as an act of daʾwah. This finding, nevertheless, do not imply that the act of mujādalah has no role in interfaith encounter. In fact, it could be extremely significant in certain contexts. This chapter also highlights that dialogue is embedded in the Qurʾān, notably in its presentation style. Moreover, Muslim fundamental issues are brought up in form of dialogue in the Qurʾān, which also contains humanistic messages that invite for dialogue among humanity. Finally, a
brief survey on the records of ḥadīth shows that in many occasions, the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) had displayed some acts based on the elements of dialogue.

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META RELIGION AS PRINCIPLE OF EVALUATION IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO ISMAIL RAJI AL-FARUQI

Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman
nfarhana@ukm.edu.my
Haslina Ibrahim
haslina@iium.edu.my

Introduction

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was born in Jaffa, Palestine on 1st January 1921. The title al-Faruqi was attributed to him from his lineage to Umar Al-Khattab’s that is known as al-Faruqi. He obtained his tertiary education from University of Beirut, University of Indiana and University of Harvard. He also served as an academic at a few universities amongst others Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University Montreal, Centre Institute of Islamic Research Karachi, Institute of Higher Arabic Studies of the League of Arabic States Cairo and Syracuse University. He also accepted offers as visiting Professor at the University of Cairo, Al-Azhar University and University of Alexandria. He has been the founders of many faculties of Islamic Studies in America. Esposito recognised that al-Faruqi was amongst the first main individuals who developed programmes on Islamic Studies in the Universities in America. Al-Faruqi married a lady from Montana named Lois Ibsen who later embraced Islam and took the name Lois Lamya’ al-Faruqi. The lives of al-Faruqi and Lamya’ sadly ended in a bloody tragedy on 27th May 1986, and that has been etched in the annals of history of famous Islamic figures.

The Journey of a Scholar

From Palestine to America : 1948 – 1954

Al-Faruqi’s early education began at the mosque and for some 10 years beginning from 1926 until 1936. He received his formal education at College des Freres (St. Joseph). As early as 24, he was appointed as the Governor of Galilee. In 1948, there was an upheaval in Palestine that
began with the establishment of Israel. As a result of this upheaval al-Faruqi decided to migrate to America. In America, he began to delve in Philosophy at the University of Indiana and obtained an M.A. in Philosophy in the year 1949. In 1951, al-Faruqi obtained another M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Harvard. In doing his studies in Philosophy, he also gave attention to researching and studying Comparative Religion. Al-Faruqi subsequently continued with a Doctorate in Philosophy at University of Indiana by majoring in Western Philosophy, specifically in Classical Western Philosophy. His title of Doctoral Thesis was On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics of Value and it was presented at the University of Indiana in 1952.

From America to Egypt (1954 -1965)

In order to uphold his ambition to protect Islam, he pursued a post doctorate programme in Islamic studies from the University of Al-Azhar in 1954 until 1957. Here, began the turning point in his life from the interest in research ethics on Philosophy to researching fundamentals of religion specifically Islam. The publication of his work titled *On Arabism; ‘Urubah & Religion: A Study on the Fundamental Ideals on Arabism & Islam at Its Highest Moment of Consciousness* in 1962, was the outcome of his turning point.

Return to America (1966 – 1968)

After completing his education in the field of Islamic Studies at University of Al-Azhar, he went searching for knowledge in the fields of religion by pursuing a post doctorate at the School of Divinity, McGill University for two years under the Fulbright sponsorship to study Judeo-Christianity. He was also appointed as an Assistant Researcher at the Faculty of Divinity under the supervision of Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith in order to obtain experience within the surroundings of a Christian environment. Al-Faruqi also engaged in other organisations and institutions of thoughts. His largest contribution conceptualised from the research and observations in the field of Social Sciences. Al-Faruqi is of the opinion that Modern Western
Social Science is not an appropriate method when understanding the social existence of the Islamic Community. Stemming from this awareness, al-Faruqi initiated steps to harmonise the knowledge of Modern Western Social Science within the conceptual Islamic context. This has led to the formation of the Association of Muslim Social Scientist (AMSS) in the year 1972. Beginning 1972 to 1978, al-Faruqi became the President of AMSS and began to propagate the idea of Islamisation of Knowledge. The idea was initially propounded by his colleague Abdul Hamid Abdul Sulayman and was continued by Al-Faruqi as composite struggle by the AMSS. The formation of the Islamic Education Curriculum based on the Islamisation Knowledge idea was initiated and propagated by al-Faruqi to Islamic Universities around the world. Furthermore, this movement has finally succeeded in formalising the Islamic College in Chicago and the shaping of the Institute of International Islamic Thoughts (IIIT) Herndon in Virginia in 1981.

Monologues of a Scholar
The involvement of al-Faruqi in researching philosophy began from the internal questionings and monologues that existed within him. It stemmed from the effects of al-Faruqi’s having that led him to leave his country as a result of the occupation and expansions of the region by Israel coupled with witnessing the oppression of his race and fellow brethren’s in religion. This condition made him become a critical person. Initially, al-Faruqi criticised his religion and culture because religion is associated with their failure to defend themselves. Beginning from this initial thought, it caused an inner insistence to answer the questions of ‘Who Am I? What am I? And What should I do?’. Al-Faruqi hopes these questions can be answered from observing and learning Philosophy, but what happened was the opposite. Al-Faruqi found out that not all issues on life can be answered from the point of Philosophy. Finally, he decided to find the answers from Islam, diving into the intellectual traditions developed by the Muslim scholars.
His Critics to the Modern Study of Religion

First and foremost, al-Faruqi disagrees with the modern definition of religion that defines it as a personal experience of a reality (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 13), that such a definition has subjected religion and its role into great misunderstanding (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 14). The modern definition of religion is lack of metaphysics. This is because earlier, the Enlightenment philosophers have removed religion and substituted it with human reasoning while some of them replaced it with human experience. Al-Faruqi has singled out some of the modern approaches and posed his critics against them for treating religion as human institution in various forms of interpretation.

In his opinion, the anthropological school was heavily influenced by the Darwinian Evolution Theory, that religion like any other living being evolved from a primitive stage to a more advance stage in progressive manner. The sociological approach conceived religion as a social institution that explains religion as a social factor, hence man needs religion in order to be able to regulate the social order. The psychological method regard religion as a state of consciousness in a very subjective manner hence; depressive in case of insecurity or need, projective in case of desire and hope, ecstatic in case of fulfilment (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 19). The historical method depends on all the available approaches and methods to explain the pattern of religion guided again by the Darwinian evolution (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 19).

Theology on the other hand propagates Christianity as the supreme religion and justifies missionary to the world. Whereas philosophy find all the means that possible to criticise religion. The phenomenological school however tried to provide the alternative method that may help one to understand religion objectively without being judgmental (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 20). Unfortunately, even though the phenomenological method seems to be the best method of all, it has sacrifice judgement for the sake of objectivity. In this regard, al-Faruqi has made an extensive criticism on the phenomenological misconception of judgement. In addition to all
these methods, al-Faruqi has also shared his rejection against other schools prevalent during his time. Those were the ecumenical, the skeptical and the mystical. The ecumenical school in his opinion was mere sentimental than reasonable (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 35). The skeptical school for instance represented by the notion of faith developed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith propagates subjectivism for it regards faith as limited to one personal experience. The mystical school did not escape from al-Faruqi’s critics too. He thought that the school is lack of criteria and evidence and therefore exposed itself to corruption in interpreting religion and its teaching (I. Al-Faruqi, 1986, p. 40).

All these critics were heavily loaded in his last article titled *Towards a Critical World Theology* published after his demise in 1986. From the critics, it is assumed that al-Faruqi disagreed with the reductionist approach adopted in the modern study of religion. He was also unhappy that even the best approach was not interested in making the study meaningful, hence led to the avoidance from making judgement to the data collected on religions. Despite his critics to the modern obsession to the reductionist and humanistic approach in the study and interpretation of religion, it is quite an irony that al-Faruqi in another work interpreted that the principle of ethics in Islam takes Islamic humanism as one of the criteria, and responsibility (‘al-taklīf’) is at the core of it. He also spoke of humanism of *al-tawhid* as a genuine form of humanism (Isma’il R. Al-Faruqi, 1992a, p. 64). After laid his strong criticism to the modern epistemology and its obsession to dualism in the study of religion, it is quite perplexing in the way he reconciled the issues by using humanism in his philosophy of ethics. Perhaps, the notion of meta-religion he developed in the study of religion can help to justify the use of the term.

**Basic Valuation Principles in Analysing Religion**

Since al-Faruqi criticised that modern study of religion has failed to recognise the need for and the possibility of evaluating religious data on the assumption that it is a biased thing to do, al
Faruqi has provided the justification and the criteria for the evaluation to take place. According to al-Faruqi, evaluation is important as knowledge presupposes judgement. (Isma’il Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967, p. 5) In this regard, it is argued that the principles of judgement should comply with universal logic in order to avoid biasness to any particular religious theology. (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 57).

There are two main premises that became the basics of al-Faruqi’s evaluation principles, namely rationality and universality of revelation.

**Rationality**

Al-Faruqi affirms that rationality is to prevent backwardness and intellectual rigidity as well as rigidity in the actions of the community. However, to ensure the structure of rational thinking, Al-Faruqi introduced the rules of rationality:

Firstly: Denial towards contradictions. This rule aims to prevent someone from falling into contradictions of small or complex when offering a rational argumentation. The execution of a rational approach is therefore referring to the action of researching or examining a contradicting thesis with the supposition that there are still aspects that have been left out for rational investigation. For example, al-Faruqi explained that in understanding the Qur’an, the reciter repeats his readings because he is worried for not being able to arrive at the correct meanings. In so doing, the risks of falling into contradicting meanings are reduced. Al-Faruqi affirms that only a weak intellect accepts contradictions as authentic. Therefore, a rational Muslim or a rational person is the one who acknowledges that revelation and reasoning cannot be contradictory to each other.

Secondly: Openness to new evidences. This rule is set out to prevent Muslims from being literalistic, fanatic and conservative. Al-Faruqi asserts that literalism and fanaticism will cause backwardness and lack of critical mind. Literalism and fanaticism are contradictories to the
advocation of Islam. According to him, Islamic advocation requires intellection in order to help someone making sound judgement before resolving into a decision.

**Universal Revelation**

For al-Faruqi, the universality of revelation is due to his conviction that all things are created and received guidance from the same God. In line with this affirmation, he proposed that all religious data is supposed to be evaluated based on universal principles in order to justify its universal reliability. Al-Faruqi introduced the universal principles as Meta Religion. In brief, al-Faruqi’s approach is explained in the following diagram:

![Diagram 1: Al-Faruqi's Approach in the Study of Religion](image)

Based on the diagram above the processing of data is divided into two stages:

i. **Level of collection of the data on religion.** At this level, the researcher has to be open and be just towards the data. He should avoid having preconceived ideas towards the religion under study. He has to avoid making judgement based on his preconceived ideas when collecting the data.

ii. **Level of evaluation of data:** At this level, analysis and evaluation will take place. The principle of universal revelation is later transformed into meta-religion principle for
evaluating data on religions. The purpose is to analyse how far a religion complies with the universal principle and to what extent a religion keeps truthfully to its source or deviated from it.

Meta Religion as Principles of Evaluation

The principles were introduced due to al-Faruqi’s criticism on the concept of neutrality and objectivity in the modern study of religion. He believed that data on religion should be made meaningful. In addition, religion speaks of religious truth requires verification. Religious truth in his opinion should be universal. Truth that pertains to religion is in fact, a biased truth. To quote him, truth which is only for those who accept it and has no claim to the acceptance of all men, is no truth at all, but a mere prejudice” (Isma’il Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967, p. 10).

Meta religion is designed to examine the differences and the similarities that exist in religions. It begins from al-Faruqi’s basic premise that God created humans and entrusted every one of them with the ability to judge and evaluate the different meanings between all religions. The meta-religion principles encompass discussions on Godliness, prophethood, revelation, freedom of action, natural disposition and functions of nature, values and responsibilities. They are indeed the prime evaluative elements within any religious beliefs. Al-Faruqi claimed that any religious teaching that contradicts with any of the principles will face logical contradictions that may risk the teaching into scrutiny.

Meta religion is conceptualised in order to provide an alternative method in the study of religion. As the modern study of religion was struggling to be objective, al-Faruqi tried to prove that one can still be objective even when judgement or evaluation is made in the study. The discussion of the principles are as follows:

**Principle 1: Duality of Existence: The Ideal and The Actual**

According to al-Faruqi, there are two types of existences or realities namely the Ideal and the actual. In terms of belief system, the Ideal may refer to God as the Creator and the actual refers
to the non-God, the creation (Isma’il R. Al-Faruqi, 1992, p. 9). On the basis of this premise of dual entities, Al-Faruqi claimed that it is the basic logic of existence that appeals to all religions.

If there is an exist that claims the Ideal is the actual and vice versa, such a claim cannot be accepted as it contradicts the universal logic. In terms of religion, The Ideal cannot be non-god and the actual cannot be god. If the glossaries of Creator and creation are used, the subtlety of the principle is more profound since the Creator cannot be creation and creation cannot be the Creator. This is because the two orders are totally disparate ontologically as well as functionally. Any religion that violates this principle of duality of existence will risk internal contradictions. The reason for that is because it will lead to difficulty to establish the differences between the Ideal and the actual, God and non-God, and Creator and creation. Hence, the basic logic for understanding the existences or realities is that, it consists of two entities and cannot be more than that.

For an instance, if this principle is to be tested on the Trinitarian doctrine, we may assume that the Trinitarian God is the order belong to the Ideal, whereas the other order, belong to the world and man as the actual. However, the question arises as to which order does Jesus belong to? Did he belong to the order of God or the order of non-God? If he belongs to the order of God, then was Jesus really a human being when he was sent to his people? If he belongs to the order of the non-God, why is he included in the Trinitarian doctrine. If the principle to be tested to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, the internal contradiction will be more disturbing to one’s reasoning and logical understanding because it is impossible to explain their ontologies.

**Principle 2: The Ideal (Creator) and The Actual (Creation) Are Relational**

The first principle establishes the fact that the Ideal and the actual are two separate order. The second principle however establishes the relationship between the two order. This is because, al-Faruqi believes that the relation between the two realities is ideational in nature (Isma’il R. Al-Faruqi, 1992b, p. 10). As a matter of fact, The Ideal is the value Giver and the actual is its
recipient that actualises the value. In this regard, the actual can realise the values but it can never reach the level of the Ideal. A question also arises on what will happen if the values provided by The Ideal are irrelevant to the actual? In this case, al-Faruqi explained that the actual will be meaningless and cannot bring values to the life as a whole. As a matter of fact, both of them are irrelevant to each other. The reason is because the Ideal does not give values to the actual to realise. Likewise, the actual does not have an Ideal to be guided.

If the principle to be tested on a religious doctrine, for example, Yahweh, the Jewish God, perceived as exclusive to the Jews. Hence, He does not relate with other than the Jews. He is not the Ideal for other human beings, and logically speaking, the latter do not regard Him as their Ideal. Both are not relational. When it comes to the relationship between the Jews and Yahweh, it is logical enough to understand that both are closely related. Interestingly, Yahweh appears to be too far and above in the Torah even the pronunciation and spelling of His name is a real struggle dictated by the Torah as YHWH. He mostly wished to be known as Adonai, a friendlier version of Him to the Jews. The question arises that if He does not wish to be known, how does religion explain His relationship to His people, the Jews and vice versa. If the answer is Adonai, then a logical explanation is needed to clarify the relationship He has with Adonai. If He is the same with Adonai, this would lead to more intricate doubts about His ontology.

**Principle 3: The Relevance Between the Ideal and The Actual Is a Command**

Al-Faruqi asserts that the Ideal explains what the actual must become. The Ideal is to function as a guidance and principle of rules that give the structuring of the actual’s lives. The Ideal in this regard, is God the Creator, the supervisor and the guide to the non-God, the creation. The Ideal is the command because without the Ideal, there can never be an actual. Likewise, without the Creator, there can never be creation. In the context of religion, the Creator is logically the Provider and the Sustainer too for it is illogical to think of a creator who abandon his creation
after the creating activities is accomplished. Al-Faruqi thought the relationship is not a matter of option. As a matter of fact, it is a command by the virtue of Him for being the Creator and the Ideal.

To test this principle on religious doctrine, Brahma for example is being one of the God of the Hindus. His function is to create. This is an important ontology of him. However, he is not worship as much as Shiva. It is believed that Brahma’s function is to create after which he would leave His creations under the care of other gods. The principle established that the relevance between the Creator to the creation is a command. However, in the context of Brahma and his creations, the relevance seems not to be the case. This is quite problematic to one’s logical reasoning as it will be troublesome to explain the extent of the relationship between Brahma and his creation.

**Principle 4: Humans (Actual Beings) Are Good.**

Al-Faruqi explained that the instance of the actual is one element of value that is based upon its Ideal. Specific truth is the values of the Ideal. In this respect, every value of the actual is instinctively good because the Ideal is good. The actual’s instance is the reality of worldly instances. This world is good; and to be and to stay in it is a precious grant. Hence, when humans inhabit it, they must realise many good values that is involved in the existence of the world. Al-Faruqi argued that whatever religions, systems of beliefs or systems of philosophies that regards this world is as a ground-work for evil, no value, a deception, they have indeed established wrong beginning and denies human right to confront what is of value and of none for people. Based on the explanations, al-Faruqi demonstrates that nature is inherently good and that is mainly because The Ideal is good.

The negative effects of denying that this world is of value is deliberated by al-Faruqi in the case of Arthur Schopenhauer who view that becoming the actual or real is an evil hence the
world is evil. He regards death as the purpose of life, which is an end to this evilness. Therefore, he teaches that the value of death is going through suffering by means of voluntary starvation. To use this principle for a religious doctrine analysis, we may take the notion of noble Truth in Buddhism. This concept teaches that the truth of life is suffering (dukkha), the truth in the origin suffering (Samudhaya), the truth in the end of suffering (Nirodha) and the truth of the path to end the suffering (Magga). To sum up, life is worthless. Based on this principle, the notion of Noble Truth can be contested, this is because the principle view life as inherently good because the One who creates life is good. This is hard for Buddhism to grasp because Buddhism has lack of explanation on the Ideal or explicitly, God. If God is unknown, so does His value and this will certainly have a domino effect on one’s understanding on his existence as well as others.

**Principle 5: Humans Has Capacity and Nature is Malleable**

Al-Faruqi explained that the principle is intended to answer the question to what extent people can understand values when the values have been predetermined. According to Al-Faruqi, to give value to the world, the awareness of values is important. If not, values cannot become what it is meant to be, in fact it causes them to become valueless. If such is the case, can the actual change its character? Al-Faruqi explained that even though the actual is inherently good, its attributes change. In this regard, the nature changes in accordance to the Ideal. However, human is different from nature because they are created with will and effort. This is to give human the ability to choose either to realise the value or not. This is the reason why human is given responsibilities (taklif) and freedom to understand and to choose whether to follow the Ideal or vice versa. In comparison to the nature, it has been instructed with certain orderliness. Within every phenomenon in the nature, there is certain justifications that is sufficient to explain the phenomena. In fact, the phenomena have been preordained by God’s law of nature (sunnatullah).
We may resume using this principle to further analyse the Four Noble Truth of Buddhism. If life in general is assumed as worthless, it implies that there is no demarcation in the value of man and other than man. Hence, man and other beings are the same in terms of their worthlessness. Such a perception on the ontology of life will not be able to explain the reason why life is brought into existence whereas this is one of the pertinent questions which a religion must be able to address.

Principle 6: The Perfection of Nature (Cosmos) Is the Responsibility of Man

Al-Faruqi explained that every member in the instance of the actual comes and goes. The existence of this realm exists under the guardian and dominion of the Ideal’s instance. The elements, the organic substances, the plants, the animals and everything are governed by the sunnatullah. Mankind, however, is responsible to give meaning to values to the nature. The main reason of this is because the nature has been granted to human who have the freedom to choose. Therefore, human cannot terminate the relationship with the nature, but they may exercise a control so that they may be in a better position to realise the values that were determined by the Ideal. To be precise, this function of human that priestship, self-isolation from the world, unworldliness and hermitage is incompatible to religion.

This principle tackles the concept of morality in a religion, that man is made responsible for his action due to his freedom. Whereas, beings other than man are not made responsible because their nature has been predetermined. To use this principle in analysing a religious doctrine, we may resume with the notion of the Noble Truth. As deliberated earlier, this notion explains the ontology of life with pessimism, that life is suffering hence worthless. Human and other beings are at the equal footing in terms of this worthlessness. The solution for man to avoid pursuing into such a despair is to rid of anything that has to do with it by means of Magga, the set of principles to end the dukkha and to achieve Nirvana, the ultimate aim of life in
Buddhism. Overall, this is to provide the moral concept and answer the eschatology of man. However, what about other beings? Will they continue to be trapped in the world of despair?

**Evaluation Principle: The Rationales**

Modern study of religion was developed during the Post-Enlightenment period. Before the Enlightenment, the discourse was found under theology. Interestingly, theology was an established discourse in the Christian, Muslim and Jewish tradition. Among the three religions, Christianity records the most polemical relationship with science. There have been critics to theology from the modern scholars of religion who were well trained in the Christian theology and graduated from ministries and seminaries such as, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Hick, Hans Kung, Paul F. Knitter, Leonard Swindler, Arvind Sharma and few others.

