

# CONTRIBUTION OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS TO COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS: SELECTED WORKS STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Religion has fascinated human mind since the dawn of humans from the primitive to the modern age. The diversity and commonality of religious beliefs have forced humans to reflect on the genesis, nature and dimensions of religion. On the one hand, the legacy of some intellectuals have impressed upon the origin of religion within the human psyche itself while a different section of intellectuals from the religious affiliations draw their conclusions on the nature, origin and function of religion from the scriptures they believe are revealed or inspired from God. However the matter is complicated when those who believe in some faith, religion or religious belief disregard and exclude the religion of the other. Such approaches foster polemics, fanaticism and hate that result in violence among the adherents of different religious denominations. Max Muller had long back remarked that “one who knows one religion knows none”. And the Indian philosopher and author, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had observed that the ignorance of other religions “is the mother of injustice”. Muslims had long back upheld these ideals, in fact many centuries earlier than the rise of the modern study of religions (Comparative Religion). The paper attempts to explore the selective Muslim scholars’ works on comparative religion, their approach and methodologies that have considerable bearings and alternatives to the contemporary approaches to religious studies.

**Key Words:** Comparative Religion, Kitāb al Fasḥ, al Milal wal Nihal, Kitāb al Hind, Christian Ethics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jacques Wardenburg in his well-researched book *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* states that whereas the Western views on Islam have received increasingly scholarly attention during the last few decades, this is much less the case

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with Muslim views on other cultures and religions. He affirms that since the inception of the Muslim civilization, Muslims have been in continuous relationship/interaction with other cultures and civilizations. The Muslim civilization that stretched from the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean and through the diverse regions has long been the carriers of culture. As a consequence, Muslims have come into contact with many religions. This encounter doesn't stop with Christianity and Judaism but extends to various forms of Christianity and Judaism inside and outside the Middle East. The religion of Zoroastrians and Manicheans, Hindus, and Buddhists also attracted the attention of Muslim scholars.<sup>i</sup> Amidst the intense wave of religious obsession and fanaticism during the Middle Ages, Muslim scholars produced certain impartial and systematic works on religion. According to Ghulam Haider Aasi, "The Muslim scholars who for long were reduced to the status of mere historians, heresiographers, or theologians by the Orientalists are being studied as the forerunners of the contemporary discipline—the comparative study of religion(s)."<sup>ii</sup> Ahmad Shallaby says that the Muslims were the earliest to contribute to the intellectual development of the discipline of comparative religions. Such an endeavour was carried out when a number of non-Islamic religions denied and condemned the existence of other religions.<sup>iii</sup> The argument of Shallaby carries a certain weight for many works of Muslim scholars have been written much earlier than the European and Western scholars began to display their interest in the religious studies. From the early part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Christian era, Muslim scholars had already begun to author numerous books on comparative religion till 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is worth mentioning that many early Muslim scholars can be identified in the discipline of comparative religion much earlier than the Western scholarship. According to Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, with the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* of Mullah Mohsin Fani, Muslim scholarship almost completed the studies of all the major existing religions of the world. One can name some of prominent Muslim scholars with their contributions to the discipline. They are Al-Nawbakhti (d.202 H) with his work on comparative religion as *al-ara wa al-Diyanat*, Al-Masudi (d.346 H) authoring *al-Diyanat*, al-Baghdadi (d.429) writing *al-milal wal Nihal*. Apart from these we come across the works like *Kitāb Al-Fisal Fi-al-Milal wa al-Ahwa wa al-Nihal* by Ibn Hazm (d. 456H), *al-Jawāb al Sabih li man badala Dīn-al-Masih* by Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728), *Al-Milal wa-al-Nihal* of Al-Shahristānī (d.548 H). One may also locate Al-Bīrunī (d.440H) with his *Tabqīq ma li al Hind min Maqulab Maqbulab li al-Aql aw Mardbulab*, Fakr-ud-Dīn Razi with his *Aqaid Muslimin wa Musbrikin*, *Kitāb Bayān al-Adyān* of Abu al-Ma'ali as well. Sadly many of these early works were only noted in the pages of historical books of *Manāqib*, *Tabaqāt*, and *Tārikh*; whereby only a few of them managed to survive to the present day for academic reference and analysis.<sup>iv</sup> The references of Maulānā Abul Kalām Azad in *his Tarjamān-ul-Qur'an* with respect to the world religions and his analysis of the evolutionary theory of religion are in fact wonderful.