The hurdle in the Christian theology when discussing other religions according to these scholars was due to the perception that Christianity is a superior religion hence the only way of salvation. Given that superior idea, it was an acceptable approach in the Christian theology to analyse other religions by using the lenses of Christianity. Such has been regarded as prejudicial and bias against the teaching of other religions. Modern scholars of religion found that this is the main hindrance to an objective way of understanding other religions. It follows with many initiatives from modern scholars of religions, as well as philologists, anthropologists, sociologist, psychologists and phenomenologists who tried to offer their objective and scientific ways of studying religions. They were divided in methods and approaches, but all were moved by the same aim, which is to provide a scientific study of religion that is neutral, fair and objective. In order to achieve that, to be judgmental is implausible, hence no judgement nor evaluation is welcome in the modern discourse of religion.
Al-Faruqi however views differently. He viewed that judgement is needed in order to relate the given meaning-wholes of certain religious idea to the universal, to the human and the divine. In addition, knowledge is not merely by gathering the data but also to relate the data and the thorough meaning. After all, religious data are not classified under cold data As they are life facts. They need to be cognised in discursive thought as well as in feeling and action (Isma’il R. Al-Faruqi, 1992b, pp. 28–29). Al-Faruqi believes that religious facts are life facts that cannot be treated as merely dead facts of natural science. If a religious fact is so meaningful, the meaning must be lived to be appreciated and valued (Isma’il Ragi Al-Faruqi, 1967, p. 5). To prove his conviction in bringing ‘evaluation’ in the study of religion, al-Faruqi has adopted the meta religion principle in his work titled Christian Ethics — A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, it is learnt that al-Faruqi’s approach in the study of religion has given emphasis on the methodology to study religion and meta religion as principle of evaluation in the study of religion. The purpose of analysing the differences and similarities between religions, is to decipher between truth and falsehood for both provides the meaning behind every religious beliefs and actions. Al-Faruqi’s contribution in the study of religion, particularly in challenging the modern study of religion to review its position towards evaluation, is indeed a significant breakthrough. Al-Faruqi however, did not relate his attempt with the *Kalam* tradition. Some wild accusations that against him claimed that he was a modernist too, where his attitude is in contrast with tradition. However, such accusation is misleading for al-Faruqi as he was well educated in Islamic traditional studies. He was also privileged to receive formal education in modern and western philosophy as well as comparative religion. Together with his friends, he established an intellectual institute diagnosing the problems with modern and traditional knowledge and offered a reconciled approach between the two; of which he called it as an
Islamisation of knowledge. Meta religion is indeed one of the outcomes of such a reconciled approach. Unfortunately, as he passed away, there has yet a scholar who would consider pursuing his struggle in promoting evaluation via meta religion as an essential component in the study of religion.

References


Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq (d.861) And the Debate Over His Identity and Works
In the Study of Religion

Associate Prof. Dr Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali
ijamh@um.edu.my

Introduction
Abu ‘Isa Muhammad bin Harun bin Muhammad al-Warraq or famously known as Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq was a Muslim thinker who active during the early third/ninth century and spent his lifetime in Baghdad. Baghdad is the capital City of Islam Empire that is very prosperous, and glorious in the aspect of culture and politics that puts the city as the most outstanding and grand in the eyes of the world during that century. Baghdad attracted the attention of various scholars with different expertise from all around the globe who came, assimilated, and be recognised by its rulers and cosmopolitan city of different cultures and religions. The Christians were the most prominent as they were the early residents of the city even before its glory. (Warräq, 2002, p. 3)

In the early days, Baghdad was a free debate and meeting place between the Muslims and Christians. It was where the encounters between religions and dialogues of life happened naturally, harmoniously and casually. This environment in Baghdad has made an impact in Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s upbringing.

Biography of Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq
Abu ‘Isa Muhammad bin Harun bin Muhammad al-Warraq or better known as Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq was one of the ‘controversial’ Muslim scholars despite his great contribution in the study of religions. He lived in Baghdad in between the third and ninth century. His named has been mentioned by Muslim scholars during the early Islamic era for his polemical and critical views on the truth of religions other than Islam. His vast knowledge in Manicheanism and Christianity has made him well known among Christian scholars.
A brief discussion about him was found in the writings of early Muslim scholars and his own works that helped to explain his religious beliefs and approaches in the study of other religions. Early statements on him was found cited by Abu al-Husayn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khayyat in his work Kitab al-Intisar produced in the year 269/882. In his work, he has associated Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq with the doorway of bid’ah’ Ibn al-Rawandi (Stroumsa, 2016, pp. 40–46) and has chosen to call Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq as the second teacher and predecessor as well as ‘agitator’ to the betrayal towards Mu’tazilite (Khayyat, 1957) Abu Husayn al-Khayyat also claimed that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq was formerly following the teaching of Mu’tazilite and more sympathetic towards Shi’ism. However, he later confessed to be ‘Manichaean dualist’ that exhibits his hatred against the Caliph Saidina ‘Ali bin Abi Talib. (Stroumsa, 2016, p. 110) Abu ‘Ali al-Jubba’i (m.303/915) criticised Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq as a ‘dualist’ and a member of the Shi’i sect together with Hisham ibn al-Hakam and Ibn al-Rawandi; in their effort to reproach religions. Nonetheless, couple of decades later, the statement made was challenged by Abu ‘Ali who stated that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq and Ibn al-Rawandi were among the followers of Shi’ism and had produced works in relation to Imamah. Abu ‘Ali stated that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq was the source of Shi’ite thinker during the 2nd/8th century. (Ritter, 1930, p. 64) The consistent debates about Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq later was discovered in Kitab Muruhj al-Dhahab, which also the work of Abu al-Hassan ‘Ali al-Mas’udi (m. 345/956) who linked Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq with Shi’ism in the aspect of beliefs and in writings. Abu al-Hassan al-Mas’udi introduced a simplified biography of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq who was believed to be from Baghdad and passed away while he was imprisoned in Ramla around the year of 247/861.

Ibn al-Nadim (m. 385/995) also listed in his writing, Kitab al-Fihrist that there were eleven works from Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq that later been revised and re-listed by David Thomas in his debate and review on Trinity. Ibn al-Nadim categorised Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq in the Mu’tazilite crowd and Murji’ite. He was also linked to talented scholars of Mu’tazilite, al-Rawandi who
had a great influence on him until Abu ‘Isa was accused as a dualist practitioner. Ibn al-Nadim stated that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq was a *zindiq* (adrift) Manichaean. (Ishāq, 1971, p. 216)

‘Abd al-Jabbar (m. 415/1025) repeatedly stated that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq is a *zindiq* and a *multihid* (atheist). ‘Abd al-Jabbar insisted that Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq is a Shi’ite. Besides, the result of hard labour from the adrift of Ibn al-Rawandi also portrayed him as a scholar who criticised Rasulullah PBUH in order to prove the rank of Imamīyyah (Ahmad al-Asadabadi, 1966) ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s opinion has been denied by a Shi’ite scholar; ‘Ali bin al-Husyan al-Sharif al-Murtada in his writing, *Kitab al-Shafi fi al-Imamah*. In his work, he contested the accusation against Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq as a dualist. He stated that Ibn al-Rawandi and Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq were rivals/enemies' hence it is impossible for their views to be on the same page.

‘Ali bin al-Husyan al-Sharif al-Murtada stated that he supported the views and thoughts of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq in his work on dualism in *Kitab al-Maqalat*. (Ali, 1986, p. 89) Despite all the allegations, until the last part of the 4th/10th century; 100 years after the active years of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq, the accusations against him remain invalidated.

During the second, fifth/eleventh century, Ahmad bin ‘Ali al-Najashi and Abu Ja’far Muhammad al-Tusi in the same tone had expressed their outmost support towards Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq and did not question a single thing about Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq link with the Shi’ism as they were certain with Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq. (Najashi, n.d., pp. 23, 12, 47) It was during this period that later scholar came with a concise biography of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq. (Muḥammad & Sprenger, n.d.) Even though it was not fully completed, but it has given a new perspective on his biography.

In the course of the sixth/twelfth century, emerge a newly Muslim scholar in comparative religion whom also a heresiographer named Abu al-Fath Muhammad al-Shahrastani (m. 548/1153). He, however has named Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq as a Majus and ‘a great scholar who understands other scholars views and thoughts’. (Shahrastānī, 1970, p. 188) Ibn al-Jawzi
(m.597/1200) has documented an incident that happened in the Baghdad city in the year 298 Hijriah based upon the authority of Abu ‘Ali al-Jubba’i. The latter reported that there was an attempt to arrest both Ibn al-Rawandi and Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq. Unfortunately, Ibn al-Rawandi managed to flee but Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq failed to escape and he was imprisoned until his death. (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1939, p. 102)

Many debates on Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq has further complicates his biography. However, it is very plain that almost all Muslim scholars linked Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq to either Shi’i sect, zindiq (adrift), Manichaean and dualism even though the legitimacy is still unknown. Hence, no one is sure about his full biography. The most recent writing about him was ventured by Professor David Thomas. Thomas has translated Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s Arabic work into two volumes. His first volume introduces Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq in his historical context and then presents a scholarly translation of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s refutation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992, pp. 9–16, 218) Thomas’ second volume provides considerable additional background material, followed by an English translation of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s critique of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. (Warrāq, 2002, p. 314)

**Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq List of Works**

Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq left behind him many scholarly treasures in the world of academics. Based on the list of his works, one can agree that he was indeed a prolific researcher in his area of expertise. The list of Abu ‘Isa’s works can be found in the introductory chapter of David Thomas, where he extracted the element from the work of Ibn al-Nadim. Thomas however had assembled them according to specific themes (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992, pp. 22–24). The list is as below;

1. **Kitab Maqalat al-Nas wa Ikhtilafihim** is one of the main writing of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq and is made the most important comprehensive reference in regard to
teachings other than Islam that were in existence during that time. It consists of
pre-Islamic Arab era religions such as Judaism and Christianity. (Thomas, 1996,
pp. 275–282)

2. *Radd 'ala al-Yahud*

3. *Kitab Iqtisas Madhab Ashab al-Ithnayn wa al-Radd 'alayhim*

4. *Radd ‘ala al-Nasara.* It is a compilation of responses (agreement/disagreement)
against couple of Christian sects and Jacobite

5. *Al-Radd ‘ala al-Thalath al-Nasara.* The work of Abu ‘Isa’s that has been
translated into English.

b) **Works on the Shi’ite teachings.**

1. Kitab Ikhtilaf al-Shi‘i

2. Al-Imama. Consist of two versions; concise and long.

3. Kitab al-Saquiya. The work that narrates what took place during the nomination
of new Muslim leader due to the demise of Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq and the leader of Rafidia; Hisham ibn al-Hakam

5. Naqd al-‘Uthmaniyya. The writings that denies the Umayyah’s glory compared
to the descendants of ‘Ali even though it is not entirely sure it can be link to Abu
‘Isa’s scholarly works.

Several works above are based on the discussion on the Shi’ites teachings found in the *Kitab
Maqalat* and the others are more on defending the Imamah.

c) **Works on the Islamic teachings**

1. *Kitab al-Hukm ‘ala Surah Lam Yakun.* Most probably this writing is debating
about Surah al-Bayinnah that has the beginning of “*Lam yakun alladhina kafaru*”
which discussed about the Quraish that has converted to Islam
2. *Kitab al-Zumuradda*. The criticism of Rasulullah even though it is doubtful to be the works of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq. S. Stroumsa stated that it is not the works of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq instead it is the commentaries of Ibn al-Rawandi, the product of his discussion with Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq. (Stroumsa, 1999, pp. 76–84)

3. *Al-Gharib al-Mashriqi*. One of Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s famous works consist of criticism towards Rasulullah and Islamic teachings that had caused an uproar in the Muslim scholars community that later resulted in an attack towards Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq including Sharif al-Murtada whom later apologised to Abu ‘Isa when it is proven it was not written by Abu ‘Isa instead was written by a dualist author. (Ali, 1986, p. 89)

4. *Al-Nawh’ala al-Baha’im* listed by Ibn al-Nadim

*d) Works concerning ‘Ilmu Kalam:*

1. Al-Hadath
2. Mas’ala fi qidam al-Ajsam Ma’ithbatihal al-‘A’rad

Looking at the number of works he authored, it is quite impossible to deny his intellectual contribution. As a matter of fact, it was reported that even Christian scholars would refer to his work in order to have a grasp of his debate against the Christians on the issue of Trinity and Incarnation.

**The Concept of Religion According to Abu ‘Isa Al-Warraq**

Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq discussed the concept of religion in his work titled *Kitab Maqalat al-Nas wa Ikhtilafihim*. In this book, he discussed all the major religions that living in coexistence with the Muslims during that time. He focused on their teachings that in many ways’ contradictory to the concept of Tawhid in Islam. The work has included the details of every religion and the different sects of different religions. (Thomas, 1996, pp. 275–290) Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq made an excellent exposition on the dualist teachings such as Manichaeanism, Mazdaism, Disanites,
Marcionites and also Zoroastrians. (Thomas, 1996, pp. 279–282) In getting the details about the religions, he has consulted the followers of religions and in this regard, his data was taken from a primary source. He took a descriptive approach in exposing their teachings. Abu ‘Isa often justified his descriptive approach that he did not aim to find imperfections in the religions under study but rather it was due to his curiosity particularly in the Abrahamic religions. In his introductions, Abu ‘Isa stated “We have been informed that different rationale exists between their faith and proof of existence. These differences are detailed according to their point of view”. (Al-Warraq, n.d., p. 88) It is quite unfortunate that some scholars have raised their doubts over his religiosity when he went to deep in justifying the teachings of other religions and that perhaps has brought some conflicts on his religious identity as a Muslim. What is more controversial was that some scholars interpreted that he was ‘promoting’ other religions and the dualist system of belief and he was also charged as belong to the Rafidia sect. According to Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari, the link between Rafidia and Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq can be seen through his leaning towards their answers on issues pertaining to the existence of God. They believe that God and human are on the same page with human themes, hence they were questioning God as capable to change His Wills and if the Qur’an can have additions or abrogation. A handful of Rafidia assumed that their Imams are much greater and powerful compared to prophets and the angels and in fact Imam has not sin compared to the prophets.

With regard to Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq association with Shi’ism, those who associated with him believed that he has written many good works on Shi’ism. Among his ‘lost’ work was Kitab Ikhtilaf al-Shi’a, which discussed the politics and doctrines of Shi’ism. Kitab al-Imama on the other hand discussed about the concept of Imam from the concise and broad version of Kitab al-Saqifa that was named in conjunction with Banu Sa’ada in Medina the location whereby the Muslim community leaders were discussing about the potential leader to replace Prophet Muhammad right after his demise. (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992, p. 22) In addition, Abu ‘Isa has
also written Naqd al-Uthmaniyyah that questioned the ‘Umayyah ascendency that has hijacked the right of Saydina ‘Ali and his descendants from the right of governance. (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992, p. 23) ‘Abd al-Jabbar attested al-Warraq’s loyalty towards the Syiah based on the former criticism to Rasulullah PBUH in defense of the Imam status. (Ahmad al-Asadabadi, 1966, p. 271) Abu Hasan al-Ash’ari on the other hand, however was more certain in his allegation on the association of al-Warraq’s with Rafidia and it was due to his companionship with Ibn al-Rawandi as well as counter ship with Hisham ibn al-Hakam. (Ritter, 1930, p. 64)

Nevertheless, some objectivities can be spared of him. Perhaps, it was due to his ‘objectivity’ that was misinterpreted by his reader. Particularly, when he took an empathic approach in explaining the doctrines of the religion he examines, and he was refraining from judging them. Could it be that the approach and the method he employed is different from the dominant approaches and methods subscribed by the theologians and Mutakallimun of his time? In addition, he seemed to be in defenses of certain groups declared as deviant by the majority Muslim scholars of that time. There were sections where he was critical of the companions, and he was reported to criticise the Prophet and challenge the Qur’an on the issue of addition and abrogation. However, it is equally important to be reminded that for the most part of his works, he defended the teaching of Islam and he was very firm in safeguarding Tawhid from the fallacy of Trinity and Incarnation. In this regard, some scholars still accepted him on the view that he was committed to Tawhid and most of the accusations against him lack of evidence and clarification due to lack of records on his biography.

**Abu Isa al-Warraq Against the Trinity**

In the early ninth century, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq wrote an Arabic treatise, Radd ‘ala al-Thalath Firaq min al-Nasara (The Refutation of the creed of the three Christian sects) famously known as “Against the Trinity”, which is a rational and philosophic attempt to refute the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. His refutation is the longest sustained
attack on the Trinity to survive from the early centuries of Islam and is a key work in the history of the relations between Islam and Christianity. (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992)

What makes Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s refutation of the Trinity truly remarkable to the Christians is that he used the same Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophic terminologies that the Christians used to describe the Trinity. This type of philosophical refutation was very rare attempted by Muslim apologists, making Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s work a historic milestone. (Warrāq & Thomas, 1992) Additionally, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq understood the aspects of the doctrine, so he was not misled by the concept of Trinity as well as a result, his refutation is more accurate.

In Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity, he used metaphysical principle, which was similar to Aristotelian and Scholastic Philosophical terminologies. Metaphysics is the science of being or reality. It is the broadest of all sciences because it deals with principles that apply to all beings or things. (N. Bittle, 1942, p. 116) At that times, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq used the term substance as if it were the being of God and not as a principle of the being of God. Al-Warraq argued that since the substance of God is one and undifferentiated, there could not be multiple hypostases in God. He stressed that the divine substance subsists in itself and by itself. God is the ultimate cause of the subsistence of the substance of creatures. Furthermore, the divine substance is unlimited and perfectly actualised.

Substance derived from the Latin word; substantia is defined as the principle by which a being exists in itself and not in another as a subject. In other words, substance is the principle by which a being subsists (subsist ere) as its own subject. Thus, every being of our experience must be a substance because every being is a subject of existence. The first concept of substance is the subsistent subject itself.
Therefore, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq begins by setting forth in his *Radd ‘ala al-Thalath Firaq min al-Nasara*, (“Against the Trinity”) as he understands them; the teaching of three sects of Christianity. At section 16, he begins his actual Refutation of the Christian creeds.

In the beginning, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq set the forth of the teachings of the three sects of Christians; the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. He presented the doctrine of the Trinity first before turning to the doctrine of the incarnation of the Jesus Christ. In section 13, he stated the basic tenets of Trinitarian doctrine. In this introductory section, he did not define the key metaphysical terms that are foundational to his refutation of the Christian doctrinal claims, as he used the terminology used by Aristotle.

Aristotle taught that substance was the principle of being that remained the same when a being experienced change. Aristotle’s substance relates to the essence of a being or what is predicated of a being. In other word, Aristotle believed in the eternal and remaining the same essence.

In “Against the Trinity” stated in section 13: “And the claims they set down and agree upon are: The eternal Divinity is one substance comprehending three hypostases, the Father who is generating and not generated, the Son who is generated and not generating, and the Spirit which pours forth from them both…” The divine substance is one and cannot be differentiated on the basis of substantiality. God is completely a divine substance without a non-divine substance. God is not composed of two or more substances.

However, in Christian’s belief, the fact that God is one divine substance does not inform us about the personhood of God, except that it must be divine too. Likewise, a human being’s substance is human-ness. A human’s heart, brain, ego and others are all human substance. To be otherwise would be on a claim that a human being is both human and non-human. This would be a contradiction. Therefore, Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq emphasised that Christianity believe in Trinity and not in one divine God.
While Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq’s refutation is refreshingly insightful, but for some Christians scholars claimed that his facts were superficial understanding of the metaphysical terms as well as faulty understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity since there was lack of explanation in his “Against the Trinity”.

Conclusion

Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq controversial identity had raised an issue on the reliability of his faith and intellectual credibility. It is quite unfortunate that due to the controversy, his works were not much studied by the later scholars as well as the present. The absence of an authentic biography of him and his association with the Shi‘ite have tarnished his integrity thus making his status and works under scrutiny. Perhaps, he was adopting a non-judgmental approach to the religions he studied; except the part that it was not a mainstream approach then. Therefore, despite his great number of writings, they were not given much impact in the study of religions even though his analysis of Christianity is remarkable. This exposition on his identity and works are presented at this chapter with the purpose to provide the bigger picture of Kalam and its venture into the study of religions. Abu ‘Isa al-Warraq and his works do fit the picture. However, his identity and thoughts were questioned by his contemporaries and that is the main stumbling block for recognising his great service to the study of religion via the discipline of Kalam.

Reference


Imam Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 CE): Scholar of Kalam and Study of Religion

Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman
rosmizi@usim.edu.my

Introduction

Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Tusi (1058-1111 CE / 450-505 AH), better known by the name of Imam al-Ghazali, has been recognised as among the most influential Muslim scholars who mastered almost the entire fields of sciences of his time, such as kalam theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, mysticism, logic, and many other sciences. Imam al-Ghazali has been credited with various titles including Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam) (“Abū Hāmid Al-Ghazali,” 2005; Al-Qaradawi, 1994; Al-Subki, 1968; Ebrahim, 2004) Zayn al-Din (the Ornament of Faith), Sharaf al-A’immah (The Nobility of the Leading Scholars) (Glick et al., 2005), Islam’s ha-Nesher ha-Gadol and Doctor Angelicus(al-Akiti, 2012) Many scholars regard al-Ghazali as the greatest scholar Islam has ever produced, and also as one of the world’s most influential thinkers (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953; Moosa, 2006) Despite his various titles and recognition in various sciences, many people still do not realise that he also offered great contributions in the field of Kalam and Comparative Religion. This section will discuss the contributions and the methodology of Imam al-Ghazali in the field of Kalam and Comparative Religion. In so doing, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the imperative link between Kalam and Comparative Religion hence both discourses are equally significant for Muslim learners who are interested in the study of other religions.

Biographical Sketch

Al-Ghazali was born on 1058 CE/450 AH in Tus, a city in Khurasan province in Persia. In 1080 CE, at almost 23 years old, he travelled to Nishapur where he studied under Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (1028-1085 CE), the greatest theologian of his time, and he became the Imam’s favourite student. Al-Ghazali’s scholarship impressed Nizam al-Mulk (1018-1092
In 1091 CE when he was 33 years old, al-Ghazali was appointed as chief professor in the Nizamiyyah College of Baghdad, the most distinguished academic position of his age (Watt, 2004: 9). Four years later (1095 CE), after falling into a spiritual crisis which also affected his health, he suddenly retired from his prestigious post, renounced his worldly possessions, and lived in seclusion as a Sufi. After nearly eleven years of retirement and solitude, at the request of the Seljuq minister, Fakhr al-Mulk, al-Ghazali eventually appeared in public life and resumed teaching in 1106 CE at Nizamiyyah College in Nishapur for a short period. He subsequently retired to Tus where he established his own madrasah (religious school) in order to teach and share his teachings and spiritual experience. (Smith, 1983, p. 33) He died on Monday 18th December 1111 CE (14th Jumada II 505 AH), at the age of fifty-three.

Imam al-Ghazali was a polymath, specialising in various fields of sciences. He was known as a wise man, far-sighted, intelligent, strong memory and a prolific writer. He is also known as a pious, ascetic, sincere, humble, diligent in worship, and do not like fame, praise, luxuries, and power.