There is no denying of the fact that some of the afore-mentioned works are disputative and at times polemical yet a considerable number is incredibly objective, analytical, and impartial. Not all the Muslim scholars were bent upon to pinpoint the discrepancies and/ or polytheistic beliefs in other religions; few were optimistic and accommodative of other religions. As for those Muslim Scholars, who charged non-Islamic religions of deviation and error, nevertheless exercised caution and integrity in collecting the facts about such religions. They candidly stated the facts at which they had arrived and never resorted to distort their doctrines or history.<sup>v</sup> Further with the zeal of finding good in other religions, some Muslim intellectuals carried out the study of religions other than Islam with much enthusiasm. The spirit of seeking wisdom in other religions is not the recent invention of Muslims, says Wardenburg; its history can be traced to the early Islamic period. The spirit of positivity was carried to the medieval ages. Muslims held that Islam goes back to the notion that all things true and good in other religions and cultures were evidently already present in Islam itself. Such elements, even if they are to be found elsewhere, may then still be called “Islamic”. In other words, elements of Islam could be found outside the historical community of Muslims. This idea often served in practice to legitimise the various assimilation processes from other cultures which enriched Medieval Islamic Civilization with so many practical, intellectual, and also religious views, prescriptions and customs, which cannot be found in the proper sources of Islam.<sup>vi</sup> (Wardenburg, 1999) However it should not be forgotten that *Tawhid* was the only *Weltanschauung* through which Muslim scholars treated other religions. The approach had semantical dimensions and the study was undertaken to approximate only the views of other religions.

In the contemporary times when the works of Muslim scholars as Abu Raihan Al Bīrūnī, Abul Fath Muhammad bin Abdul Karīm al-Shahristānī, etc are gaining popularity at the hands of Western scholarship, the Muslim intelligentsia is also making some strides to explore the contribution of such Muslim religious scholars and their likes. Recently one Muzammil Hussain Siddīqī, for instance, wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Ibn Taymīyyah's al-Jawab al-sahib li man badala Dīn al-Masīb* for Harvard University. Likewise, a promising scholar from Nigeria, Isa Muḥammad Maīshanu, has recently completed his doctoral dissertation on *The Comparative Method in the Study of Religion: A Case Study of Al-Amirī and al-Bīrūnī* for the International Islamic University, Islamabad.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2. CONTRIBUTION OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS TO COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION (*Religionswissenschaft*)

Muslim scholarship had taken on the study of religious scriptures other than Islam after Max Muller had stated more than seven centuries later that none has the right to

comment on any religion without knowing about that religion through its own original sources. In this section we would be considering the contribution of such influential Muslim scholars in the field of religious studies who studied different religions from their scriptural point of view.

## 2.1 ABU RAIHAN MUHAMMAD IBN AHMAD AL-BĪRŪNĪ (973-1050 CE)

al-Bīrūnī was born in 973 in a place called Khwarizm in Central Asia. In his youth he got interested in Greek sciences especially astronomy; later Indian Culture fascinated him and he took to the study of Indian culture and society. It was his stay with Sultan Mahmud in India that he produced his popular book *Kitāb-al-Hind* (1030) that gained acknowledgment at the hands of leading scholars of anthropology and religion within and across the Muslim community from the Middle Ages up to now.<sup>viii</sup> Al-Bīrūnī is considered as the pioneer in the field of Indology inspiring Max Muller and other Western Indologists to work on the religions of the East, especially Hinduism and its off-shots. He wrote a thorough comparative study on the anthropology of religions across the Middle East, Mediterranean, and more especially the Indian subcontinent. He set out for the extensive, personal investigations of the peoples [acting himself as a participant observant], customs, and religions of the Indian subcontinent. His book, *Tabḥīq ma li al Hind min Maqulab Maqbulab li al-Aql aw Mardbulab* invites praise from all corners of the globe. It offers a detailed account of the Indian life, religion, languages, and cultures, besides marking his observations on the geographical conditions of the country. However comprehending the Indian religious thought is the hallmark of his book. Arthur Jeffery, a well known figure in the Oriental Studies and Semitic languages finds the work of Al-Bīrūnī as rare, fair and unprejudiced. He is all praise for al-Bīrūnī's unprejudiced statements of the views of other religions. The zeal of al-Bīrūnī to study religions, other than his own i.e. Islam, in the best of the sources is a rare phenomenon. William Montgomery Watt describes the approach of al-Bīrūnī as “objective and unprejudiced”. He calls him impartial in his presentation of facts [of other religions].

Contrary to the general trend of studying religions as Hinduism negatively, al-Bīrūnī as a disciple of learned Brahmans mastered Sanskrit – the language of the Hindu Scriptures at the feet of Hindu religious scholars. This helped him to understand the religious philosophy of Hinduism through its original sources. His effort was to understand the Hinduism as someone belonging to the Hinduism would have done. His approach and influence is often seen reflecting in the works of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a 20th century most celebrated religious scholar. The phenomenological method that holds sway in the field of religious studies owes much to the contribution of al-Bīrūnī. He had

stated long back that a scholar should follow the requirements of a strictly scientific method. Al-Bīrunī suggested that the statements given by a particular religious scholar about a religion are bound to invite the criticism by its adherents; hence he was in favour of a sound scientific method that prevents the researcher from partiality and judgement.<sup>ix</sup> In his *Kitāb al-Hind* Al-Bīrunī is seen as offering a brief summary of the ideas of the Indian philosophers and scientists on a specific theme and then proceeds to quote appropriate extracts from the Indian philosophical discourses and religious scriptures. Bringing comparison into play, he at times identifies the similar ideas of Greek philosophers and thinkers, and the Sufis, quoting from the concerned sources.<sup>x</sup> Penetrating deep into the philosophy of Hinduism, al-Bīrunī came up with a startling revelation. He declared Hindus essentially as Monotheists; polytheism, the result of a certain confusion and corruption. He found commoners as fond of idols while the elites engaged themselves in the immaterial comprehension of One Supreme God.<sup>xi</sup>

## 2.2 ABUL FATH MUHAMMAD BIN ABDUL KARIM AL-SHAHRISTĀNĪ

al-Shahristānī (479-548 AH/1153 CE) as he is popularly known was born in Shahristān, a city in Khurasan province in Iran. There are slightly different accounts about his year of birth, but the majority of the Muslim historians agree upon 479 AH as his year of birth. Educated in the then famous Madras-i-Nizamiya wing of Nishapur during the reign of Seljuks; Shahristānī excelled in the field of Arabic, Persian, *Usul-al-Fiqh*, *Tafsir*, *Hadīth*, Philosophy, and *Kalām*. There are many books attributed to him on Islamic doctrines, *Ilm-ul-Kalām*, *Qura'nic* interpretation, etc. Some of the manuscripts of his uncompleted works can be seen in the libraries of Iran, Russia, and Europe. However some of his famous extant works that are preserved and even translated in other languages are: *Nihāyat-ul-Aqdān fi Ilm-al-Kalām* (published from Oxford), *Kitāb Mas'rat-ul-Falāsafa*, *Mafatih-al-Asrar wa Masabih-al-Abrār*.<sup>xii</sup> (Siddiqui, Ali Muhsin) Nevertheless the book that lends immortality to him is *Kitāb-al-Milal wa al-Nihal* which would be our focus in the upcoming pages.