Throughout his early career (until 1095), Imam al-Ghazali mastered and wrote on several subjects, such as science of kalam (theology), fiqh and usul al-fiqh (jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence), mysticism, logic, and philosophy. His most celebrated work is known as Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), which does not only contain Islamic information and knowledge, but also spirituality, philosophy, logic, personal experiences, mystic and many other elements.

**Imam al-Ghazali’s Contributions and Works in Kalam and Comparative Religion.**

Imam al-Ghazali has been known as a prominent scholar who has extensive knowledge, wide experience, profound and unique insights on various field of knowledge. He was also known
as a prolific writer who wrote extensively on various sciences. He has left a great contribution in many fields, including in the field of Comparative Religion. His writings are important and serve as a reference in many fields. Although many of his works have been successfully preserved, some of them have been lost, or have experienced technical problems.

Imam al-Ghazali wrote several books which are directly or indirectly related to *Kalam* and Comparative Religion. Some of them address different sects in Islam such as the Kharijites, the Murji'ites, and the Mu'tazilites. Some other books analyse different movements, denominations, schools of thought or ideologies which are mainly outside Islam such as Shi'ism, Philosophy, Logic, materialist (*Dahriyyun*), Naturalis (*Tabi'yyun*), and Theis (Metaphysical, *Ilahiyyun*). Besides, Imam al-Ghazali also devoted some books which address other religions (like Christianity).

Among the works of Imam al-Ghazali which address different issues related to *Kalam* and Comparative Religion are listed as follows:

a) *إحياء علوم الدين* - Ihya ‘Ulum al-Din
b) *مقاصد الفلاسفة* - Maqaṣid al-Falasifah
c) *تهافت الفلاسفة* - Tahafut al-Falasifah
d) *المنقذ من الضلال* - al-Munqidh min al-Dalal
e) *الإثبات في الاعتقاد* - al-Iqtiṣad fi al-’I’tiqad
f) *الاقتصاد في الاعتقاد* - al-Iqtiṣad fi al-’I’tiqad

g) جوهر القرآن ودرره - Jawahir al-Qur'an wa Duraruh
h) *الاستفادة من الفقه* - Fayṣal al-Tafriqah bayn al-Islam wa al-’Zandaqah
i) *الإفلاس من الباطنية* - Qawasim al-Batiniyah
j) *المستظهرات الباطنية* - al-Mustaẓhirah atau Fada’ih al-Batiniyya
k) *مشكاة الانوار* - Mishkat al-Anwar
l) *الارتداد من علم الكلام* - Iljam al-‘Awamm an’ Ilm al-Kalam
m) *إجابة الفقهاء على الكافرون* - Al-Hikmah fi Makhlulat illah
n) *قانون التأويل* - Qanun al-Ta’wil
o) *الرد على الإلهي عيسى* - al-Radd al-Jamīl li Ilahiyyat ‘Isa bi Sarih al-Injil

**Imam al-Ghazali and the Theologians**
In *Munqidh*, al-Ghazali classifies the various seekers after truth into four main groups, namely, the theologians (*mutakallimun*), the Batinites, the philosophers, and the Sufis or mystics. He believes that the truth which he has been seeking must be somewhere within these four groups. (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953, p. 27) Following his quest and plan, al-Ghazali started to examine the achievements of these different groups “commencing with the science of theology (*ilm al-kalam*) and then taking the way of philosophy, the ‘authoritative instruction’ of the Batiniyah, and the way of mysticism, in that order.” (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953) He mastered all of these disciplines and offered his critical views towards them. This section will only discuss the first three groups as they are relevant to *kalam*. As for Sufism, al-Ghazali has devoted an extensive study as well as practice of the Sufis way, and eventually he became convinced that the truth can be found in Sufism because the Sufis were “men who had real experience, not men of words....” (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953)

In his mission of searching for the truth, al-Ghazali found that the science of theology (*mutakallimun*) was inadequate for his purpose. It had a different aim, namely, to preserve the Sunnite faith and principles, and therefore, it only attained its own aim but not his. (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953) Hence, al-Ghazali acknowledges the achievement of the theologians in their own context, namely, they successfully preserved and defended Orthodox Islam against the heretical interpretations and practices (ibid.). Moreover, he also acknowledges those who were “truly learned” among them, namely, those who “espoused the nobility that knowledge brings,” and those who “comprehended the true meaning of the word ‘discernment’ (*fiqh)*.” (Moosa, 2006, p. 10) Nevertheless, he believes that the majority of the theologians were still involved in, and “were compelled to admit by naive belief (*taqlid*), or the consensus of the community, or bare acceptance of the Qur’an and traditions.” (Moosa, 2006, p. 28)

Al-Ghazali also acknowledged that the theologians attempted to study the real nature of things, as well as the nature and properties of substance and accidents. However, he observed that they
did not deal with it thoroughly, for it was not their aim. They were still becoming trapped into observing the outer dimension and the diligent performance of pious actions. Although they were diligent in performing good deeds, they still failed to observe their spiritual dimension, and therefore, their deeds were not able to bring the desired effect to the heart or soul. Consequently, they were still not able to “arrive at results that sufficient to dispel universally the darkness of confusion due to the different views of men,” and certainly, they were unable to cure al-Ghazali’s malady. (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953, p. 28) This indicates that al-Ghazali was not satisfied with the theologians and the practice of general society in emphasising only the outer dimension of religious observance. Walid N. Arafat has observed that even al-Ghazali emphasised the need to perform good deeds diligently, he regarded those who are obsessed with religiosity and acts of piety as excessive which could offend the Islamic principles or cause some other problems. For instance, this obsessive attitude develops neurosis and doubt, as well as causing them to ignore the real essence or objective in performing certain good deeds or devotional acts. (Arafat, 1970, pp. 59–60)

**Imam al-Ghazali and Shi’ism**

Imam al-Ghazali’s engagement with the Batinites or Isma’ili Shi’ites was more direct and polemical in nature as compared to other groups. He saw their doctrines as opposing traditional teaching. He has devoted some special books on Shi’ism, especially the Batinites.

While some works of al-Ghazali on the Batinites are lost, others have survived, namely, *al-Mustazhiri* or also known as *Fada’i‘ih al-Batiniiyyah wa Fada’il al-Mustazhiriyyah* (The Infamies of the Batinites and the Merits of the Mustazhirites), *al-Qistas al-Mustaqim* (The Just Balance), *Faysal al-Tafriqah bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqah* (The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Masked Infidelity), and *Qawasim al-Batiniyah* (Backbreakers of the Esoterics) which he wrote after *al-Mustazhiri*. (Hourani, 1984) However, the most important of these works is *al-Mustazhiri* or *Fada’i‘ih*, which was written at the request of Caliph al-
Mustazhir in order to reveal the prevalent and subtle innovations and errors of the Batinites. (Al-Ghazali, 2001) As exhibited in his *al-Mustazhir*, al-Ghazali’s stance towards the Batinites is critical. Not only he pointed out many of their errors, but he also maintained that certain doctrines amount to unbelief, some of which are considered as dangerous threats to religion. Imam al-Ghazali’s stance towards the Batinites as well as his writings about them is critical and polemical in nature. He opposed two of their main teachings, namely, *ta’lim* (the authoritative instruction or teaching)—exhibited in the concept of the infallible Imam or the Imamate doctrine—and their extreme esoteric or mysterious beliefs and practices. The issues of *ta’lim* and extreme esoteric beliefs are two main issues of *kalam* that become the focus of al-Ghazali in dealing with the Batinites. Although Imam al-Ghazali himself believes in the existence of inner dimensions of religious beliefs and practices, and welcomes the esoteric interpretation which do not contradict their outer or literal meaning, he observes that the Batinite esoteric conceptions were extreme, misleading, and not only were in contradiction to the fundamental teachings of Islam but indeed destroyed them. In fact, Imam al-Ghazali describes the Batinites as hypocrites who appeared to be Muslims only outwardly, but in reality, their hearts were filled with errors and misdeeds. (Al-Ghazali, 2001, p. 176) Imam al-Ghazali argued that in order to serve their propaganda, the Batinites had misinterpreted various Qur’anic and Prophetic traditions which were already established in traditional Islam. They explained them away, attached strange inner or esoteric meaning to them, and used the literal injunctions and texts out of their contexts. For instance, they claimed that adultery or fornication was “casting the sperm of inner knowledge into the soul of him who had not previously been bound by the pact;” that *al-tubah* (ritual purity) was “being free and clean from believing any doctrine except allegiance to the Imam;” that the five canonical prayers were “the indication of the four fundaments and of the Imam.”
Imam al-Ghazali observed that their requirement of total and blind obedience to their Imam had deprived people of using their reason and intellect. He further characterised these people as having impediments in their intelligence which made them blind toward the truth, and he categorised them into eight classes. (Al-Ghazali, 2001, pp. 193–195) With regards to the doctrine of the Ta’limites, al-Ghazali summarised:

[I]t is that it is a doctrine, the exterior of which is rašd [rejection, i.e. of first three Caliphs], and its interior out-and-out infidelity [unbelief]; and its beginning is the restricting of the ways to attain knowledge [sure cognitions] to the utterance of the Infallible Imam, and the removal [isolating] of minds [intellect] from being [able to] perceive [grasp] the truth because of the doubts which befall them and the disagreements to which reasoners are open, and imposing for the seeking of the truth, the way of instruction and learning, and the judgment that the Infallible Imam is the seer [the only one able to see], and that every age must have an Infallible Imam to whom recourse is to be had concerning any ambiguities in religious matters. (Al-Ghazali, 2001, p. 195)

Imam al-Ghazali argued that this was the beginning of their propaganda and eventually they would produce things contradictory to the Shari’ah, which was their ultimate aim. (Al-Ghazali, 2001) This negative attitude towards the Batinites indicates that—at least in Imam al-Ghazali’s view—they were not only considered as innovators and heretics, but also as infidels and dangerous enemies, who did not only oppose the Shari’ah, but also attempted to abolish it.

**Imam al-Ghazali on the Kharijites, the Murji’ites, and the Mu’tazilites**

Unlike his special treatment on the Batinites, Imam al-Ghazali did not devote a special book to the Kharijites, the Murji’ites, and the Mu’tazilites. Nevertheless, he addressed these various groups briefly and refutes some views that he regarded as erroneous through several of his writings. His critical analysis of the Kharijites, the Murji’ites, and the Mu’tazilites can be found in several places in his works, such as *Ihya’, Qawa’id al-Aqai’d, al-Arba’in fi Usul al-Din*, and *Faysal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa*.

Among important issues of *kalam* discussed by the Kharijites, the Murji’ites, and the Mu’tazilites which Imam al-Ghazali addresses is the issue related to faith (*iman*) and work...
(‘amal) in Islam, such as their relationship, roles and status of sinner. From his writings, it is clear that Imam al-Ghazali disagreed with the Kharijites who claimed that faith and good deeds were absolutely indispensable, and therefore, bad deeds or sin could obliterate one’s faith. Imam al-Ghazali did not regard faith and good deeds as one entity. Instead, he considered the latter as “a superaddition (mazid)” which supplements the former. (Al-Ghazali, 1999, p. 166) Imam al-Ghazali also invalidated the extreme view which maintains faith as void if one fails to perform obligatory deeds. (Al-Ghazali, 1999, p. 105)

Imam al-Ghazali’s disagreement with the Murji’ites is also demonstrated in his refutation of the concept of pure determinism of the Jabarites, which in turn forms the foundation to the Murji’ite theology. Imam al-Ghazali argued that this view is erroneous for it had attributed injustice to God through its claim that all evils or bad deeds come from God. Indeed, Imam al-Ghazali maintained that this stance has deceived many of them in committing sin. This is because, since the doctrine of pure determinism states that all evils come from God, they used this view as an excuse for their evils or bad deeds. (Al-Ghazali, 2003; Ghazzālī & Rojaya, 2010)

Imam al-Ghazali also disapproved the Mu’tazilite doctrine of intermediate state (al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn), which placed a grave sinner in an intermediate position between a believer and an unbeliever. The Mu’tazilites considered such a person simply as a reprobate (fasiq) who will remain in Hellfire forever. (Al-Ghazali, 1999, p. 105) Imam al-Ghazali maintained his stance that the Mu’tazilites failed to grasp the real meaning of some of the Qur’anic verses that they employed (e.g., the Qur’an 20:82; 103:1-3; 19:72-73; 72:23; 4:93, etc.), which are also general and therefore, need to be specified to their contexts. (Al-Ghazali, 1999, pp. 114–115)

**Imam al-Ghazali and Philosophy**
Imam al-Ghazali was aware that there had been no Muslim scholars who devoted their attention and thought to systematic and profound analysis of philosophy. Therefore, he felt obliged to master the science of philosophy in-depth. With intensive efforts, eventually he managed to master and achieved a comprehensive understanding of philosophy in less than two years. He first wrote *Maqasid al-Falasifah (The Aims of the Philosophers)* which is devoted to describing the philosophy objectively and neutrally without criticism or judgment, from various angles such as thoughts, ideas, logical, physical and metaphysical.

After almost a year of mastering Philosophy, then Imam al-Ghazali wrote a work of criticism against philosophy, entitled *Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*. The *Tahafut* has left great impact on philosophy, in which it dealt the last blow to philosophy, from which it did not recover in the Muslim lands. (A.-Ḥāmid M. Al-Ghazali & Watt, 2007, p. 13)

Thus, Imam al-Ghazali left great contribution in the field of philosophy through his two main philosophical works of *Maqasid al-Falasifah* and *Tahafut al-Falasifah*.

Among the issues addressed by Imam al-Ghazali in *Maqasid al-Falasifah* are issues related to *mantiq* or logic, metaphysic and naturalist. Based *Maqasid al-Falasifah*, Imam al-Ghazali divided philosophy into four main categories, namely Mathematics (*al-Riyadiyyat*), Logic (*al-Mantiqiyyat*), Naturalist (*al-Tabi‘iyyat*) and Metaphysic (*al-Ilahiyyat*). Each main category is discussed extensively by Imam al-Ghazali in several contexts.

As Imam al-Ghazali relates in *Munqidh*, he is aware of the various schools of philosophers, but he believes that their understanding was impaired through their distance from religion. (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953, p. 30) He also questioned the belief in, and reliance on intellectual self-sufficiency which is the foundation of the philosophers. In his mind, the dependence of most philosophers on reason had reduced the spiritual element in their hearts, thus they failed to balance between mind (reason) and spirituality.
In *Tahafut*, Imam al-Ghazali offers a critical analysis and refutation of the twenty fundamental doctrines of philosophy, seventeen of which were charged as heretical innovations and the other three as irreligious (*kafr*). These are the main issues of *kalam* in philosophy that he earnestly refuted. He even charges Abū Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi (c. 872-950) and Abu ‘Alī al-Husayn ibn ‘Abdullāh Ibn Sīnā (c. 980-1037), the two outstanding Muslim philosophers, with holding some irreligious views. Although it is often thought that Imam al-Ghazali disliked and refuted philosophy, some scholars such as Zaqzūq and al-Akiti have observed that he did not reject philosophy in toto, but was able to differentiate between *un*Islamic and good philosophy. (Zaqzūq & Mohd. Sulaiman Hj. Yasin, 1993) As the results of his deep analysis and extraordinary ability, he was able to master and criticise these views so much that it can no longer be defended by the philosophers.

Apart from *Maqasid al-Falasifah* and *Tahafut al-Falasifah* which are the two masterpieces in philosophy, there are still other works written by Imam al-Ghazali on philosophy. These works also address the issue of logic, *kalam* and theological issues. Among these works are *Mi‘yar al-‘Ilm fi Fan al-Mantiq, al-Madnun bihi ‘ala Ghir Ahlihi*, *al-Qistas al-Mustaqim*, and *Ma‘arij al-Qudus fi Madarij Ma‘rifat al-Nafs*.

**Imam al-Ghazali and Christianity**

There is a rather controversial book on Christianity entitled *al-Radd al-Jamil li Ilahiyati ‘Isa bi Sarih al-Injil* (The Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus through the Text of the Gospel) (Al-Ghazali, 1990) which has been associated to Imam al-Ghazali as the author. The book addresses very important theological doctrine in the Christian faith, namely, on the divinity of Jesus, and on the issue of “the son of God.”

There are different opinions between Muslim and Western scholars in determining the real author of this book. Some accept it as one of the original works of Imam al-Ghazali, some thought that the book is a compilation of sermons written by his students, and some have argued
that the book does not belong to Imam al-Ghazali, but was written by a former Copt-Christian convert to Islam. Each opinion has its own argument and proof. It is not the intention of this chapter to analyse those disagreements. For the sake of brief discussion in this chapter, however, we will follow the traditional stand which claims Imam al-Ghazali as the author of al-Radd al-Jamil. Imam al-Ghazali begins his discussion of al-Radd al-Jamil by analysing the status of the Gospels and treatises, focusing on their historical backgrounds, some contents, as well as some other related issues. He then analysed six selected Biblical texts which focus on issue of Divine union between Jesus and God. Imam al-Ghazali argued that Christian theologians had given incorrect understanding and misleading explanation of some verses of the Bible which had contributed to the formulation of the concept of the divinity of Jesus or anthropomorphism. Imam al-Ghazali offered metaphorical explanation of these verses that could relate to other passages which are also in line with the characteristics of humanity Jesus. He also criticised and repudiated the divinity of Jesus through the understanding of different denominations of Christianity. Among the issues of kalam discussed in al-Radd al-Jamil are on the impossibility of dual nature of Jesus (the divinity and humanity) as found in the discussion of al-Lāhūt wa al-Nāsūt, al-Hulūl wa Ittiḥād, and about different divine titles for Jesus. With regard to Christian belief in the Divinity of Jesus, Imam al-Ghazali argued that Christian faith has suffered a severe corruption. He asserted that this is the result of the influence of pagan philosophy and the misuse of analogy (qiyas) which has led to anthropomorphic belief. Imam al-Ghazali also attempted to harmonise between the Divinity texts (al-Nusus al-Ilahiyyah) and the Humanity texts (al-Nusus al-Insaniyyah) of the Gospel. Having analysed these texts, Imam al-Ghazali contended that both texts must be approached according to their own contexts. While the textual passages on the humanity of Jesus should be taken literally,
the texts on Divinity of Jesus must be read allegorically or metaphorically. It is therefore not only misappropriated but in fact is severely misleading to read both kinds of text literally.

Regarding the issue of the Divinity of Jesus or Divine union between God and Jesus, Imam al-Ghazali offered critical analysis on those Biblical verses which seem to support the idea. Among those Biblical verses are as follows:

I and the Father are one (John 10:30).

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one (John 17:11).

That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you (John 17:21).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

Christians believe that these verses indicate the Divinity of Jesus or Divine union between God and Jesus, that both are united and perhaps, of the same essence (al-īthād or homoousius). Imam al-Ghazali argued that these verses which seem to propagate the concept of “Divinity” of Christ must be approached metaphorically or allegorically and according to their contexts. For instance, the Biblical verse “I and the Father are one” is in fact a metaphor (mājāz) word and therefore cannot be taken literally. This verse should be understood as indication of close relationship between God and his ‘lover’ or someone He love. Bunyamin Duran suggested that the verse indicates that Jesus wanted to explain that his will and love are in harmony with God’s will and love. (Bakker et al., 2006)

Imam al-Ghazali disproved Christian argument that Jesus was God because he is referred to as “the Word” in the verse “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This literal understanding is misleading because John is also referred to as the
word of God. Therefore, the term “word” here should be interpreted in its own context, namely as God’s attribute of knowing. Thus, Jesus cannot be claimed as God or has divine qualities.

Imam al-Ghazali also offered critical analysis of the issue of al-Lāhūt wa al-Nāsūt, namely, the dual nature of Jesus, that he is a man and God in the same time, as believed by Christians. The belief of al-Lāhūt wa al-Nāsūt is related to the belief of Ḥulūl wa Ittiḥād which propagates the doctrine of incarnation of God in the form of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus is the incarnation of the Son of God. The Christian doctrine of incarnation states that in order to redeem human being from the Original Sin, God the Son incarnated himself in the form of Jesus Christ. Imam al-Ghazali invalidated this belief and literal interpretation of relevant Biblical verses, contending that they are metaphorical verses (majāz) and therefore should be read and understood metaphorically according to their own context. To read them literally is not only misleading but also brings contradictions to many other verses and contexts.

Among the examples of these Biblical verses is John 14:10:

Do not you believe that I am in the father, and that the father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, is Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Imam al-Ghazali asserted that this text cannot be taken literally, but must be approached metaphorically. To take it literally will amount to so-called the doctrine of Ittiḥād (union) between God and Jesus as well as to the doctrine of al-Lāhūt wa al-Nāsūt (Divinity and humanity) of Jesus. For Imam al-Ghazali the metaphorical expression is not unusual. It is also used by Sufis, such as Sufis expression:

You are inside me, You are around me, I only see You, wherever I go, because there is nothing in Our universe of love except You and me.

This expression is metaphorical and should be approached in metaphorical way. It does not suggest that the Sufis and God is one, or that they are united in essence, as the Christians tend
to literally believe in the case of Jesus and God. It is only a metaphorical expression of their close relationship and indication of depth of faith in God. Imam al-Ghazali observed that the confusion among the Christians is due to contradictory beliefs among different and various Christian denominations or sects as well as the results of different councils in Christian history. The example can be seen through the contradictory status of Jesus (between divinity and humanity) as held by the Jacobites (Monophysites), the Nestorians and the Melkites.

Imam al-Ghazali brought various Biblical evidences that affirm Jesus was a man and a prophet who was sent by God. He also proposed various Biblical verses which are against the Godhead or Divinity of Jesus. All of these verses and argumentations affirm that Jesus was only a man and a sincere prophet, and therefore, the Biblical verses which tend to lead to anthropomorphism must be approached metaphorically according to their contexts.

The Methodology of Imam al-Ghazali

Imam al-Ghazali was a systematic thinker and prolific writer who was also known as “encyclopedic”. He has his own distinctive methodologies in research and writing. He employed integrated method which combine different methodologies. Among those methodologies are objective, systematic, descriptive, critical, philosophical, theological, logical, *mantiq*, and some other methods.