### 2.2.1 KITĀB AL MILAL WA AL-NIHAL

The book has earned a lot of praise in the past and continues to do so in the contemporary times. Taj-ud-Dīn al-Subukī registers his remarks about the book in the following words, “*Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* despite being short proves the best book on the theme of religion. It surpasses *Kitāb al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa an-Nihal* of Ibn Hazm in many respects”. Eric J. Sharpe says that the book is the first scientific account of the history of religion.<sup>xiii</sup>

The impressions of al-Subukī and Eric J. Sharpe are appropriate for al-Shahrastānī has maintained an academic style devoid of any polemical tone in expressions. Owing to its academic worth, the book has been translated into many European languages, Persian, Turkish, and of course Urdu. Shahrastānī writes in the introduction of his book that he has the honour to study books of different world religions and communities. He further says that it was among his concerns to consult the sources of the various religions, and that he desired to collect all the details in the form of a book for the posterity to consider it.

The major portion of the book deals with the Muslim sects and their differences on Islamic beliefs and practices. The book traces the beginnings and development of such sects within Islam; the variations in the interpretations and explanations of the Islamic Sacred Texts. The six Muslim sects identified by Shahrastānī are *Mutazila* (Mutazilites), *Jabariya* (Jabarites), *Sifatiya*, *Khawārij* (Khawjirites), *Murjiya* (Murijites), *Shia* (Shītes), and *Ahl-i-Sunnah wal Jamah*. All such sects have been dealt in detail along with their sub-sects. The other part of the book discusses the religion of Jews and Christians, of course with their sects. Zoroastrians, Manichians (*Thanviya*), *Ahl-ul-Hawā* (people of the opinions) though treated briefly in book, nevertheless are recorded with the essential details. Shahrastānī analyzes that this group of people glorify their reasoning power to the extent that they deny other sources of reality, even the reality of Prophethood. In other words such people show categorical obedience to their own mental inclinations.

The fascinating feature of Shahrastānī is that he makes an interesting division of the world into seven continents; and the people of those continents according to him consist of different temperaments, colours and shades. He says that the world can be called four directional, i.e., East, West, North, and South and the people of these all continents and regions share different temperaments and have different legislations (*shar'ial*) to follow. This point is worth to be noted for Shahrastānī takes into account the geographical features, social and cultural variants among mankind.

Shahrastānī doesn't stop here; he divides the people according to their nationalities with the denominations like *Arab*, *Ajam*, *Rum*, and *Hind*. He says that the civilizations are pairs in terms of their common traits which they share mutually at the expense of others. He says that the people inhabiting *Arab* and *Hind* lands are closer to each other in their religious temperament. Their inclination according to Shahrastānī is towards ascertaining the natures of things (*khawās al asha*). They prefer to delve deep in bringing out the inner cores of the realities of things as well as their essences.

Moreover, they value things for their spiritual valuation. According to Shahrastānī the people of *Rum* and *Ajam* having different preferences and their proclivity is towards the nature of things, to understand the conditions and qualities of the things. They have pragmatic considerations i.e. they care for outcomes and consequences of things. In other words they are more interested in the material considerations of various matters at the cost of their spiritual worth.



Shahristānī locates the common roots of Jews and Christians. His description and presentation makes both the religions as complimentary with Judaism ornamented with perfect legal injunctions, and Christianity beautifying ethical and moral contours of religion. He gives details about the beliefs of Sabians and according to Shahristānī a group of them believed in seven stars. Shahristānī however sees them originally as Monotheists who in the beginning were the followers of the ancient Prophet Hermes (*Adhimun* in Arabic). Founded among the beliefs of Greeks, Muslims later identified Hermes with the Qur'anic Idris (Enoch). Shahristānī found that the Sabians abandoned the prophetic teachings of Idris, who had emphasized on the Oneness of God. The deviation and negligence landed them into a unique worship of stars. They feared and revered stars; and according to a certain belief the Sabians of India have come from the stars and heavenly bodies. They have assumed the body of men and finally shaped into idols, which don't talk, listen or see and never do any good to the people. Shahristānī sees one group of Sabians as star worshippers and the other transforming into idol worshippers. Shahristānī categorises Sabians into: the Sabians of Nabt, of Persia, and Rome.<sup>xiv</sup>