Before Imam al-Ghazali discusses an issue, movement or ideology, he first mastered thoroughly almost all aspects of the issue movement or ideology that he addressed. To maintain the objectivity of his endeavour, Imam al-Ghazali studied and mastered the original writings or the original context and beliefs of movement or ideology that he studied. In fact, often times Imam al-Ghazali gained deeper understanding than the movement or ideology that he studied so much that he could correct some misunderstandings hold by them. For instance, these methodologies can be seen in his engagement with the four groups that he called the seekers...
after truth, namely, the theologians (*mutakallimun*), the Batinites (*the Batiniyyah*), the philosophers, and the Sufis (mystics). Al-Ghazali has been known as the great theologian and therefore there is no question regarding his expertise in the field. He has learned and mastered various writings and ideologies of the Batinites and was able to offer critical analysis and correction to various issues that he discussed. He had devoted special time for extensive study of philosophy until he has successfully mastered and achieved a comprehensive understanding of philosophy. He carefully studied the writings and teachings of the Sufis or mystics, and was sought to distinguish the real Sufism from the extreme and pseudo one. He also practiced the way of Sufism and became convinced that the Sufis were “men who had real experience, not men of words....” (W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953, p. 58) and therefore he found the truth that he has been searching for in Sufism.

Another important feature of Imam al-Ghazali’s methodology is the scope of his in-depth and comprehensive analysis. When he discusses certain issues, such as the doctrine or belief, he covered their various aspects, including the smallest and most delicate issues which may not be considered important by others.

Imam al-Ghazali has also been known as a systematic thinker who employed systematic method. He is systematic in his research and writing. His discussions and argumentations are structured and presented in a systematic manner. Some scholars argue that Imam al-Ghazali was the earliest systematic thinker in history that has provided motivation and guidance to other scholars to employ systematic method.

The other uniqueness of Imam al-Ghazali’s methodology is that he was able to harmonise and integrate different methods. For example, through his discussions and arguments, Imam al-Ghazali employed different methods of philosophy, theology, logic, metaphorical, exegesis, scriptural analysis and others. Likewise, his references also come from various sources, both
primary and secondary sources, such as the Qur’an, Hadith, reports from the companions and tabi’în, spiritual experience of Sufis, logic, and others.

Another unique approach of Imam al-Ghazali is that he used personal experiences, and offers a variety of examples as role models to readers (Al-Ghazali, 1984; W. M. Al-Ghazali, 1953, p. 82). He himself practiced what he taught or wrote in his books. He was interested to share what he obtained through a spiritual journey to make others better. Thus, the stories of the companions, sufis, mystic and others can be seen in some of his writings.

Conclusion

Imam al-Ghazali has been known as Muslim polymath who mastered various fields of knowledge. Despite he is not well known in the field of Kalam and Comparative religion, he left a significant contribution in the field, and therefore deserved to be recognised as among the scholar of Kalam and Comparative Religion. This is because apart from the different sects in Islam (e.g., the Kharîjîtes, the Murji’îtes, and the Mu’tazîlîtes), he also studied other movements, denominations, ideologies, and beliefs such as Shi’ism, Philosophy, Logic, materialist (Dahriyyun), Naturalis (Tabi’îyyun), Theis (Metaphysical, Ilahiyyun) and perhaps, Christianity. His methodology is unique and systematic, which enable him to combine and integrate between various methodologies and apply them according to their relevant contexts.

References


Ibn Khaldun’s (1332-1406 CE) Study of Other Religions in the Muqaddimah: An Overview

Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi bin Wan Razali
wmfazrul@usim.edu.my

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Ibn Khaldun, a great Tunisian Muslim genius. In praising Ibn Khaldun and his achievements, George Sarton (1884-1956), a renowned Belgian-American Historian of Science, describes him as: “the greatest theoretician of history, the greatest philosopher of man’s experience, not only of the Middle Ages, but the whole period extending from the time of the great classical historians down to that of Machiavelli, Bodin and Vico” (Sarton 1975 3:1775-1776).

This chapter deliberates on three main points, namely: Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual background, introduction to Muqaddimah, and Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions in the Muqaddimah. In general, scholarly studies on Ibn Khaldun concentrate on the historical, political or philosophical aspects of his works. Ibn Khaldun had been studied by many scholars, in many disciplines, such as epistemology (Zaid Ahmad 2003; Mahmoud Dhaouadi 2005:585-591;), ʿaqīdah (Muna Ahmad Abu Zayd 1997; Abdullāh ʿAbd al-Jalīl 1420H), tasawwuf (Adal 1990; Semih Ceyhan 2008), philosophy (al-Wardi 1994; Muhsin Mahdi 2016), Islamic thought (ʿImād al-Dīn Khalīl 1983; al-Shikʿah 1992), sociology (Jaffary Awang 1994; Alatas 2006), politics (Gibb 1933; Muhammad Mahmoud Rabie 1967), economics (Weiss 1997:29-37; Salim Cafer Karatas 2006), and history (Allen 1967; Simon 1990). This chapter, instead, concentrates on the aspects of Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions in his Muqaddimah. According to Walter J. Fischel (1902-1973), a prominent orientalist-scholar in Khaldunian studies, this aspect of Ibn Khaldun’s works, or he called as the Egyptian phase of Ibn Khaldun’s life, ‘far remained largely unexplored and has not yet been subjected to a thorough critical analysis in all its facets’ (Fischel 1967:3).
Ibn Khaldun’s full name is al-‘Allāmah Walī al-Dīn Abū Zayd ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldūn (Mohammad Abdullah Enan 1997:3). Walī al-Dīn, which literally means the protector of religion, is his laqab (title) given to him in conjunction of his appointment as the mufī (religious authoritative scholar) of Mālikī madhhab (school of Islamic law) in Egypt. Whilst, Abū Zayd is his kunyah (fatherly title), which means the father of Zayd; who is his eldest son; as in the traditional culture of Arab (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Waḥīd Wāfī 1962:12-13).

The name ‘Khaldūn,’ which is popularly ascribed to him originated from an honorary title conferred to his ninth grandfather, whose name is Khālid ibn ʿUthmān. This grandfather of Ibn Khaldun was his first and earliest family member who entered Spain or al-Andalus during the opening of Islamic countries (al-Faṭḥ al-Islāmī). According to the culture of Arab, though his grandfather original name is Khālid, it was changed to ‘Khaldūn’ with the additional Arabic letters of waw (و) and nūn (ن) to signify one’s great position by using a collective noun (اسم جمع). With this change, the whole Khālid ibn ʿUthmān’s family line is popularly known as the Banū Khaldūn or the generation of Khaldun (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Waḥīd Wāfī 1962:13).

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis on 1 Ramaḍān 732AH / 27 May 1332AD and died in Cairo on the 26th Ramaḍān 808AH / 16th March 1406AD (Fischel 1967: xlviii-lv; Schmidt 1978:34). He was a “medieval scholar famed for his philosophy of history and insights into the rise and fall of civilisations” (Campo 2009:334). This philosophy of history and thoughts on the rise and fall of civilisations are amongst the contents of his brainchild science, namely ʿumrān, which could be traced to develop from his intellectual training in the sciences of Kalām, philosophy and logic. One of the important factors that also influenced the creation of his ʿumrān science and his writings was his travels to many regions of African, Arab and European
countries, such as Morocco, Spain, Egypt, Palestine and *al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn* (Mecca and Medina) (Fuad Baali n.d.).

In his autobiography, Ibn Khaldun describes that his family originated from the descendants of Yemen Arab of Hadhramaut. Later, the family of Khaldun (*Banī Khaldūn*) is known to have migrated to places such as Seville, Spain (*al-ʿAshbīlī bi al-Andalus*) and Africa, namely in Tunis and Morocco. He also describes that the Khaldun family lineage connects to Wāʿil ibn Ḥujr (Allah satisfies with him), who died circa 661-680 and was also one of the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Hadhramaut. He justifies this claim by quoting from Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr’s (368-463AH) *al-Istīʿāb Fī Maʿrifah al-ʿAṣḥāb* and Ibn Hazm’s (384-456AH) *Jamharah Ansāb al-ʿArab* (Ibn Khaldūn 2004:27-29, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr 2006 2:339-340; Ibn Ḥazm 1962:460-461).

His Education

According to Ibn Khaldun’s autobiography, he received his earliest education from his father, Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn. He says: “I was educated under the influence of my father, may Allah shower His blessings on him, until I reached adulthood…” (Ibn Khaldūn 1979:17). Next, among his early teachers was Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Saʿd ibn Burrāl al-Anṣārī from Spain, who was secondly mentioned in Ibn Khaldun’s autobiography (*al-Taʿrif*). Ibn Khaldun learned from Saʿd ibn Burrāl al-Anṣārī many basic Islamic knowledge such as Qur’ānic studies, *Qirāʿat* studies, *Rasm al-Qurʿān* through *Matan al-Lāmiyyah* and al-*Rāʾiyah* by al-Shājahibī (538-590AH), Hadith studies through *Mawāṭṭa*’ Mālik ibn Anas (93-179AH), Arabic grammar studies through *al-Tashīl* by Ibn Mālik (600-672H) and Fiqh studies through *al-Mukhtaṣar* by Ibn al-Ḥājib (570-646AH) (Ibn Khaldūn 1979:18-19).

Ibn Khaldun learned *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Mawāṭṭa*’ Mālik and some other Arabic and Fiqh treatises from Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Jābir ibn Sulṭān al-Qaysī al-Wādiyāshī, who was a renowned Hadith expert in Tunisia during Ibn Khaldun’s time. He was also conferred
with many ijāzah sanad (licenses of transmission chain) from this teacher. He also learned Fiqh from many other religious teachers in Tunisia, such as Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Jayyānī, Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad al-Qaṣīr and Qāḍī Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Hawārī (Ibn Khaldūn 1979:20).

**Intellectual Contributions**

For Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual contributions, this chapter only describes his major writings and the names of his prominent students. Evidently, there are many other intellectual contributions of Ibn Khaldun, especially in terms of his scholarly views on history, politics, philosophy and education. Thus, Philip K. Hitti (1886-1978), a Professor of Arabic Studies at Princeton University, attributed Ibn Khaldun as the founder of sociology and one of the great historians of all times (1946:568). While, according to Reynold A. Nicholson (1868-1945), an eminent orientalist of Cambridge University, he praises Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual contributions as follows:

No Muslim had ever taken a view at once so comprehensive and so philosophical; none had attempted to trace the deeply hidden causes of events, to expose the moral and spiritual forces at work beneath the surface, or to divine the immutable laws of national progress and decay. Ibn Khaldun owed little to his predecessors, although he mentions some of them with respect. He stood far above his age, and his own countrymen have admired rather than followed him. His intellectual descendants are the great medieval and modern historians of Europe – Machiavelli and Vico and Gibbon (Nicholson 1907:438-439).

In the analysis of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badwī (1917-2002), a prominent modern Egyptian biographer and historian, there are eight writings which are ascribed to Ibn Khaldun (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badwī 2006). However, according to Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Munʿim Aḥmad (Ibn Khaldūn 1417AH:55-59), an expert-scholar on Ibn Khaldun studies from Umm al-Qurā University, there are three more writings of Ibn Khaldun, which could also be included in the list. These three other writings are evident based on the biographical analysis and some manuscripts,
which are attributed to Ibn Khaldun. The list of Ibn Khaldun’s writings is as follows (al-Ṭabbâ‘i 1992:54-59; ʿAbd al-Rahman Badwi 2006:33-77; Ibn Khaldūn 1417AH):


ii. Abridgement of Ibn Rushd’s writings on philosophy;

iii. Taqyīd Fī al-Mantiq, on logic;

iv. Kitāb Fī al-Ḥisāb, on mathematics;


vi. Commentary of al-Būṣīrī’s (608-696AH) Qaṣīdah al-Burdah, on Arabic poem in praising and remembering the Prophet S.A.W;

vii. Shīfā’ al-Sā’il Fī Tahdhīb al-Masā’il, a treatise on Islamic sufism, which answers a few questions on Islamic spirituality such as the meaning of al-Taṣawwuf, al-Rūḥ, al-Nafs, al-Qalb, al-Aql, al-Mujāhadah, al-Sa‘ādah, al-Ma’rifah, al-Shaykh, al-Murīd and other sufi related themes (Ibn Khaldūn 1996).

viii. Diwān al-Mubtada’ wa al-Khabar Fī Ayyām al-ʿArab wa al-ʿAjam wa al-Barbar wa Man ʿAsharah Min Dhawī al-Sultān al-Akbar. This includes two important portions from the Diwān, namely Muqaddimah and al-Ta’rīf Bi Ibn Khaldūn Wa Rihlatuhu Gharban Wa Sharqān;

ix. Waṣf Bilād al-Maghrib, a writing specially prepared for Tamerlane (1336-1405), the highest ruler of Mongol, which describes the geopolitical aspects of Morocco and some other countries in North Africa;

x. Tadhkīr al-Sahwān, a small tract describing a tradition (ḥadīth) of the Prophet S.A.W.; and lastly,


Next, when it comes to describing Ibn Khaldun’s students or disciples, it is hard for any researcher to find a complete list of his students. Though, in his autobiography, Ibn Khaldun mentioned few times of his teaching experiences as teacher in Tunis and in Egypt at al-Madrasah al-Qamḥīyyah, al-Madrasah al-Barqūqīyyah, al-Azhar Mosque (al-Jāmiʿ al-Azhār)

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and as Qāḍī of Mālikī school. Obviously, the names of his followers and disciples are only available from the secondary and tertiary sources, which include witnesses from the students themselves and observations from any third party. Among these students and disciples of Ibn Khaldun are as follows: Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (766-845AH / 1364-1442AD), Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥasqālānī (773-852AH / 1372-1449AD), Badr al-Dīn al-Damāmīnī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥasan al-Bisāṭī, ʿAmmār al-Miṣrī (ʿAmmār al-Miṣrī ʿAbd Al-Jalīl ʿAbd Al-Rāshid 1420H, 98-100; Ikrimah Abū Bakr 2014:31-32).

The Study of Other Religions in The Muqaddimah

Literally, the study of religion, connotes the pursuit for religious knowledge; researching, contemplating or scrutinizing attentively at religion. Ninian Smart (1927-2001) signifies the study of religions as an attempt to understand the various aspects of religion, especially from using other intellectual disciplines (Smart 2006). Whilst, Jean Jacques Waardenburg (1930-2015) suggests that the study of religion “includes all studies concerned with religious data, their observation, ascertainment, description, explanation, analysis, understanding, [and] interpretation” (Olson 2003:5). This second scholarly definition of the study of religion is the chosen definition to be applied along this present writing for its compatibility and viability with the focuses of this writing. Here, this second definition focuses on the approaches or ways to study religious data, namely from observation, ascertainment, description, explanation, analysis, understanding and interpretation. Whilst religious data here includes the whole universe of religions as its subjects of study, for instance: on history, creed, prophethood, scholars, sacred texts, sacred places and many more (Alles 2005:8761). These subjects of religious study are the ones that could be found in the Muqaddimah, which rendered as Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions in the Muqaddimah.
However, before this chapter proceeds, it is important to firstly understand how the study of other religions in the *Muqaddimah* was conducted. One important point that must be remembered by anyone is that the study of religions is very much known for its ubiquitous and permeating nature. By ubiquity, this means that the discourse on religion is very much flexible, permeating, and not just specifically concentrated in the study of religion. Whereas, discourses on religions could also be found in many other pursuits of knowledge and sciences of all time. For instance, one can read on religious origin and development in the science of history (read: not only in the study of religion). One can also know the ideals of religion from learning the philosophy. In the same way, one can also make sense on why and how religious people live in a society from reading the works on sociology or anthropology. In sum, the discussions on religions could be found in the other disciplines of study, in the same way, to find the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*.

This ideal of analysing the study of other religions in an historical text, such as Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, is not something new. For instance, Ahmad Shboul (1979) in his doctoral thesis studied al-Mas’ūdī’s study of other religions in *Marūj al-Dhahab Wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawhar* (2005), a historical *magnum opus* of al-Mas’ūdī. The same also goes to Kamar Oniah in her doctoral thesis (2003), where she analysed al-Bīrūnī’s (362-440AH) study of other religions through al-Bīrūnī’s sociohistorical texts, namely *Fī Tahqīq Mā Li al-Hind Min Maqūlah Maqūlah Fī al-Aql Aw Mardhūlah* (1958) and *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyyah ‘An al-Qurūn al-Khāliyyah* (1897). Whilst, Mohd Sani Badron (2012) analysed Ibn Arabi’s conception of religion from Ibn Arabi’s mystical masterpieces, namely: *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Ījāz al-Bayān Fī Tarjumah ‘An al-Qur’ān*. With these examples, it is evident that the study of other religions could also be found in the texts of other disciplines of study (read: non-religious study) and supposedly realised by the present and future researchers in the academia. This is epistemologically obvious from learning a wisdom by George Sarton (1884-
1956), who was a renowned American philosopher and historian of science, where he exemplifies:

As every trained scholar knows (and superficial bibliographers forget), some of the best information on any subject is likely to be found in books devoted to large subjects or even to other subjects. For example, valuable information on Ibn Sina might be tucked in a general history of Islam or hidden in a medical journal or a metaphysical treatise (Sarton 1975:3-9).

The *Muqaddimah* is principally meant to be a lengthy introduction to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitab al-Ibar* by Ibn Khaldun. Nevertheless, the composition of the book also includes information on the study of religions. The same path was also shown by previous famous Muslim historiographers and historians, such as Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar Ibn Wāqid al-Wāqidī (130-207AH), Aḥmad Ibn Yāhū al-Balādhūrī (d. 278/279AH), Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310AH) and Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAli Ibn Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (282/283-345AH), which their works were read by Ibn Khaldun. In other words, all masterpieces by these previously listed Muslim historiographers and historians, are also included their study of other religions altogether in their historical descriptions.

Due to that, it is also found in the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun regarding several descriptions and analyses on the study of other religions. Ibn Khaldun’s study of the other religions here refers to his expositions and clarifications of the non-Islamic religions, namely of Judaism, Christianity, Sabeanism, and Magianism. Furthermore, there are also previous researches and academic papers by modern scholars of religious study and historiography that also highlight the same discussions on the study of other religions in the *Muqaddimah*. These scholars, both non-Muslims and Muslims, discussed on multiple aspects related to the themes of Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions, such as his study of Judaism, Christianity, Jesus, Bible and theories of religion (Fischel 1958:147-171; Pines 1970:265-274; Bland 1983:189-197; Wasserstrom 1999:164; Muhammad Azizan Sabjan 2010; Whittingham 2011:209-222).
praising Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions, Walter J. Fischel, a scholar of Oriental Jewry and Islamic studies at the University of California, says:

Ibn Khaldun’s detailed knowledge of early church history shows how and to what degree he, the orthodox Muslim, could detach himself from the fetters of his own faith and penetrate into the theological and doctrinal differences of another religion. Indeed among the Arab-Muslim scholars who attempted such a study, it was Ibn Khaldun, the great Muslim thinker of the fourteenth century, who achieved astounding scholarly objectivity in regards to the various non-Islamic religions (Fischel 1967:137).

Though this study agrees with the general praising remark made by Fischel above, nevertheless, it is important to review and concentrate on Fischel’s understanding of detachment from one’s own faith for an objective study of various non-Islamic religions. It is possible to say that due to this understanding of detachment that Ibn Khaldun is labelled as secular by some scholars such as Bryan S. Turner and Kraemer (Turner 1971; Tāhā Ḥusayn 1925:76-81). However, this trend of labelling is very typical for any secular orientalists or western-educated scholars of religious studies. For them, objectivity means detachment from religion or bracketing one’s faith throughout one’s study of other religions.

Whereas, in the Muslim scholarship, detachment from religion or bracketing of one’s faith for objectivity is not even needed in one’s study as exemplified by al-Bīrūnī (362-440AH) and al-Shahrastānī (479-548AH) in their masterpieces. Some Muslim scholars reject such secular-Western understanding of scientific-objectivity. These rejections could also be referred in the other scholarly exposés such as Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman’s Towards Forming an Islamic Methodology of Religionswissenschaft: The Case of Al-Biruni (1998); Dīn Muḥammad Muhammad Mīrā’s Maqālāt Fī al-Manhāj: Fī ‘Īlm al-Dīn al-Muqāran (2009:6-30) and Anis Malik Thoha’s Objectivity and the Scientific Study of Religion (2009).

Themes of Ibn Khaldun’s Study of Other Religions
The themes in Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions are developed using qualitative analysis method, or specifically from the third level of coding, namely selective coding. Selective coding is the process of linking or integrating all the data, codes to a central or core category of study. This category then is linked or integrated with the other central or core categories to develop and refine this study into themes. Through the process of selective coding, this study managed to link or integrate all related information to the specific themes for this study. There are five themes that could be traced to represent Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions in the *Muqaddimah*. These five themes are as follows:

1. On Judaism
   a. On the Jews as the Chosen People
   b. On the Jews Living in Wilderness from the Exodus History
   c. On the Origin of Cohen
2. On Christianity
   a. The Chronological Development of Christianity
   b. The Nicene Creed
   c. On the Origin of Pope
3. On Sabeanism
4. On Magianism
5. Interreligious discourses
   a. Ibn Khaldun’s Views on the Torah and the Gospel
   b. Muhammad’s PBUH Name in the Previous Scriptures
   c. The Significance of Jerusalem in the Religions of Sabeanism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam

In the previous five themes, there are themes that also consist of subthemes, namely the first, second and fifth themes. Whereas, for the second and third themes, there are no subthemes included, due to the brevity and focus provided in these two themes. Though they are brief and focused, yet they also convey essential information on other religions. Eric John Sharpe (1933-2000) categorised that there were three perspectives in looking at other religion, as follows: “to ignore them altogether (the majority view), to observe them as curiosities, without taking them too seriously, and to condemn them as evil” (Hinnells 2005:23). In due case, information
provided by Ibn Khaldun and other scholars must always be cherished and taken into analysis by the present and future scholars of religious study.

For the first theme, which is in Judaism, there are three subthemes. They are: on Jews as the chosen people, on the Jews living in wilderness from the Exodus history and on the origin of Cohen. It could be said that these three subthemes, which are explained in the *Muqaddimah*, are the condensed and selected narratives from his second volume of *Diwan al-Mubtada’ Wa al-Khabar Fi Tarikh al-`Arab Wa al-Barbar Wa Man `A`sharahum Man Dhawih al-Sha’n al-Akhar* (2000). He discussed about al-Yahud or Judaism in many pages, under chapter titled: *al-Khabar ‘An Banī Isrā’il Wa Mā Kāna Lahum Min al-Nubuwah Wa al-Mulk Wa Taghallubuhum ‘Alā al-`Arḍ al-Muqaddasah Bi al-Shām Wa Kayfa Tajaddadat Dawlatuhum Ba’da al-Inqirāḍ Wa Mā Iktanafa Dhālika Min al-`Aḥwāl* (The Story of the Children of Israel, and their Prophethood and Kingdom, and their Sovereignty on the Blessed Land at Shām. And the way they Renewed their Kingdom After Cessation. And Matters Related to Them). Here, he traced the long history of the Jews and Judaism from Prophet Ibrāhīm, Ishāq, Ya’qūb or Isrā’il, Yūsuf and Mūsā A.S. (Fischel 1967; Bland 1983; and Ibn Khaldūn 2000 2: 92-166). In Kalman Bland’s praises of Ibn Khaldun’s study of Judaism, he stated: “substantiating the claim to uniqueness and originality of Ibn Khaldun’s treatment of the Jews presents no difficulties. The historical sources from which he derived his data, as well as the breadth of his coverage, far exceed all other medieval Islamic historians” (Bland 1983:189).

Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun includes three subthemes of Christianity, namely the historical development of the Christians, the Nicene Creed, and the origin of Pope and Patriarch. His ingenious remarks that correlate the discussion on the origin of the word ‘Patriarch’ and ‘Pope’ to the long history of Christendom, and also to the Nicaea Council are very thought-provoking.

Nathaniel Schmidt (1962-1939), a Sweden-American Baptist Theologian and Orientalist, regards Ibn Khaldun as a careful, unprejudiced observer, and also a participant to his subjects of study. In Schmidt’s own words, he notes: “his objectivity in dealing with the Christian peoples and his freedom from national prejudice in pointing out the serious limitations of the Arabs, are quite beyond praise” (Schmidt 1978:12).

With regards to the third theme of Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions, his remarks on Sabeanism are mentioned very brief in the Muqaddimah. This is unlike Ibn Khaldun’s remarks on the two of earlier themes, which are Judaism and Christianity. From using qualitative content analysis methodology in this study, it is found that the word Ṣābi‘ah (Sabeanism) derives only three times in the Muqaddimah, where specifically in the subchapter sixth: Fī al-Masājid wa al-Bayūt al-ʿAẓīmah Fī al-ʿĀlam (The mosques and venerated buildings of the world) of chapter four of Muqaddimah (Ibn Khaldun 1967 2:249-266; Ibn Khaldūn 2014 2:788-799). Ibn Khaldun mentioned on Sabeanism in his descriptions on the virtues and brief history of al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. He began his remarks by stating that the Sabeans used Jerusalem in the time of Abraham (Ibrāhīm A.S.) as the site for them to build a temple (Haykal) for Venus (al-Zahrah). One of their rituals at the temple was to pour oil (al-Taʾmīd) on a rock. Interestingly, Ibn Khaldun also remarked that the Sabeans were in Jerusalem long before the Jews, or in the year of Prophet Ibrāhīm A.S. (1997-1822BC), which means during the years of the Patriarch Abraham as in the belief of the Jews and Christians, who was also the father of Prophet Ismā‘īl A.S. (1911-1744BC) and Ishāq A.S. (1897-1717BC) (al-Maghlūth 1998:50-56).
For the fourth theme, same as in the third theme, Ibn Khaldun’s remarks on Magianism were also mentioned very brief in the *Muqaddimah*, in comparison to his remarks on Judaism and Christianity. Both words, namely Majūs (Magian) and Majūsiyyah (Magianism) derived twice in different places of the *Muqaddimah*. However, there are only two places where Ibn Khaldun correlates his reference to the Magianism with discussions in the religious studies. Specifically, these two remarks by Ibn Khaldun on Magianism are on the two unique attributes of the Magianism, in comparison to Islam, Judaism and Christianity. These two unique attributes are first, Magianism does not possess any revealed scripture, and second, Magianism does not possess any prophet. However, both attributes exist in the religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, but not in Magianism as claimed by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah* (Ibn Khaldun 1967:93 & 390; Ibn Khaldūn 2014:342 & 2:565).

With regards to the final theme, namely on interreligious discourses, there are three subthemes found. They are: Ibn Khaldun’s Views on the Torah and the Gospels, Muhammad’s S.A.W Name in the Previous Scriptures, and the Significance of Jerusalem to the religions of Sabeanism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three subthemes are purposely arranged due to their interfaith and interreligious concerns. For instance, in discussing Ibn Khaldun’s view on the Torah and the Gospel, this study found that this discussion cannot be arranged systematically under the previous headings of particular religions: Judaism or Christianity. Through analysis and investigation on Ibn Khaldun’s discussions on the Torah and the Gospel in the *Muqaddimah*, this chapter found that Ibn Khaldun tends to discuss his view on these both scriptures together. Ibn Khaldun does not properly separate his discussion on these both scriptures, where his discussions on the Torah are usually overlapped with his views on the Gospel (Ibn Khaldun 1967; Ibn Khaldūn 2014).

The same also goes to the second subtheme in the interreligious discourses, namely Muhammad’s S.A.W Name in the Previous Scriptures. His reference to this theme is included
in his invocation (al-Dirā) at the early pages of Muqaddimah, where he says: “والصلاة والسلام... على سيدنا ومولانا محمد النبي العربي المكتوب في التوراة والإنجيل...”, which means: “…prayer and blessings upon our Lord and Master, Muhammad, the Arab Prophet, whom Torah and Gospel have mentioned and described…” (Ibn Khaldun 1967 1:4; Ibn Khaldūn 2014 1:281). Though this Islamic notion was mentioned very briefly, however it bears a significant importance in the Islamic discussions, on the finality of Muhammad’s S.A.W. prophethood (Khātam al-Nubuwwah), faith in the previous scriptures (al-Imān bi al-Kutub al-Sābiqah wa al-Rusul al-Sābiqīn) and signs of Muhammad’s S.A.W. prophethood (Dalā’il al-Nubuwwah).

Whereas the third subtheme in the interreligious discourses, namely the Significance of Jerusalem to the religions of Sabeanism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Interestingly, it is worth mentioning here about the unique, deep and ingenious research by Ibn Khaldun to the history of Jerusalem. While many modern studies that trace the history of this sacred site are limited only to the three Abrahamic faiths, namely Islam, Judaism and Christianity (Stroumsa 1997; Armstrong 2002; Lundquist 2008; The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought 2010); yet Ibn Khaldun paves the different path. In the Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun included his remarks on the history of Jerusalem altogether with its relation to the religions of Sabeanism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It means here, Ibn Khaldun not only extends his scopes of discussion on Jerusalem, but he also enlarged his research sources and the chronology of his Jerusalem research far beyond to the time of Prophet Ibrāhīm A.S. (Ibn Khaldun 1967 2:249-266; Ibn Khaldūn 2014 2:788-799).

All in all, what could be understood from all five main themes of Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions; Ibn Khaldun was being selective in presenting and commenting his views on the other religions. This selectivity in Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions, as proposed by Eric John Sharpe (1933–2000), could be determined from 3Ms, namely from Ibn Khaldun’s ‘motive, method and materials’ in his study of other religions (Sharpe 1986:1-2). In other
words, such selectivity by Ibn Khaldun are decided, first, from his motive in writing the *Muqaddimah*; second, from his method of ‘Umran science of history; and third, due to his references and writings in his access of his time. Thus, it must be stressed again here that Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* is not a full-fledged and systematic reference for the study of other religions. However, Ibn Khaldun’s remarks and deliberations on many religious themes in the *Muqaddimah* are unique and differentiated accordingly to his motive, method and materials.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, al-Qāsim Wall Wall Dīn Abū Zayd Abū Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn is a medieval scholar *par excellence*, celebrated for his thoughts and insights on diverse fields of study, namely history, politics, education, and economics. He introduces his ‘Umran science in the *Muqaddimah*, which could be traced to develop from his intellectual training in the sciences of Kalām, philosophy and logic. One of the important factors that also influenced the creation of his ‘Umran science and his writings was his travels to many regions of African, Arab and European countries such as Morocco, Spain, Egypt, Palestine and al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharifayn (Mecca and Medina).

*Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn* is a prolegomenon to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitab al-Ibar* of Ibn Khaldun. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun’s purpose for writing the *Muqaddimah* is actually related to the purpose of writing his *Tārīkh*, namely these four purposes as follows: first, problematic and wrong facts in the books by previous historians such as al-Masʿūdī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Wāqidī. Second, new arrangements of historical facts and reflections. Third, new focuses on the history of the Arabs and Berbers of Maghrib, including their early origin to Ibn Khaldun’s time. And lastly, new comments on civilisation, urbanisation, human social organisation and dynasty building. He organises the contents of *Muqaddimah* with an opening (*khutbah* or *dībājah iftitāḥiyyah*), an introduction of the book.
on the virtues of Science of History (Muqaddimah fī faḍl ʿīlm al-Tarīkh), and six fuṣūl or chapters.

It must be mentioned here that Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddimah does not contain a systematic treatment which can be described as a full-fledged text for the study of other religions. This is more obvious if Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddimah is to be taken in comparison with other works of Muslim scholars, such as al-Milal Wa al-Nihal (1993), al-Jawāb al-Ṣahih Li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masih (1999), and al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Nihal (1996). Nevertheless, Ibn Khaldun does seem to recognise some basic aspects and information in the study of other religions. For instance, Ibn Khaldun stresses that religious beliefs and institutions are important factors in the life of a society, where they are capable in influencing the workings of a community. Subsequently, these information on religious beliefs and institutions are considered as vital historical information as required for the purpose of writing his Muqaddimah (2014).

Information on the other religions as enshrined in the Muqaddimah are not systematically arranged as in any modern textbooks of study of religions. In this case, this study utilises the qualitative content analysis method, where primary focus is given to the text of Muqaddimah, especially on the chapters, or subchapters or sub-subchapters that deal with religion. There are four non-Muslim religions mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in his Muqaddimah, namely Judaism, Christianity, Sabeanism, and Magianism. Ibn Khaldun’s descriptions and analyses on these four religions are organised into five themes to represent Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions in the Muqaddimah. These five themes are as follows: on Judaism, on Christianity, on Sabeanism, on Magianism and Interreligious discourses.

Ibn Khaldun deliberated matters related to the other religions by discussing on their histories, faiths, sacred scriptures, religious institutions and places of worship. His approach is clearly of a historian or historiographer, which stresses the recording and understanding of any
information of historical value. These information on other religions are acquired from his intellectual background, namely from his references to many writing sources, travels to different places, and personal meetings with many scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

In brief, this chapter found that both aspects namely the intellectual background of Ibn Khaldun and his Muqaddimah, are important impetuses for Ibn Khaldun’s study of other religions. Though the Muqaddimah is principally meant to be a lengthy introduction to the voluminous text of Kitab al-Ibar, nevertheless the composition of the book also includes relevant and significant information for the study of other religions. In the words of Kalman Bland:

Anyone who was unwilling to let the Muqaddimah “wash his hands of any blind trust in tradition (taqlīd)” would not “become aware of the conditions of periods and races that were before his time and that will be after it.” He would no doubt be as put off by Ibn Khaldun’s theory of the Jews as he would have been by so much else in this “new, extraordinary, and highly useful,” yet unduly neglected, monument to medieval Islamic genius (Bland 1983:196).

References


Nur al-Din Al-Raniri

Nur al-Din ibn ‘Ali ibn Hasan-Ji ibn Muhammad Hamid al-Shafi’i al-Ash’ari al-‘Aydarusi al-Raniri is a well-respected Muslim scholar in the Malay Archipelago. He was one of the most influential Muslim scholars during the golden period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. (Bakar, 1991, p. 259)

A Brief Biography

This 17th century kalam scholar in the Malay Archipelago was popularly known as Al-Raniri. It actually refers to the name of his hometown, Ranir in India. Although he came from the other part of the Muslim world, Al-Raniri’s contributions, particularly to the process of Islamisation in the Malay Archipelago had made him as the well-known scholar by the communities in this region. Most writers consider him as a Malay Muslim scholar, rather than an Indian or Arab scholar.

His educational and spiritual quest intensified when he travelled to Arabia sometimes around 1600. Arabia particularly the South Arabia or Hadramawt, was a centre of Islamic scholarship and heritage at that time. The Sayyids of Hadramawt were known as knowledgeable people and the propagators of sufistic approach of Islam. In fact, most historical data have shown to us that they were actively involved in missionary activities around the world. (Al-‘Attas, 1986, pp. 3–4; Azra, 1994, pp. 171–172)

Al-Raniri’s religious background can be traced through his own account in several writings for example in his book Hujjat al-Siddiq li daf’ al-Zindiq (written between 1638–1641) and Jawahir al-‘Ulam fi Kashf al-Ma’lum (written between 1642-1644). He belongs to the Shafi’i
School of Islamic Jurisprudence, which is the prominent school in the Malay Archipelago. Al-Asha’riyyah is his school of theology, a prominent and dominant theological school among the Malays until today. Thus, Al-Raniri’s school of thought in Islam was not different from the rest of the Malay communities. In fact, this had contributed much to his mission in the Malay Archipelago and made things easy for him to propagate his ideas and thoughts.

Al-Raniri was very much involved with Sufism even before his arrival in Acheh. He was known to be the follower and later on became a leader of a Sufi Order namely the Rifa’iyyah, in particular, in the Malay Archipelago. (Bakar, 1991, p. 260)

His Contributions to the Malay Archipelago

Al-Raniri’s contributions to the Malay Archipelago and also to Islamic heritage in general, are significant. He assumed the highest religious position in Acheh as the Shaykh of Islam. The appointment was made by the Sultan of Acheh himself at that time, Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636-1641). After the death of the Sultan, the throne was succeeded by his queen, Sultanah Taj al-‘Ala’ fi Shafa‘iyyat al-Din Shah (1641-1675). Al-Raniri also won favour of a new ruler and retained his position at the court until his abrupt departure from Acheh in 1644.

Al-Raniri’s scholarly works particularly his writings are in various disciplines of knowledge. He had mastered various branches of the Islamic knowledge such as Fiqh, Hadith, Theology, History, Sufism, and study of religion. Most of the themes in his writings are from these disciplines with a special emphasis on the field of theology and Sufism. There are at least three different periods taken by Al-Raniri to write his scholarly works. It includes the period before he arrived in Acheh (before 1636), the period he was in Acheh (1636-1644) and the period after he left Acheh and return to his homeland (1644 onwards).

In this chapter, Al-Raniri’s works namely Tibyan fi Ma’rifat al-Adyan (The Explanation of Faiths), Asrar al-Insan fi Ma’rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One) and Bustan al-Salatin (Garden of the
Sultans) will be the subject of discussions. Al-Raniri had explained many aspects of religions other than Islam such as Magianism, Judaism and Christianity in these works.

*Tibyan fi Ma’rifat al-Adyan* (The Explanation of Faiths)

The *Tibyan* was written by Nur al-Din al-Raniri between 1641 and 1644., under the command of the Queen of Aceh at that time, Seri Sultan Taj ‘Alam Sultanah Safiyyat al-Din Shah (1641-1675).


For the purpose of this analysis, we use Voorhoeve’s facsimile compilation of the *Tibyan*. (Raniri, 1955) His edition of the *Tibyan* is the only complete copy published. In addition, two romanised versions of the *Tibyan* by Engku Mohd. Anuar (Anuar, 1965) and Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani (Mohd Jailani, 2003) will also be used to assist in our understanding if we encounter any difficult word(s) found in Voorhoeve’s facsimile edition of the *Tibyan*. Steenbrink’s work in discussing several early Malay texts, including the *Tibyan*, is also useful in this analysis. (Steenbrink, 1988)

There is no other text written by early Muslim ulamas in the Malay world that we know up to now in as much detail as *Tibyan* in terms of its discussion on religions other than Islam. Furthermore, al-Raniri also included a discussion of the Islamic sects that existed throughout the world in this text. Although the reason for al-Raniri writing this text is simply to refute the teachings of the Wujudiyah movement in the Malay world at that time, he extended his
writings by highlighting all other practices and beliefs, which he considers not Islamic, and he tried to associate them with the Wujudiyyah. This is to give a clear message to his readers that the Wujudiyyah is a deviant teaching and Muslims in the Malay world should reject it entirely. At the same time, Tibyan could also have been written in such a way in order to warn the courts of the dangers brought to the local people by foreign traders who might be the followers of these religions and sects.

Generally, al-Raniri wrote the Tibyan by following the general scheme of al-Shahrastani in his work Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal. (Steenbrink, 1988, p. 198) Steenbrink also highlights the difference between these two texts, especially on the position of the Brahman. Al-Raniri includes the Brahmans as people of the Book, while al-Shahrastani did not accept it. According to Steenbrink, this is probably a practical solution to the problem of the Muslim minority of Gujarat, the birthplace of al-Raniri. (Steenbrink, 1988, p. 198) Meanwhile, the Tibyan also relies heavily on Abu Shakur al-Salami’s Kitab al-Tamhid fi Bayan al-Tawhid (The Book of The Preface in Explaning the Creed) as its major source. (Steenbrink, 1988, p. 198)

The Tibyan is divided into two parts. In the first part, after a brief introduction about himself and the background of the book, al-Raniri highlights the existence of main religions in the world such as Hinduism (Brahmanism), Magianism, Judaism and Christianity. (Steenbrink, 1988, pp. 43–48) The enumerations given by al-Raniri about these three religions are not supported by references. This could be done purposely by al-Raniri, since the real objective of the writing of the Tibyan is not on these religions, but to refute the Wujudiyyah of Hamzah Fansuri. Thus, he might have been thinking that these references were unnecessary and may distract the attention of his readers from the real purpose of the Tibyan. References might also be irrelevant to this kind of text, because it is not an academic exercise. Rather, it is a religious opinion of al-Raniri against the practice of the Wujudiyyah teachings presented to the Sultanah.
The second part of this book discusses the existence of sectarian groups in Islam. He divides the sects in Islam into six main groups, namely the Jabriyyah, the Qadariyyah, the Tashbiyyah, the Ta’til, and the Rafidiyyah.

“Maka adalah madhab mereka itu antara madhab Jabriyyah dan Qadariyyah dan antara madhab Tashbiyyah dan Ta’til dan antara madhab Kharji dan Rafidi” (Tibyan, 42)

“Kata mu’allif ghafara ‘l-Lahu lahu, hai Talib, maka inilah I’tiqad dan madhab tujoh-puloh dua kaum yang disebutkan segala ‘ulama ahlu ‘l-sunnah wa ‘l-jama’ah dalam kitab merekaitu.” (Raniri, 1955, p. 84)

The last section of the second chapter carries the main focus of this book. It is about al-Raniri’s refutation of the Wujudiyyah movement. It begins with a list of thirteen deviating Sufi movements, including the Wujudiyyah itself, which is also known as Ittihadiyyah.

“Shahdan adalah kaum yang bersufi-sufi dirinya itu amat sesat lagi dalalah, hasha ‘l-Lah, sekali-kali tiada putut dinamai akan dia dengan nama sufi, terutama dikaqan dia akan nama kafir atau fasiq. Maka adalah banyak merekaitu tiga-belas kaum” (Raniri, 1955, p. 86)

Al-Raniri used all of his knowledge of Sufism to refute the teachings of Wujudiyyah. He considered this movement as deviating from the teachings of Islam, and urged Muslims to practice true Sufism, which is in line with the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah.


Here, al-Raniri has issued a fatwa allowing the death sentence to those who committed apostasy. However, those who repented will be spared the sentence. Al-Raniri also highlighted
views from ulamas whom he did not mention specifically by name in this text, that repentance will only be accepted from those who had committed apostasy, except the followers of *Ibadiyyah, Ghalibiyyah* and *Shay‘iyyah* who originated from sects such as *Rafidiyya, Qaramitah, Zanaqah, Wujudiyyah* and *Falasifah*. Without elaborating further on the reasons why the repentance of followers of these sects is not acceptable, he quoted the Prophet, saying ‘*man baddala dinahu faqtuluhu*’ which means ‘whomsoever changed their religions, kill him’.

In short, al-Raniri adopted a direct approach to condemn *Wujudiyyah* by listing all the beliefs and practices that are not in conformity with Islam as he defined and associated them with the contents of the teachings of *Wujudiyyah*. For the purpose of this analysis, the *Tibyan* serves several purposes. Firstly, it tells us about the religious development in the Islamic heartlands of Arabia, which has been brought to the Malay world. Contemporary debates and polemics at that time, especially among ulamas and followers of the *Sunnī* and philosophical Sufism in Arabia and the Indian subcontinent, have influenced al-Raniri in his writing of the *Tibyan* (Chittick, 2002, pp. 37–39) Al-Raniri was probably asked by the ruler at that time to provide his expert opinions on such debates and polemics. The command from the Aceh ruler at that time for him to write on this issue was timely for him. He now has at his disposal a valuable tool i.e. the *Tibyan* itself to justify to the ruler and the people of Aceh his actions, from the time of the ruler’s father, the previous Sultan Iskandar Thani, to combat what he termed the deviating teachings and practices of the *Wujudiyyah* movement in the Malay world. (Daudi, 1978, pp. 14–15)

Secondly, in doing so, al-Raniri also demonstrated his attitude towards other religions, namely Brahmanism, Magianism, Judaism and Christianity. However, these religions except Brahmanism and Christianity are hardly known by the Malays at that time. The Brahmins were there in the archipelago and they represented the essential component in the religious edifice
of the early kingdoms in South East Asia, prior to the spread of Islam in the region as has been discussed before.

The Malays might have come across Christians since 1508, and more so since the fall of Malacca in 1511. They were soldiers and Portuguese traders who came to the Malay world for business. Historically, there were traces of the presence of Christians in South East Asia as early as 7th century. (Goh, 2005, p. 1) However, the presence of Christians in the Malay world were recorded only after the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511. It was after this date that more Christians came to the Malay world, primarily for trade. Other than that, no historical records show that these religions really existed in the Malay world. The only way they got to know these religions is from the Qur’an and stories of travellers. Some of them, especially Malay students in Arabia, might also have encountered the followers of this religion in Arabia.

*Asrar al-Insan fi Ma’rifat al-Ruh wa al-Rahman* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One)

In a more specialised theological text, al-Raniri highlighted his concern on matters related to the question of spirit (*ruh*). This text was written by al-Raniri under the royal command of Sultan Iskandar Thani, but was completed during the reign of the next ruler, Sultanah Safiya al-Din. (Tudjimah, 1960, p. 25,210) For this analysis, we will be using the text which was studied by Tudjimah for her doctorate thesis. Steenbrink’s romanised version of the text for folio 77a until 80a, which will be the focus of this analysis, is also become a part of our main reference. (Steenbrink, 1988, p. 23,29)

In this text, Al-Raniri focused on several well-known fundamental differences between Islam and Christian beliefs, on the attributes of Prophet Isa such as the spirit of Isa: he is the light (*nur*), he is God’s Word (*kalima minhu*) and he is the Messiah (*al-Masih*). (Steenbrink, 1988)
He started his discussion on the Christian’s belief of the spirit of Jesus by highlighting what Qur’an says on this matter that those who claimed God is Jesus, the son of Mary have indeed committed a blasphemous act in Islam.

“Dan demikian lagi dianugerahi Haq ta’ala akan Nabiullah ‘Isa berbagai-bagai daripada anugerahnya, hingga dikata segala kafir, bahawa ia Haq ta’ala, seperti firman Allah ta’ala ‘laqad kafara alladzina qalu inna’llaha al masihu ibna Maryam’ sesungguhnya telah kafirlah segala merekaitu yang mengata bahwasanya Haq ta’ala itulah Isa ibnu Maryam” (Qur’an 5:17) (Tudjimah, 1960, p. 175)

Later, he elaborated on why the Christians are considered disbelievers based on the above Quranic verse by highlighting four attributes of Prophet Isa, from the Islamic point of view and how these differed from the Christian’s beliefs. (Tudjimah, 1960, pp. 7–10) He then drawn a comparison on the nature of creation of Prophet Isa, who is born without a biological father with Prophet Adam.


Prophet Adam is known as the first man or the father of all human being who was born without a father. However, he was still considered as a human being without any divine element given to him to uplift his status. On the other hand, Prophet Isa who has similar birth history with Prophet Adam was handed over with such privilege by the Christians. They believe that he was the Son of God. This belief is one of the fundamental beliefs in Christianity and this is why the Quran says that the Christians are the disbelievers because of their belief in the divinity of Prophet Isa.
Indeed, *Asrar al-Insan* is a pure Islamic theological text, written by al-Raniri to discuss relevant issues on the spirit (*ruh*). al-Raniri relied upon the sources from Persia and Arabia to compose this text such as from al-Hallaj (d. 922), al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), and ‘Abdul al-Razzak al-Kashani (d. 1329). (Tudjimah, 1960, p. 210) This text clearly reflects his effort to take part on the ongoing theological discussions in the Muslim world at that time. Looking at the contents of this text, they are not so much used by al-Raniri as a tool to attack his opponents, followers of the *Wujudiyyah* movement in the Malay world unlike the *Tibyan*. This is because the teachings of *Wujudiyyah* do not so much dwell on such theological concepts. Rather, the focus is on the understanding of the nature of God itself, and not others, such as *ruh* as discussed above.

There are several other possible reasons for al-Raniri writing this text apart from a direct command from the ruler of Aceh Sultan Iskandar Thani. One reason mentioned by Tudjimah is for al-Raniri to share his views on the understanding of concept of spirit (*ruh*) based on the teachings of Islam, because there was an ongoing dispute among ulamas all over the world at that time in understanding this issue. (Tudjimah, 1960) Theological issues such as this one which has no detailed explanation in the Qur’an have often become the subject of disputes among ulamas. The Qur’an has a brief yet precise explanation on this matter.

> ‘They ask thee concerning The Spirit (of inspiration). Say: ‘The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!’)’ (Quran 17: 85)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his commentaries on this verse, especially on the issue of spirit (*ruh*) says that this is one of those high spiritual mysteries which cannot be explained in the terms of everyday human experience. (Ali, 2004, p. 698) He continued by saying that our worldly knowledge is limited to fully understand the total sum of true spiritual knowledge. (Ali, 2004, p. 698) In other words, there are things happening in this world which human knowledge has
a very limited capacity to understand and one of them is this issue of spirit. Men can try to find the answer to this mystery. However, with such limited knowledge possessed by them, they will never be able to understand it in its fullest meaning. That is why without a clear injunction from the Qur’an, ulamas try to elaborate on this issue based on their knowledge which is supported by other relevant verses from the Qur’an and sometimes from the Hadith.

There is also a possibility that al-Raniri wrote this text in response to the emergence of Christians in Aceh at that time. The conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese had resulted in the rise of Aceh as a predominantly Muslim trading and cultural centre taking over the role previously held by the Malacca Sultanate. The popularity of Aceh also attracted western Christian traders to come and do business there. For example, the relationship between the Acehnese Sultanate and the Dutch traders began in 1599. (Hall, 1981) One may note a huge gap between the period of the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch to the Malay world which is separated by almost ninety years gap. There is a possibility that, it was due to their lack of sailing technology and no knowledge of the route to Asia of the latter. (Ricklefs, 2008, p. 24)

Thus, it is obvious that the Christians were in Aceh at that time. Based on this situation, the possibility that al-Raniri wrote Asrar al-Insan in a refutation of the beliefs of the Christians who were present in Aceh at that time cannot be ruled out. The text is written in such a way as to warn Malay Muslims about the negative influence of Christianity on them. Al-Raniri would have been aware that some Muslims might be making comparisons between Islam and Christianity. The fact that these two ‘Abrahamic’ religions shared some commonalities, and the commercial advantage held by Christian traders with their bigger ships and international economic power might, he may have feared, attract people to leave Islam and convert to Christianity.

*Bustan al-Salatin* (Garden of the Sultans)
This is another contribution of al-Raniri to the Malay world. He had written this text of seven volumes in Malay while he was in Aceh under the command of Sultan Iskandar Thani. (Iskandar, 1995, p. 419) Although there are seven volumes, volume two in particular is relevant to this study because it discussed al-Raniri’s views of other religions such as Magianism, Judaism and Christianity. (Harun, 2004, p. 99) He did so while explaining the history of prophets from Adam to Muhammad. For this analysis we will be using Jelani Harun’s edition of the *Bustan* which consists of volume one and two. (Harun, 2004) In his book, Jelani also gave the background of the *Bustan*. According to him, the *Bustan* can be categorised into the world history genre based on Islamic historiography. (Harun, 2004) Furthermore the contents of this text were arranged in such a way similar with the works of other Muslim historians such as al-Baihaqi, al-Baidawi, al-Qashani and many more. (Harun, 2004)

Firstly, al-Raniri highlights the origin of the fire worshipping by the followers of Magianism. According to him, the Magians started to worship fire after Kiyamurti lit a candle besides the grave of his only son, Saya, who was been killed by an evil spirit known as Afrit.


His act of lighting the candle was imitated by his followers and turned it into ritual of fire worshipping. Al-Raniri did not further elaborate on this.

Secondly, the enumeration of Judaism is very brief. Al-Raniri did not mention any specific theological issues about this religion such as the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. He merely provides a list of prophets such as Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), Ya’qub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph) Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Daud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Uzair (Ezra) and Zakariyya
(Zacharias). There is also mention of the translation of the *Taurat* (Old Testament) from Hebrew to Greek, which was agreed upon by seventy-two Jewish scholars at that time.

“Dan pada masa itu turut dipindahkan segala ulama daripada bahasa Ibrani kepada bahasa Yunan, iaitulah naskhah Taurat yang sah dari kerana bahawasanya telah ittifak atas naskhah itu tujuh puluh dua ulama daripada mereka itu.”(Harun, 2004, p. 131)

Thirdly, al-Raniri’s brief explanation of Christianity began with the story of Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist). According to him, Prophet Yahya was executed at the request of the daughter of Herodias for his refusal to allow her to marry her own uncle.


Then he mentioned the story of Prophet Isa and his mother, Maryam. Al-Raniri stated that Jesus was sent back to his mother for a while after he was taken away by God. This was to allow Prophet Isa to console his sick mother, Maryam that he was not killed by the Jews but in fact was taken away by God. “Setelah itu maka diturunkan Allah Nabi Allah Isa kepada bondanya serta katanya, “Hai ibuku, bahawa hamba telah diangkat Allah Taala ke langit dan adalah hamba dalam kesentosaan.”(Harun, 2004, p. 133) Immediately after this, he was taken back to God, and then his mother passed away.
Generally, al-Raniri seems to follow the same method he did before in the *Tibyan* in discussing the religions of the world. However, he did not discuss anything regarding Brahminism. This may be because it is irrelevant to include Brahminism while discussing the prophets in Islam, and the religions brought by them since Brahminism is not part of the Abrahamic religions.

This is the second time al-Raniri had included the discussion of Magianism in his text. Here, he discussed the origin of fire-worshipping by the Magians. It seems that al-Raniri was very keen to elaborate more on this religion, although Magianism is not among the Abrahamic religions. There must be something special about this religion or the followers of this religion which made him want to include them in two different texts.

The only reason which we can think of is by looking at his own living experience with the followers of Magianism at his birthplace, Gujarat. Gujarat was an important international port in the Indian subcontinent in the 16th century. As a result, many foreign traders were trading there, such as the Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, Persian and those who were from Central Asia. (Tudjimah, 1960, pp. 1–2) This view is echoed further by Jelani, who emphasised that al-Raniri’s early life in Gujarat was indeed influenced heavily by Persian tradition as a result of the presence of a significant number of Persians living there. (Harun, 2004, p. xxvi) Not only traders, there were also several Persian historians such as Ali Muhammad Khan, Shah Abu Turab and Sikandar Muhammad who have produced texts on world history lived there. (Harun, 2004) This could be a strong explanation as to why al-Raniri felt so important in including Magians especially in the *Bustan*, where it seems to be irrelevant. He knew followers of this religion very well. His familiarity with Magians and its followers may be the reason why he felt comfortable writing more about Magianism in the *Bustan*, as well as in the *Tibyan*, in order to share his knowledge about this religion with the people in the Malay world at that time.

‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Sinkili (d. 1693)
‘Abd al-Ra’uf bin ‘Ali al-Jawi al-Fansuri al-Sinkili was born in the Western Sumatran coastal town of Singkel. Undoubtedly, he was one of the most influential Muslim scholars during the early period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. His mastery in Islamic sciences was evident when he was appointed as the Mufti of Acheh the moment he returned to Acheh in 1661 until his death in 1693. (Aini, 2014, p. 6)

Brief Biography

‘Abd al-Ra’uf received his early education at his birth place in Singkel. On one account he was said to have blood relationship with Hamzah Fansuri but never met him. This is due to the fact that Abd al-Ra’uf’s was born in 1615 whilst Hamzah passed away in 1607. However, ‘Abd al-Ra’uf may have met and studied under Hamzah’s contemporary Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani. Shams al-Din passed away in 1630. ‘Abd al-Ra’uf may have studied with him during his teen ages.

He went to Arabia around 1642 during which the heated controversies between the followers of Wujudiyyah movement and al-Raniri were still going on. He went to several important learning centres in Arabia such as Doha, Bayt al-Faqih (Yaman), Zabid, Liyahah, Mawza, Muhka, Hudybhiyyah, Jedda, Makkah and Madinah. (Aini, 2014) to improve his knowledge in Islamic sciences for nineteen years. There, he was directly under the tutelage of fifteen notable Muslim scholars. (Iskandar, 1995, p. 421) Two of them were responsible to initiate ‘Abd al-Ra’uf into Islamic mystical order. They were Ahmad al-Qushashi (d. 1660), as well as Ibrahim al-Kurani (d. 1690). The former became his spiritual and mystical teacher whom later on initiated him into the Shattariyyah and Qadiriyyah Orders while the letter served as his intellectual mentor after the death of Ahmad al-Qushashi. (Azra, 1992, p. 392; Ricklefs, 2008, p. 192)

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It is an undeniable fact that `Abd al-Ra’uf’s educational journeys to many centres of Islamic education in Arabia had shaped him intellectually and spiritually. His mastery on Islamic sciences was evident in his fifty-six writings. Riddell has categorised his writings into eight different subjects namely Jurisprudence (fiqh), Sufism (tasawwuf), Quranic exegesis (tafsir), Islamic Law (shari’a), Eschatology (sakharat al-maut), the purpose of prayer, the doctrines of Ibn al-‘Arabi as well as the duties of teacher and students. (Riddell, 2001, p. 129) This chapter will only be focusing on one out of his many other writings namely Lubb al-Kashf wa al-Bayan lima Yarahu al-Muhtadar bi al-‘Iyan. `Abd al-Ra’uf had included discussions on religions other than Islam in this text, albeit briefly.

**Lubb al-Kashf wa al-Bayan lima Yarahu al-Muhtadar bi al-‘Iyan (The Essence of the Exposition and Explanation of what the Dying sees in His Vision)**

`Abd al-Ra’uf al-Sinkili wrote this book in Arabic, and it was translated into Malay by Katib Seri Raja. (Braginskii, 2004, p. 651) It is based on Kitab al-Tadhkirah bi-umur al-Akhirah (The Book of the Reminder of the Events in the Hereafter) by al-Qurtubi (d. 1272). It focuses on the experience of every human being while on his deathbed. This text also includes an elaboration of the essential preparations of a Muslim who is about to face death. These preparations are important in guiding Muslims from the devil, who will try to change the belief of the dying Muslims from Islam to other religions. For this analysis, we will be using Voorhoeve’s edition of the text which was published under the title Bajan Tadjalli. (Voorhoeve, 1952, p. 91)

Al-Sinkili explained that devil will come in three different faces to the dying Muslims to persuade them to change their religion. These three faces will be in three different colours as well, which are black, red and yellow. Black represents the devil itself, while red and yellow represent Judaism and Christianity.

“Telah datang kepada manusia pada ketika sakarat al-maut beberapa rupa jang amat banjak, maka apabila datang kepadanja rupa jang hitam maka jaitu iblis
Thus, it is important for the dying Muslims to remember God every time these evil temptations come to him by repeating the prayer *la ilaha illa Allah* (There is no God but Allah).

Furthermore, al-Sinkili also mentioned that at the moment of death the devil will come to the dying person in the faces of their relatives to influence him from his right-hand side to convert to Christianity and from his left hand side to Judaism.

“In Kata Sjaich Djamaluddin radija’llahu ‘anhu tersebut dalam kitab Tadhkirah tjeritera daripada setengah ulama’ bahwasanya seseorang hamba Allah apabila adalah ia pada ketika sakarat al-maut maka duduk disisinja dua orang setan seorang dari kananji dan lagi seorang dari kirinji. Maka setan dari pehak kananji itu merupakan dirinja seperti rupa bapanji pada hal berkata ia akan dia: Hai anakku, bahwa sanja adalah aku menjajangi dikau dan mengasihi dikau, tetapi matilah engkau atas agama nasrani, dan ialah sebaik-baik daripada segala agama. Dan setan dari kananji itu merupakan dirinja seperti rupa ibunja pada hal berkata ia akan dia: Hai anakku bahwasannya adalah perutku budjenamu dan air susuku minumanmu dan pahaku tempat kedudukanmu, tetapi matilah engkau atas agama jahudi, dan ialah sebaik-baik daripada segala agama.” (Voorhoeve, 1952, p. 92)

In this text, al-Sinkili included a quotation from his source of Syeikh Jamaluddin’s book of *Tazkirah* (Reminder) on other religions such as Judaism and Christianity, to tell his readers that they should prepare themselves, and not be tempted by the devil to deviate them from their faith during their very last moment of life before death. The devil will try to change the belief of a dying Muslim either to Judaism and Christianity.

Thus, Muslims should prepare themselves by remembering God all the time, and not fall into the two religions. Although al-Sinkili considered Judaism and Christianity deviationists, his response to these two religions is different from the way al-Raniri treated them in his texts, as
discussed before. He did not use a word ‘kafir’ or ‘disbeliever’ to the followers of these two Abrahamic religions. The selection of these two religions is simply a quotation from a different source, mentioned above. Moreover, the discussion about these two religions is common to the Qur’an, as well as in the prophetic traditions.

The important message which al-Sinkili wishes to convey to his readers is to prepare themselves properly before death, by remembering God all the time. Otherwise, there is a chance that they will deviate from Tawhid. If that is the case, they will have to face the consequences similar to all other deviationists in the hereafter which is in the hellfire. Again, the highlights of the two Abrahamic religions in this text have nothing to do with the author’s direct reference to the followers of these religions in the Malay world at that time similar with what has been discussed earlier with the Asrar of al-Raniri. Rather, it was simply the continuation of a tradition of the Qur’an to inform Muslims to safeguard their faith against any other religions such as Judaism and Christianity. The reminder from the Qur’an to Muslims on this matter is clearly mentioned in the following verse:

‘Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: “The Guidance of Allah—that is the (only) Guidance.” Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor helper against Allah’ (Quran, 2:120)

**Conclusion**

The degree of which the works written by the two scholars in the discourse of religions should not be compared with those Muslim scholars’ works during the classical and middle ages of Islam. However, if one understands the global history during the 16th century, he would recognise the significant role played by the two works in defense of Tawhid. In reality, the emergence of Portuguese in Malacca and later the Dutch in Indonesia was the result of the Catholic missionaries overseas. The Portuguese and the Dutch were colonials no doubt, but they also came to the Malay Archipelago as well as many other parts of the world to convince
people into Christianity. Hence, it is understandable the reasons why the two scholars have
vested their energy in reinforcing the right teaching of Islam against other religions as well as
deviant teachings. The use of Kalam may not be in its pure sense of methodology, but rather a
more contextualised approach suitable to the political, social and cultural scenario of the people
in the Malay Archipelago.

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The Name of God in Muslim And Christian Traditions: Reviewing the Scholars’ Approach And Lessons For Malaysians

Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar
faridh_omar@yahoo.co.uk

Ahmad Faizal Ramly

Introduction

The discussion of the importance of certain word, especially in relation to names used in sacred texts is classified as a complex one. In modern society and in our day-to-day life, names are such an integral part of our thinking and our communication with one another. Frederick Mathewson Denny defines the phenomenon of naming very precisely as being ‘central to human symbolic and communicative process’. (‘Names and Naming,’ 1987, p. 300)

Paradoxically, the reason behind the use of certain ‘name’, was hardly recognised. Why this ‘naming’ process is essential?

Cohen takes the issue of ‘naming’ from social anthropological perspective with the contention that there are ‘different kinds of significance which naming has in different societies and cultures.’ (Cohen, 1999, p. 2674) Hence, such diversity should be seriously considered for as far names and naming are concerned, they are complex matter, whether the name is purely of earthly realm or meddling with the divine names. (Byrne, 2011, p. 9)

The exercise of examining the divine names is naturally complex since it deals with both literal and metaphorical terminology and meaning. Herbert Chanan Brichto in commenting this says, it is ‘so complex that movements toward the solution may be impeded, distorted, or even blocked by its formulation in the singular.’ (Brichto, 1998, p. 3) It is believed that in the process of naming, it requires a degree of anthropological and sociological understanding in order to comprehend fully the possibilities of its communications. In addition, one should recognise the historical context of the naming and the possibility of the external and cultural influences that could have involved in the process.
God Names in Christianity

A more recent philosophical report on the use of the divine names in the particular setting of Christian dialogue is useful to introduce at this point. Carlo Huber proposed linguistic analysis and phenomenology to address the theological problem of the meaningfulness and reasonability of that which Christians say about God. (Huber, n.d., p. 1) Hence, he identifies three distinct linguistic levels, namely the human, the religious, the Christian, and each referring to different groups. (Huber, n.d., p. 57) The human level refers to the significance for the 'lay' community. The religious level has consequences for the transcendent significance, and finally the significance is particular to the Christian experience. Huber’s work is critical as it represents another layer of context that used to be recognised when analysing the divine designations. This designation is one that is presented outside of the text itself and is connected more correctly with the reader and their response to the text as well as the meaning of designation for a wider community.

With the level of the ‘lay’ significance, Huber highlights how the religious meaning is introduced only indirectly into human language. He discusses the important point that must be included in this study; that there are negative as well as positive implications. This is relevant in particular with familial terms such as ‘father’ but may also hold true meaning. Huber stresses that ‘the meaning of a phrase to be used in speaking about God must be capable of being gradually stretched to infinity.’ (Huber, n.d., p. 60) In this instance, infinity is a sense of the everlasting property of the name and the name cannot be taken away once it is designated. It also signifies the fact that the name designates an absolute.

If God is termed the father, then it signifies the meaning that, he is the father, above all others. In terms of the attributes of God, Huber intends that the attributes to be seen in ‘a logical sense … as any predicate (function) that can be united with the subject “God”. (Huber, n.d., p. 46) Huber also emphasis the need to use our own human language when we speak of God. These
words are already having a meaning, through their everyday use. Huber calls the changes that these words undergo when they were used as a designation for God a ‘specific shading’. Ultimately the ‘non-religious significance’ of a word constitutes the model for its’ use in speaking about God. Therefore, Huber outlined these three characteristics to be termed for God:

1. A positive connotation, by which Huber means that it must express a meaning of moral, social, or economic order. Terms that are not positive must be in the negative; simply put, they should be of the form ‘God is not evil’.
2. ‘a horizontally analogical meaning’ at the human or ‘lay’ level of significance where only expressions that can be used analogically in dialogue that is not religious can be used as designations for God.
3. There must be graduations of significance already existing at the level of human use. This is associated with the notion that the meaning of the word must be able to exist and to be understood regardless of the generation in which it is being used.

Maire Byrne proposes that a critical survey need to be done in determining the names used to refer to God in the four Gospels, principally to create a framework that may be used for future work. (Byrne, 2011, p. 47) A primary concern at this stage is to assess who is the referent in terms of the names, titles, and epithets used in the New Testament – in other words, what biblical characters may be called divine. In the New Testament, the character of Jesus is in retrospect, viewed by many as a divine being. In fact, the heart of the New Testament message is the proclamation of what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ. (Byrne, 2011, p. 47)

Here, God is physically present through Jesus, as the Son of God.

The preaching of Jesus was centered on God, but the doctrine of God is not the ‘thematic center in the New Testament’, nor in the preaching of the early Christians that forms its backdrop. Jesus was not set out to instill a new idea of God to the people he preached to but to make it clearer who the god of Israel, the creator, ruler of the world and not in his metaphysical aseity,
rather in his significance for the individual. Nonetheless, the doctrine of God may still be understood as the most crucial conjecture of the New Testament, as statements concerning God construct a template of the fundamental message of Christianity as proposed in the New Testament and particularly in the Gospels.

With regard to the reflection of God in the New Testament, it is clearly a continuation of the theology of the Hebrew Bible. In addition, the names used in the text of the New Testament that refer to God are reflective of the fact that the texts were written within the context of a culture, where Greek was the predominant language. The terms and tradition that influence the language of the text are from the Hebrew Bible, and these have been mediated through the LXX (the Septuagint Bible refers to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). (Boring, 1985, pp. 684–685) Boring later raises the important point that in the New Testament period, Jews respected the Tetragrammaton (The Divine Name in the Hebrew Scriptures, n.d.) by using ‘periphrastic’ or indirect ways of speaking about God. (Boring, 1985, p. 685) Tetragrammaton is divine name, in Greek term that means ‘four-letter word’ refers to the traditional way of writing the name of God – YHWH, represented by the four Hebrew consonants יהוה, appears nearly 6,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. (Byrne, 2011, p. 22) This translation renders those four letters, known as the Tetragrammaton, “Jehovah.” That name is by far the most frequently occurring name in the Bible. While the inspired writers refer to God by many titles and descriptive terms, such as “Almighty,” “Most High,” and “Lord,” the Tetragrammaton is the only personal name they use to identify God. At the same coin, the Jews read YHWH as Adonai which means Lord out of respect of the name. to them, verbal mentioning of God’s name is a blasphemy in Judaism tradition. (Rösel, 2007, pp. 411–428) In the Bible (English translation version), YHWH was translated as GOD (uppercase letter).

A question was initiated by Maire Byrne of whether God is portrayed in the New Testament as the same way it is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. It became apparent that both of Hebrew Bible
theologians and the New Testament theologians are holding different presentation on YHWH. She later emphasises that, while there is of course the understanding that Christian commentators and biblical scholars will naturally approach the text from a Christocentric viewpoint, there is yet a dearth of literature and commentary on the image or character of God in the Gospels, or indeed in the New Testament as a whole.

Nils Dahl’s criticised that such commentaries are ‘the neglected factor in New Testament theology’ as there have been lack of ‘comprehensive or penetrating study of the theme “God in the New Testament”.’ (Rösel, 2007, pp. 153–161) In his opinion the only reason that caused the lack of commentaries was due to the conditioning of the history of the discipline and of the Christian theology in general. However, Maire Byrne slightly differs Dahl’s stance in the sense that he thought more have to be offered in terms of the commentaries of God and that many other scholars shared his concern. For example Jean Galot’s observation in relation to the Trinity stated that, ‘the theology of God the father is far less developed than the theology of Christ and the theology of the Holy Spirit,’(Byrne, 2011, p. 49) whereas Leander Keck highlighted the fact that the ‘understanding’ of the theology of God is a ‘neglected factor’(Byrne, 2011, p. 49) while Thompson goes as far as to state that god has ‘largely been ignored’ from the content of New Testament theology.(Byrne, 2011, p. 1; Thompson, 2001)

By reviewing those difference commentaries, Maire Byrne views that there are three principal reasons for the lack of commentaries as expressed by Dahl:

1. The rise of Christocentrism in theology since Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). Ritschl held that Jesus’ divinity was best understood as expressing ‘revelational-value’ of Christ for the community that trusts him as God.

2. The suspicion of metaphysical language, that is speaking of things that are not physical in form.

3. Emphasis on specifically Christian elements in the New Testament ‘with the corresponding view that the concept of God in the Old Testament as interpreted by late Judaism, is taken for granted, along with a great
diversity in the New Testament itself in language of God. (Byrne, 2011, p. 49)

Larry Hurtado offers an argument as way out of such dilemma. In his opinion, ‘the Gospels are narrative about Jesus, but his whole significance rests on the claim that God is the source of Jesus’ authority, the one whose kingdom he truly proclaims. That is, though the Gospels are undeniably Christological narratives, they are also deeply God-centered. (Hurtado, 1992, p. 270) This implies that discussion about God is secondary because the Gospels were meant to tell people about Jesus that only through him one’s understanding of God can be comprehended. This insight is also held by Bultmann in his work Theology of the New Testament. It is just that God of the Hebrew Bible has retreated far off into the distance. But Jesus as his representative, mediates God’s message to both individuals and the people. (Bultmann, 1980, p. 272)

In looking at the difference between scholars of New Testament and what was highlighted above in relation to one ‘official’ name for God, Byrne claimed there is no ‘proper name’ for God, as with the Tetragrammaton in the Hebrew Bible. As such, it is clear that the texts of the New Testament do not simply carry on methods of the tradition of speaking about God. (Byrne, 2011, p. 48) She ends the notes by comparing the texts of the New Testament with the amount of names that are used in the Hebrew Bible for the deity of which she concluded the New Testament on the other hand, as quite a reserved in the language it uses for God. (Byrne, 2011, p. 48)

God Names in Islām

The naming system for God in Islam is considerably more structured than Christianity, or even to Judaism. Even a precursory reading of the Qurʾān, it would expose the reader with a list of divine names. James Winston Morris captures the significance of manifold names of God.
central to the Qur’ān as ‘a central topic and inspiration in all subsequent traditions of Islamic theology and spirituality.’ (Morris, 2007, p. 90) There are ninety nine (99) names of Allah and they are proclaimed in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]: Abu Hurairah reported in Sahih Muslim Hadith Number 2677: The Messenger of Allah, [pbuh], said; “Allah has ninety-nine names and whoever preserves them will enter Paradise”.

The names of Allah are divided into two categories, the names of the Essence (al-dhāt), such as Allāh, and the names of the Qualities (al-ṣifāt) such as al-Rahīm. The names altogether are typically referred to as the Most Beautiful Names from the Qur’ān: ‘The most beautiful names belong to God’ (7:180). These names consist of those revealed directly in the Qur’ān and indirectly from certain passages in the Qur’ān, the attributes of Allāh, or in recent times, ‘praises of Allāh’.

The fact that God or Allāh in Islam is unique, with the form of the first article of the shahadah (the Islamic confession of faith); ‘There is no deity/god but Allāh and Muhammad is Allāh’s Messenger’. Four of the Five Pillars of Islam, communal prayer, the praying of alms, the fast of Ramadhan, and the Hajj pilgrimage are usually seen as affording understanding to those regarding the Islamic faith and a sense of unison to both local and worldwide faith communities. The importance of the Five Pillars is the shahadah and is often viewed as the aggregate of all Islamic theology and teachings. The statement of the shahadah highlights the acknowledgement of tawhid. This literally means ‘making one’, except that it is unidentical to the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity. That it does of course mean that there is only one God, but it also signifies the idea of Unity or ‘Oneness of God’. Aslan aptly describes the doctrine, ‘God is Unity: wholly indivisible, entirely unique, and utterly indefinable. God resembles nothing in either essence or attributes.’ (Aslan, 2006, p. 150) This aspect of Islamic belief is vital to consider when studying the divine designations in the Qur’ān. The very existence of God means that nothing can be associated with God or Allāh. Tawhīd is essentially
that God cannot be described in human terms, as a matter of fact, Allāh is beyond any scope of resemblance with His creation.

Toshihiko Izutsu explains that Qurʿān changes the basic religion-ethical terms of the Jāhiliyyah Arabs. (Izutsu, 1980; Ramly, 2015, p. 80) 

Tawhīd is the center of Muslim worldview, and as such, the meaning of the term Allāh must be the clearest of all. Corruption of the term will jeopardise everything followed then. Historically, Muslim scholars agree that Allāh has been used by the Arabs before the emerging of Islam to refer to the Supreme God. By the time the Arabs has distorted the concept of Tawhīd, by worshipping idols or deities as intermediary gods. Allāh however stays as the name for the Supreme God but attributed with false attributes.

The precise meaning of Allāh in the Qurʿān it refers to The One and only true God. He is neither begotten nor born. He has neither spouse not the attribute of creatures like mass and body. He does not eat, sleep, suffer or die which all have been attributed to the gods of the Pagan and as well as Jesus. This is Allāh as understood in Islamised Arabic and other Islamic language families – including the Malay world. (Wan Daud, 2012, pp. 35–39) By giving this absolute description Allāh as personal name for the Supreme God, the scholars thus argue that the word cannot be translated into any language as it will deconstruct the meaning. Whilst accepting the stance that Allāh is the personal name, the first group holds Allāh is ism jāmid which means the name is not derived from certain root word and it is a proper name for the only one God by definition. (Md. Asham Ahmad, 2010, pp. 16–17; Ramly, 2015, p. 81) This opinion closes any space to view Allāh, by having generic meaning and refer Him as the Essence of God alone.

However, the second group views that Allāh is derived from the word al-Ilāh (literally: the god) which etymologically means the Worshipped but with additional meaning. Allāh is referred to as the god that comprises all the names and attributes of the true God not like other false worshipped gods (ālihah) thus He alone is worthy of being worshipped. Ibn Abbas, one
of the companions of the Prophet says “Allāh the Owner of all forms of submission over His entire creatures.” (Al-Ṭabari, n.d., p. 123) Commenting on this, Maire Byrne in this regard viewed that the language used in the Qurʾān in relation to Allāh is allegorical in nature and uses symbolic vocabulary to attempt to describe God/Allāh. (Byrne, 2011, p. 94)

The Allāh Case: Malaysian Experience

In January 2008, the Malaysian government renewed the publication license for the Malay-language edition of the Roman Catholic Church weekly, “The Herald”, which was terminated in December 2007. Although the publication license was resumed, the weekly was barred from referring to God as ‘Allāh’. The then Deputy Internal Security Minister (now known as Home Minister), claimed that the word ‘Allāh’ could only be used in the context of Islam and that “The Herald can use other words but not ‘Allāh’. (Malaysia Human Rights Report 2008, 2009, pp. 66–67, 118–120) The reason behind this ban is the possibility of confusion would harm the society understanding – Muslims and non-Muslim – which later could erred the stability and harmony among the society.

In contrast to the government view, High Court concluded that “The Herald” had the constitutional right to use the word ‘Allāh’. (Kuala Lumpur High Court Judicial Review, n.d.) The court ruling led to Muslim groups protests in early January 2010. The protests coincided with arson attacks on a number of churches across Malaysia. (Malaysian Churches Attacked, 2010) For record, 10 churches been vandalised, only 3 were damaged to arson attacks. Soon the government appealed against the decision of the High Court. On 14th October 2013, the Court of Appeal allowed the appeal and set aside all orders given by the High Court to the judicial review application. According to the court’s findings the usage of the term ‘Allāh’ was not an integral part of the faith and practice of Christianity and if such usage were allowed, it
would cause confusion within the community. The Court of Appeal’s conclusion on what was or was not integral to the Christian faith, was striking to the public opinion, a prominent Malaysian lawyer, Malik Imtiaz Sarwar commented: “It is not for the courts to define what is and what is not essential in any faith and I can see no reason for any superior court in this country to ever take such an extraordinary step. Not only is such a course wholly inconsistent with the various dimensions of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion, it is unnecessary.”(Sarwar, 2013)

Malik Imtiaz observes that the whole case was made controversial by certain groups for their own purposes and that “[…] in failing to recognise the controversy for what it was, the Court of Appeal may have inadvertently laid the ground for the further machinations of those who would divide this nation.”(Sarwar, 2013) The ploy followed soon when in the beginning of January 2014, Malaysian authorities raided the Bible Society of Malaysia, arrested two of its officials and seized Bibles in which the word ‘Allāh’ was used. (Malaysian Authorities Seize Bibles Containing ‘Allah,’ 2014)

Looking closely on the chronological of Allāh case experienced by Malaysian, the government, the public, the politicians intervene, the religious scholars of both Muslim and Christian, Natalia Laskowska notices a main concern of deceptive in handling of truth by the Malaysian media, whereby they have been used as means of fear-mongering among Muslims to support the ban on the use of the word Allāh, and eventually, to exacerbate religious tolerance.(Laskowska, 2014, pp. 81–87) As has been reminded by Michael J. Sullivan, “you don’t win battles with hate”. In this case, it lays on future intelligences to restore the religious understanding and tolerance.

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3 The grounds of judgment of the Court of Appeal of Malaysia - summary of decision, W-01-1-2010: “[5] It is our common finding that the usage of the name “Allah” is not an integral part of the faith and practice of Christianity. From such finding, we find no reason why the respondent is so adamant to use the name “Allah” in their weekly publication. Such usage, if allowed, will inevitably cause confusion within the community.”
After 10 years of the heated debate amongst Malaysian - the public, politicians, scholars – on this polemic, today it seems nothing had happened and were forgotten. Or at least understandable upon using the ‘word’ is respected by both groups. According to Meerangani and Rushdi, albeit there is no clear restriction for the word Allāh as cannot be used by non-Muslim from Islamic jurisprudence perspective, and historically the word was used by Christian in certain areas, where the understanding between both groups is the main reason this issue was not prolonged. (Meerangani & Ramli, 2016, pp. 117–138)

In addition to that, maintaining societal stability and harmony is overarching that should be embraced by all Malaysian. In fact, such action considers diplomatic approach as the main reason of why this issue was not prolonged. (Meerangani & Ramli, 2016, pp. 47–69)

At the same time, this issue is by far understandable within inter-religious community in Sabah and Sarawak. (Abd Hakim, 2015) In means, understanding and tolerance through dialogue and engagement amongst religious leaders; in this case refer to Muslim and Christian religious leaders, is a foundation to move forward from hatred debate on religious matters. As stressed by Khadijah, despite differences in theological worldview, ‘dialogue of life’ is the possible bridge to see Muslim-Christian relations remain intact socially and culturally, especially in dealing matters related to day to day activities rather religious issues. (Yon, 2011)

**Conclusion**

This article attempts to deconstruct the origin of name of God by reviewing scholars’ approaches in both traditions of Islam and Christianity. It can be summed that the origin of name of God was defined differently by contemporary scholars in Christianity traditions, which has been hardly found in the biblical commentaries. Unlike Muslim scholars, the discourse remains the same and agreeable upon the name, nature and attributes of Allāh. Linguistical, theological, legal and ethical-cultural approach are determinant aspect that make this a lengthy
discussion until today, and thus erupted to a new interpretation in some community on how to
call God. In respect to multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-religion country like Malaysia,
safeguarding the stability and harmony among the people is the ‘value’ that must be held by
all without prejudice and discrimination. As such, it does show that dialogue, engagement and
understanding amongst Malaysian are the best ingredients that bridging similarities, plus
authorities with their credible role must act in accordance to country’s highest interest.

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Introduction

During the middle ages of Islam, the Mu’tazilites, Batinites, Kharijites, Jabarites, Qadarites, Dahriyyun and other foreign and heretical beliefs and ideologies were the major threats to the Muslims aqidah. Muslim theologians and scholars of Kalam (mutakallimun) in particular, shouldered the responsibilities in countering these groups. However, at present, Kalam is facing new forms of ideological threats such as atheism, post-modernism, liberalism, relativism, socialism, secularism, positivism, materialism, humanism, scepticism utilitarianism, existentialism and empiricism.

The rise of scientific research that relies on experimental method has also cast a great challenge to the kalam method that depend mainly on logical argumentation or dialectical reasoning (M Sait Ozervarli, 1999). More importantly, these ideological threats are affecting the way of thinking of the people at grassroot level and not only the intellectual elites and scholars. Ironically, logical argumentation in its classical form of Kalam, is highly philosophical and complex to be appreciated and applied by the laymen.

In order to address the new threats to aqidah and to benefit all ranks of society, contemporary Kalam demands for methodological adjustment and enrichment but it need not to estrange its original framework and theocentric orientation as championed by the classical Kalam. The same concern is also pertinent to the existing model of inter-religious dialogue as one conduit for Kalam. The existing model of inter-religious dialogue should not only appeal to the elite but it should also appeal to the grassroots as they are always subjected to foreign ideologies and philosophies.

The Rationales for Inter-Religious Dialogue
In the subsequent discussion, the author aims to discuss the rationales of adopting interreligious dialogue from different angles of justification:

**Epistemological Rationale**

According to Dunbar (1995), inter-religious dialogue epistemologically focuses on the pursuit of greater truth and knowledge. This rationale has also been recognised by other scholars Muslims and Christians alike. Khalf Muhammad al-Husayni (1975) for instance stated that dialogue involves the ‘taking’ and ‘giving’ process in the quest for truth and knowledge about the other individual’s understanding of, and belief in particular subjects. Al-Faruqi (1992:9) also acknowledged the epistemological rationale of inter-religious dialogue:

“Dialogue is the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder claim to the truth win. Dialogue disciplines our consciousness to recognise the truth inherent in realities and figurations of realities beyond our usual ken and reach (al-Faruqi, 1992: 9).

Built on the same premise, the Christians, according to Swidler (1989:343) need to engage in dialogue with those who have differing cultural, philosophical, social, religious viewpoints so as to strive toward an ever fuller perception of the truth.

The Christian’s epistemological rationale is largely influenced by the religious pluralism stance in which the divine truth is believed to be radiated to all religions. Inter-religious dialogue therefore is a platform to understand the truth as offered by other religions (Dunbar, 1995).

The ‘truth’ as brought forward by Muslims however is based on the doctrine of Tawhid (Seyyed Hussain Nasr, 1995). Al-Faruqi postulated that inter-religious dialogue will lead human consciousness to the recognition of truth and that truth is inherent in Islam as ad-din al-fitrah.

**Sociological Rationale**

The betterment of humanity is one of the concerns in sociology. Inter-religious dialogue is envisaged to resolve conflicts, to promote religious peace, to address social problems including
poverty crime and destruction of the environment, to counter oppression, discrimination and racism. All these issues therefore plead for religious cooperation and joint action that can be realised through inter-religious dialogue (Dunbar, 1995: 28). The sociological rationale is best described to the inter-group dialogue concept since its main focus are the peaceful coexistence and social harmony that will lead to betterment of humanity. Inter-religious dialogue is just one type of dialogue that work within the framework of inter-group dialogue.

Dessel, Rogge and Garlington (2006: 305) for instance mention that “Faith-based groups are an integral part of local social fabric, and a point of both convergence and divergence for many in understanding their own lives as well as the greater society.” In a higher educational setting, inter-group dialogue can be understood as;

"a face-to-face facilitated learning experience that brings together students from different social identity groups over a sustained period of time to understand their commonalities and differences, examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007: 2).

Inter-group dialogue is proven to facilitate positive changes in prejudicial attitudes or behaviours and mend troubled relationships (Parrott, Zeichner & Hoover, 2005). Based on this reputation, inter-group dialogue is adopted in number of fields such as social work, political science, social psychology and communications. More positive views of conflict and expressed greater support for multicultural and affirmative action policies compared to the non-participating students (Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999) are among the positive attitudes displayed by students that involved in inter-group dialogue. Other outcomes of dialogues in community and international settings are less stereotyping, improved personal relationships, building trust and consensus towards development of critical social policy and commitment to social change (Alvarez & Cabbil, 2001). It can be concluded that the most desired outcomes from inter-group dialogue are reduced inter-group anxiety, prejudice, and other detrimental
attitudes or actions that can negatively affect inter-group interaction (Miller & Donner, 2000; Nagda, Kim & Truelove, 2004).

Al-Faruqi believed that moral excellence become the main purpose of humanity which can be achieved through dialogue. Dialogue in the form of joint effort between religious groups for instance the effort towards reducing poverty according to al-Faruqi (Fletcher, 2012) can also be understood as realising God’s will in the world and pursuing the truth. Based on this premise, sociological rationale in a way can also lead to epistemological rationale.

**Ethics of Inter-Religious Dialogue**

The ethics or moral principles that guide someone’s behaviour during his involvement in dialogue have been identified in the earliest works of Muslim scholars. For instance in *Kitab Tahqiq ma li al-Hind* (Verifying All That the Indians Recount, the Reasonable and the Unreasonable) or also known as *Kitab al-Hind* by Abū al-Rayān Muhammad ibn Almad al-Bīrūnī (973 CE-1048 CE) made a special commentary on Hinduism and outlined dialogical principles for engaging with others as a result of his interaction with the Hindus in the Indian subcontinent (Sachau, 1910). In order to communicate and understand a particular culture or religion, developing a common and understandable language is significant. This is the reason why al-Bīrūnī himself had learned Sanskrit and became very proficient in that language. Being objective and non-judgemental also other preconditions in dialogue that had been demonstrated by al-Bīrūnī throughout his contact with the Hindus despite discrepancies in theological aspects between Hinduism and Islam. This objectivity is articulated in the following excerpt:

> I shall not produce the arguments of our antagonists in order to refute such of them, as I believe to be in the wrong. My book is nothing but a simple historic record of facts. I shall place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are, and I shall mention in connection with them similar theories of the Greeks in order to show the relationship existing between them (Sachau, 1910: 7).
The attitude of non-judgemental had also being proposed by al-Faruqi but he termed it as ‘disengagement’. What he meant by disengagement is leaving one’s own presumptions and existing values while engaging in dialogue, and in order to increase one’s knowledge about other religions (Al-Faruqi, 1967).

In his book, 'Adab al-Hiwar fi al-Islam" (Ethics of Dialogue in Islam) Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (1997) has delineated few ethics for inter-religious dialogue which also include the non-judgemental attitude among the participants and respect of the opinions of others. Apart from these, he highlighted that dialogue should be based on truth and free from deception; one should stick to the topic selected and should address a clear argument; the dialogue participants should support the truth even if it is coming from other groups; they are also expected to be humble and should be provided with the same opportunity to present his/her opinions or arguments.

While engaging in dialogue, be it dialogue on religion or dialogue on co-operation, participants must be able to ‘agree to disagree’, to respect differences, to demonstrate decency, sincerity, sensitivity, responsibility, patience and other virtues (Kamar Oniah, 2001). Building on the Islamic spirit of inclusiveness, mutual respect and understanding Irfan Abdul Hameed Fattah (2004) has proposed few ethics to be adopted by Muslims for a successful inter-religious dialogue. Among the ethics are: openness in faith with the followers of other traditions; recognizing the purpose of the Qur’an, which includes the confirmation and ratification of the earlier revelations contained in the Torah and Gospel; and acknowledging the Qur’anic position in honouring people of different languages, races, cultures, and religious convictions given that they are all God’s creations.

Based on his principle of comparative religious study and meta-religion, al-Faruqi (1992) developed six principles of inter-religious dialogue. The first principle states that no dialogue
is beyond critique, which means authoritarian statements are unacceptable. The second and third principles suggest that no communication may violate the laws of internal and external coherence. Internal coherence suggests that a religion is not ‘self-contradictory’ and external coherence means that the religions involve in dialogue must consistence with history, logic and human life and knowledge. Correspondence with reality as opposed to myth become the fourth principle and freedom from absolutised scriptural figurations represents the fifth principle. The sixth and the last principle proposed ethics as the most suitable subject for dialogue instead of theological matters (Fletcher, 2008).

Scholars other than al-Faruqi also emphasise that dialogue should not involve theological discussion. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1998) for instance argued that theological issues will remain a major obstacle in dialogue. As an example in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians, the question of incarnation and the Trinity still remain contentious. According to Kamar Oniah (2001), dialogue should not compromise the so called intra-personal dimension of religions which signifies faith (e.g. theology, articles of faith or rituals), as it can involve the inter-personal dimension of religion which are related to universal values such as “concern for justice, sympathy for the unfortunate and love for the family” (Kamar Oniah, 2001: 119).

Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm (994 CE-1064 CE) however suggested that in the process of examining and understanding other religions, dialectical-dialogical method (Ghulam Haider Aasi, 1999) should involve all religious dimensions such as theology, doctrine, practices, culture, historical background and matters that involve the understanding of the Holy Qur’an (Khairulnizam Mat Karim & Suzy Aziziyan Saili, 2012).

Methods of Inter-Religious Dialogue

Other substantial number of works and researches have classified methods of dialogue since they discuss particular systematic or established procedure that normally involve phases, stages
or steps of conducting inter-religious dialogue. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2003), has proposed four phases of dialogue development. During the initial contact among inter-religious groups, the main focus would be placed on the effort to find similarities in theologies and scriptures. This objective can be accomplished in the first dialogue phase.

In the next phase, dialogue participants are expected to involve themselves in the rituals and prayers of other faiths as long as it is not contradictory to one’s own creed in order to further strengthen the relationship. Once trust and understanding have been built among the dialogue participants, the dialogue can progress to the third phase i.e. exploration of differences in religious values and practices. The final phase of dialogue is dedicated to discover ways to apply the values of different faith traditions for mutual benefit.

More systematic and specific inter-religious dialogue method is found in the inter-group dialogue model proposed by Zúñiga and Nagda (2001). They have divided dialogue process into four different types that evolve into four stages based on different goals and objectives.

**Collective Inquiry**

Often occurs in organisational settings such as business, government agencies and non-profit agencies, meaningful relationships among the participants are expected to develop during their engagement in collective thinking and inquiry (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001).

**Critical-dialogic Education**

The understanding of inter-group interactions in systems of power and privilege and building relationships across these differences are the main goal of critical-dialogic type of dialogue (Nagda, 2006). This type of dialogue often takes place in educational setting schools or universities (Nagda, Spearmon, Holley, Harding, Balassone, Moise-Swanson & de Mello, 1999).

**Conflict Resolution and Peace Building**
Conflict resolution and peace building type of dialogue is carried out “…to identify issues of conflict, generate action plans and achieve a workable agreement to conflicts or disputes” (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001: 308).

**Community Building and Social Action**

Segregated groups in particular community discuss community concerns, build relationships and explore the opportunity of working together to effect change.

**Four-stage Dialogue Model**

In order to achieve the overall goals, each type of dialogue suggested the need to go through the four stages of dialogue (Zúñiga and Nagda, 2001). Different type of dialogue however has different and unique application in each stage, namely forming and building relationships; exploring differences and commonalities of experience; exploring and dialoguing about issues of conflict; and action planning and alliance building. Table 1.1 below was adapted from Zúñiga and Nagda (2001: 314-315) has summarised the type, stages and the application for each type of dialogue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Collective inquiry</th>
<th>Critical-dialogic education</th>
<th>Community building and social action</th>
<th>Conflict resolution and peace building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting the environment</td>
<td>Build a container for dialogue for safety and trust issues to emerge. Develop group consensus.</td>
<td>Develop guidelines for dialogue. Build relationship.</td>
<td>Discuss, clarify and set ground rules. Share personal beliefs and experiences about race and race relations.</td>
<td>Orient group members. Decide to engage in dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a common base</td>
<td>-Explore beliefs and assumptions leading to public suspension of judgments. Dialogue about personal, work related or general topics.</td>
<td>Develop a common language. Explore multiple social identities, commonalities and differences.</td>
<td>Ask what the state of race relation in our community is. Ask what the nature of the problem with race is.</td>
<td>Map and name problems and relationships. Explore and clarify issues and group development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring questions issues, conflict</td>
<td>Increase suspension of judgment and trust. Inquiry and creativity flow. Explore personal, work related or general topics.</td>
<td>Explore issues of conflict and social justice. Explore in/out group dynamics and issues.</td>
<td>Ask participants about the main changes they would like to see in the community. Ask what kind of public policies can help.</td>
<td>Continue clarification of issues. Probe relationships to choose direction for change. Build scenarios-experience a change in the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving from dialogue to action</td>
<td>Assess experiences. Explore transfer of learning and skills into daily life.</td>
<td>Plan action. Envision and seek opportunities for action. Build alliances.</td>
<td>Ask what participants will do as individuals and with others to make a difference.</td>
<td>Plan action. Act together to make change happen. Monitor and evaluate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants of Inter-Religious Dialogue

With regards to the participants of inter-religious dialogue, scholars are divided into those who propose that dialogue should only involve the elite and those who permit dialogue for the grassroots. Al-Faruqi (1992) for instance restricted Muslim-Christian dialogue to the ‘intelligentsia’ since this group is expected to be more prepared with the distorted original Christian’s teachings, experience of the crusades and evangelisation compared to the masses. Likewise, Kamar Oniah (2001: 116-117) also suggests that formal inter-religious dialogue should only be participated by those who have ‘competent knowledge’ and devoted religious adherence. Even in inter-religious co-operation, the participants should also have ample and correct understanding of the religion.

Inter-group dialogue on the other hand is specifically designed by the grassroots for the grassroots to increase communication which previously lack among diverse groups of people in schools, in communities and also in the work place (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Conducted in a small groups, normally 12 to 18 people from two or more social identity groups, inter-group dialogue involves “men and women; biracial/multiracial/ethnic people; Arabs and Jews; people from working-class, middle-class, and upper-socio-economic class backgrounds; and Christians, Muslims, and Jews” (Zúñiga et al., 2007: 3).

Conclusion

The contemporary challenges to faith in the form of atheism, post-modernism, liberalism, relativism, socialism, secularism, positivism, materialism, humanism, scepticism utilitarianism, existentialism and empiricism afflicting every level of society especially the grassroots. The classical *Kalam* or dialogical method that is based on logical argument might be appropriate for the intellectuals or the elite but might not be applicable for the grassroots in
general. In order to address these multitude threats to faith and to include the grassroots in the Kalam for inter-religious discourse, the existing method need to be adjusted and enriched.

Al-Faruqi had laid the concept of din al-fitrah or natural religion as the foundation for inter-religious dialogue. According to al-Faruqi the threats to faith as aforementioned are part of the moral needs of people that can be addressed by inter-religious dialogue in the form of cooperative endeavour between religions. The key to dialogue and cooperation is din al-fitrah since all religion has its source in God. The concept of din al-fitrah therefore is the glue that attaching the epistemological and sociological rationale of inter-religious dialogue since it allows the perfecting of humanity through the obedience to God’s will (Fletcher, 2012).

The theoretical contributions of al-Faruqi especially the concept of din al-fitrah can be incorporated with the inter-group dialogue model as proposed by Zúñiga and Nagda (2001) in order to make it more applicable to the grassroots not only to the intellectuals or the elite. Inter-group dialogue model provides a systematic framework of how the cooperative endeavour among religions can be achieved.

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CONCLUSION

The task of reviving Kalam in the study of religion is challenging because of the impression that the modern study of religion is a more sophisticated and reliable discourse established and evolved during modernity. On the other hand, Muslims who study Usul al-Din and Kalam were glued with classical debates on logics, Muslim sects (al-firaq) and dated findings on religions and deviant teachings of the past.

Towards the end of the 20th century however, there emerged an intellectual movement among the Muslim scholars who were well trained in Islamic traditional education as well as modern education. The movement called for Muslims to adopt a reconciled approach between the traditional Islamic studies to that of modern studies under the banner of Islamisation of Knowledge. Part of the agenda was to end the dichotomy of education that have resulted into secularisation of knowledge and education. The impact of the movement to the Muslims mind is much felt up to present time in the sense that it has stimulated for a more critical and analytical approach to knowledge acquisition and dissemination.

With regard to the study of religion, it was Ismail Raji al-Faruqi who introduced the breakthrough in the way religions other than Islam to be studied. He himself had proficient knowledge of Christianity due to his encounter with the Christians and its prominent scholar such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Al-Faruqi’s work of Christian Ethics and alternative method in the study of religion, namely Meta Religion have greatly inspired the making of this book which in fact an outcome of a research on Kalam and Comparative Religion. One who read al-Faruqi’s works on the study of religion would notice his peculiar way of presenting his ideas. He frequently cited either Hebrew, Greek and Latin expressions that resemble the meaning of certain word in the Islamic glossaries. It creates a question whether he was writing for the Muslims to know more about Christianity, or was he writing for the Christians to know more of the authentic version of Christianity which has its foundation in Islam? This peculiarity of
him deserved him a recognition as the first Muslim scholar who introduced a new approach in the study of religion at the modern time. He did not call his approach as Islamic, but rather he called it as Meta Religion (literally means beyond religion) in order to advocate its universal character. Hence, the method he introduced is not biased for the Muslims, but indeed practical for universal consumption. He called it a critical world theology.

It is way too ambitious for this work to present something outstanding or even similar to al-Faruqi’s ideas of meta religion. However, al-Faruqi’s style of argumentation and line of reasoning were rooted in the Kalam tradition. Al-Faruqi has indeed adopted the dialectic method of Kalam and this is plainly stated in his Christian Ethics. In addition, his critics of Christianity was centralised on the doctrine of Incarnation. Al-Faruqi was polemical in his arguments. He intended that Meta Religion to help one to arrive at and accept the Truth voluntarily for the choice he made reflects his moral values towards the Truth.

Apart from promoting a critical world theology, Al-Faruqi was generally silent about the specific role of Kalam in the study of other religions, but his treatment to the discourse seemed to uphold the bigger framework held by Kalam such as the dialectic and polemical approach, the verification of the truth via logical reasoning and argumentation and the theme selected for examination. It was for these reason that the eleven chapters in this book were identified. They are not exhaustive, but they help to reinforce the main findings of a research on Kalam and Comparative Religion; that both are essentially needed in the Muslim study of other religions.

There are several reasons why Kalam should not be omitted from the discourse. Firstly, the Muslim legacies in the study of other religions were mainly rooted in Kalam. Secondly is due to the diverse methods and approaches adopted by the Muslim scholars in the past as well as present in the study of religions other than Islam as presented in some of the chapters of this book. Thirdly, is regarding the verification of the truth which is the ultimate aim of Kalam.
Fourthly refers to the orientation of the discourse that sought to analyse religion by means of logical reasoning and argumentation on the central teachings of a religion.

In comparison, the modern approaches are antithesis to all the above. It has no appreciation to tradition or revelation whatsoever. It has developed into different nomenclatures based on reductionist approaches. Modern study of religions is not interested in the verification of the truth as it is biased hence it propagates the importance of neutrality and objectivity. And finally, under what has been regarded as scientific, the modern discourse reports religion as it is, on the belief that religion should speaks for itself.

In the introduction of this book, the author has underscored the insistence to ‘leaving your religion outside the classroom’ which epitomised the significant approach in the modern study of religion. Is this totally a wrong measure? Muller claimed that this is important to help someone to remain neutral as he gathers data on religion under study. The phenomenologists called this measure ‘epoche’ or ‘bracketing’ whereby one has to suspend his judgment when collecting and reporting data on religion. Al-Faruqi appreciates the measure however he disagrees that one has to leave his religion outside the classroom forever. He said that is a temporary measure during the collection of data on religion. (Perhaps, he has benefited this from Al-Shahrestani’s and Al-Biruni’s approaches even though they were nowhere mentioned in his works.) Once the collection of data has completed, one has to make analysis of the data and at this point of time, he needs to break away from suspending his judgment because doing analysis involves intellection exercise that requires judgment. But al-Faruqi does not approve using one’s religion as the basis of judgment. He said the standard of judgment should be universally recognised and applicable, so he introduced Meta Religion.

Modern study of religion is practical so long that it requires first-hand, empirical and in-depth study of religion. Neutrality and suspension of judgment is useful too without which learning
is hindered. However, suspension of judgment need not to be forever or otherwise one who studies religion will not be able to grasp the meaning of the data he collected. With regard to the reductionist approaches propagated via anthropology, sociology, psychology, philology or even philosophy, despite reducing religion to a particular domain in human life, they did contribute in the way religions were empirically studied. However, they left the most important domain in religion unattended which is the metaphysical and spiritual domain.

This book does not call for a total abandonment of the modern approaches neither that it invites for a total submerging in the classical Kalam approaches. As a matter of fact, it calls for Muslim learners of religion to benefit from both approaches and holding fast to the bigger framework of Kalam in deciphering the truth from falsehood. Methods and approaches can vary so long that the religious metaphysics are not abandoned to wonder around in one’s monkey’s mind. This book also calls for Muslims to appreciate but remain critical to their own tradition hence it opens door for knowledge discoveries or ijithad. Only with such spirit that Muslims learners will be inspired to pursue their intellectual endeavour in making religion understandable and reachable to human mind and common sense, hence enlightening their quest for the meaning of religion.
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SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Haslina Ibrahim

Dr. Haslina Ibrahim is serving as an Associate Professor at the Department of Usul al-Din & Comparative Religion of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She has been serving the Department since 2003. Her research areas of interest are religious studies, inter-religious relationship and Islamic da’wah. She has held various administrative positions and currently she is holding the post as the Deputy Dean Responsible Research and Innovation at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences (KIRKHS). She has published a book titled Exploring Religious Pluralism: Christian and Muslim Response and her upcoming article is Mediation and Interreligious Discourse: Prospects and Challenges in Resolving Interreligious Skirmishes in Malaysia. She is currently working on a manuscript titled A Muslim Guide to Understand Sacred Text of Religions: A Comparative Approach.

Wan Haslan Khairuddin

Dr. Wan Haslan Khairuddin is serving as a senior lecturer at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, the National University of Malaysia (UKM). He has been serving the Centre since 2014 after serving at the International Islamic University College Selangor (KUIS) from 2010. His research areas of interest are ‘Ilm al-Kalām, Mysticism, Comparative Religion, Biblical Studies and Logic. Currently, he is holding the post as the Deputy Director at the Islamic Centre of UKM. He has completed research titled the Doctrine of Retribution in Islam and Hinduism (2010) and Theme and Method of Biblical Criticism by Raḥmatullah al-Kayrānawī based on Izhār al-Ḥaq (2018) and his upgoing research is the Development of Muslims Interaction and Dialogue Modules with Atheists Based on ‘Ilm al-Kalām Works.
Indriaty Ismail

Dr. Indriaty Ismail is a senior lecturer at the Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, the National University of Malaysia (UKM). Has been a faculty member since 1991 and has served 28 years in UKM. Bachelor degree in Islamic Studies at UKM, Masters at Lancaster University, UK in Religious Studies, and PhD in the fields of Theology and Philosophy at UKM. Her areas of research include Philosophy of Religion, Modern Philosophy, Religious Studies and Current Ideologies and Feminism. Supervised many students in conducting their research at undergraduate and postgraduate degree; masters and Ph.D students. She also conducted research collaborations with colleagues and several researchers from other universities in other fields such as Comparative Religion, Spiritual Studies and Liberalism. She has participated in numerous conferences and some academic collaborations over the world such as China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, North Cyprus, Philippines, South Africa and Sri Lanka. She has completed few researches in Feminism, such as Mind and Method of Sisters in Islam.

Alwani Ghazali

Dr. Alwani Ghazali is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Islamic Studies and Thought, the Academy of Islamic Studies University of Malaya (UM). She received her doctorate at Melbourne University, Australia; and both her Bachelor and master's degrees from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Prior to serving at UM, she served at the IIUM and the University of Islamic Sciences Malaysia (USIM). She is also a research fellow at the Islamic and Strategic Studies Institute (ISSI). She has been dedicated her research interest on the theme of interreligious dialogue.

Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman
Dr. Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman is serving as a Senior Lecturer at Research Centre of Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). She has been serving the Department since 2010. Her research areas of interest are religious studies, religious tolerance, muslim-non Muslim relationship, religious pluralism and Islamic Thought. Currently she is holding the post as the Head of Programme Theology and Philosophy (Undergraduate). She published journals and wrote chapters in book such as Religious Pluralism challenge Malaysia: in Theology and Syariah, Wu Chang Relation in Confucianism and Redefine of Religious Tolerance in Ta’amul (Pemaknaan Semula Toleransi Beragama dalam Berta’amul).

Khadijah Mohd Khambali@Hambali

Dr. Khadijah binti Mohd Khambali @ Hambali is an Associates Professor in the Department of ‘Aqidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Her research areas of interest are Religious Studies, Inter-Religious relationship, Mualaf Community and Islamic Thoughts. She was invited as Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU), Georgetown University, Washington D.C. from 2001-2002. Dr Khadijah holds the post of Co-ordinator of the University Co-Curriculum and Elective Section (SKET) currently known as CITRA, University of Malaya 2004-2006, Deputy Director of Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya 2006-2007. She currently a member of the Islamic Religious Council, State of Selangor from 2018, as well as a member of the Selangor State Fatwa Committee. She also provided an affidavit of the Allah Sentencing issue for the Attorney General's Chambers and the National Security Council. In addition, her active involvement in the field of research for 30 years of service is reflected in her contribution to producing 10 scholarly books, 35 chapters in scholarly books, 99 scholarly

Romsizi Abdul Rahman
Dr. Mohd Rosmizi Bin Abd Rahman is a senior lecturer at Akidah and Religion Studies Program, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Islam Malaysia (USIM). He obtained his Bachelor’s Degree (2005) and Master’s Degree (2007) in Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion) from International Islamic University Malaysia. In 2014 he received his PhD in Comparative Religion from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. His major expertise and interest are in Comparative Religion and Islamic Aqidah. He has published several books and articles such as 4 Agama Monoteisme; Introduction to Islamic and Buddhist Personal Ethics; and Agama-Agama di Dunia. Currently he is the Editor in Chief of al-‘Abqari Journal and is the Head of Program of Akidah and Religion Studies program.

Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Bin Wan Razali
Dr. Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Ramli is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Religion and Usūl al-Dīn at the Akidah and Religion Studies Programme, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Presently, he is also the Director at the Centre for Core Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). He lectures on various key areas in Islamic studies and comparative religion. Among his publications are The Modern Study of Religion: A Preliminary Survey on Clifford Geertz, Akidah Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jamaah in Malaysia: Contemporary Challenges and Issues, Islamic Theology, Islamic Ethics &
Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil

Dr. Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil is an Assistant Professor in Comparative Religion at the Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He has been with the Department since 2003. His research interests are mainly on the early development of religions in the Malay world, Malay manuscript study and Islamic Da’wah. At the moment, he is also holding the post of Deputy Dean, Student Development and Community Engagement at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences (KIRKHS). He has published research papers in numerous academic journals. His latest article entitled Politico-Cultural-Religious Milieu of Southeast Asia: An Examination of Pre-Islamic Structures of Authority and Syncretic Practices was published in KEMANUSIAAN - The Asian Journal of Humanities. Currently he is working on several manuscripts namely Examining The Roles of ʿUlamāʾ in The Process of Islamization of The Malay World, The Contribution of Muslim Scholars to The Study of Religions Other than Islam During the Early Period of Islam in the Malay World and A Critical Survey on the Cardinal Islamic Practices in the Classical Malay Texts.

Mohd Farid Hafez Mhd Omar

Dr. Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar is a lecturer at the Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). He has published three journal articles, three chapters in book and presented lectures on Islamic Da’wah Movements/NGOs in Malaysia, inter-faith dialogue, Muslim-Christian relations, NGO leadership and governance, which are his research interest. He actively involves with
Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) in promoting and living a better understanding of Islam towards Muslim and non-Muslim in Malaysia. His highest achievement was being awarded Fulbright US-ASEAN Visiting Scholar Initiative Program 2019/2020, where he conducted a research project at Center for Islam and Contemporary World (CICW), Shenandoah University, Virginia, United States (September-December 2019). The project title is Exploring Leadership and Governance Framework in Islamic Institutions/NGOs in the United States. He is expecting to receive a Doctor of Philosophy in 2020 and his research title is The Governance of Da’wah Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Malaysia: A Critical Study on the Aspect of Leadership.

Ahmad Faizal Ramly

Ahmad Faizal Ramly is a PhD candidate in Syariah at the Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies (FKI) at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). He is interested in promoting the culture of love towards all creation of Allah through empathy, compassion and understanding of others. He involves himself in charity projects for the needs and less fortunate. His Master thesis is an analytical study of Christian Usage of the Term Allah for God in the Malay Language while his PhD is a comparative study of the Spirituality of Christian and Muslim Family at Drug Rehabs in Malaysia.

Arfah Abdul Majid

Dr. Arfah Ab. Majid is a senior lecturer at the Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She is currently involved in the teaching of Islamic and Asian Civilization and Ethnic Relations course. Dr. Arfah received her bachelor’s degree in Usuluddin and Comparative Religion from the International Islamic University Malaysia (2006), MA in Study of Religions from the
School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London (2008) and Ph.D in Usuluddin and Comparative Religion from the International Islamic University Malaysia (2013). In 2017, she had completed her one year postdoctoral research at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore. Her primary research interests include religious studies, inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious/inter-ethnic relations. She is currently leading a research project funded by Ministry of Education Malaysia entitled “Development of Inter-religious Dialogue Model for the Grassroots towards Achieving Social Cohesiveness in Malaysia”.