Shahristānī further narrates that the Prophet Ibrahim had later come to render such beliefs of Sabians as futile both theoretically and practically, starting with the rejection of star worshippers as is stated variously in Qur'an in *Surat-ul-Anam* and *Surat-ul-Anbiya*. Prophet Ibrahim pointing at the stars and the moon declaring them God, but as soon as they set, he turns away from those declaring them incompetent as gods. The Qura'nic Translators and *Mufasirun* (Qura'nic Exegets) like Muhammad Asad term it a deliberate attempt on the part of Ibrahim in rendering the beliefs of star and idol worshippers as ridiculous and futile. Later Ibrahim broke all the idols of false gods and exposed their powerlessness. (Qur'an, 21: 63). He thus established *Hanafiyah Kubrā* and *Shari'at-i-Uzmā* which is Dīn-ul-Qaim. Shahristānī claims that all the prophets from his (Ibrahim's) progeny were followers of Hanafiyah creed specially Prophet Muhammad.<sup>xv</sup> Nevertheless applying a certain model in his account, Shahristānī recuperates Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. It is no surprise that Shahristānī discusses Sabianism in the second part of his book, where the Indian religions are placed. For him, it serves as a kind of model for a sort of religion that is situated so to say, between monotheism and polytheism. By Presenting Indian religion as a form of more or less admissible Sabianism, Shahristānī tries to rehabilitate a great deal of Hindu thought and religion.

As far as Magians, Zoroastrians are concerned, they hold on to the dualism i.e. belief in two administrators of good and evil, profit and loss, light and darkness. Shahristānī maintains that the earlier followers of Zoroaster believed in the eternity of goodness and temporariness of darkness (evil). However with the passage of time Zoroastrians later believed in the equal power of good and evil. On the whole, the account of Shahristānī on dualists, Zoroastrians is laudable. He offers a fair treatment of Buddhism about which Muslim knew pretty little till then.<sup>xvii</sup>

### 2.3 ABŪ MUHAMMAD ‘ALI IBN AHMAD IBN SA’ID IBN HAZM

Ibn Hazm is one of the greatest prolific writers. He stands only next to the great Ibn Jarir al-Tabari as long as the written works are considered. He was born in 994 CE in Spain. His family enjoyed the kind patronage of Umayyads of Spain. Ibn Hazm remained one of the staunch supporters of Umayyad Emirate/Caliphate of Spain throughout his life, bearing every hardship for the cause of the Umayyad rule. Educated under the competent and pious scholars of Qur’an and Hadīth, Ibn Hazm continued to be trained in Fiqh and Kalām. He wrote extensively on ethics, genealogy, history, jurisprudence, and logic. His works on the codification of the Zāhiri school of Islamic Law are immensely recognized as influential. He is unanimously acknowledged as the Imam of Zāhiri Fiqh.

Taking the pluralistic character [ethically, socially, religiously] of Spanish society into cognizance, Ibn Hazm set out to analyze the religious diversity among his own people. Ibn Hazm didn't believe that juristic, theological, and philosophical differences in society were merely heresy, schism, or religious deviation. He therefore decided to pore over the religious diversity on a scientific basis i.e. historically, rationally, socially, politically, and of course psychologically. *Kitāb al Fasl Fi al Milal wa al Ahwā wa al Nihal* is the product of the same concern. In the foregoing pages we may be discussing the same work of the author that has secured an important place in *Religionswissenschaft*.

#### 2.3.1 KITĀB AL-FASL FI AL-MILAL WA AL-AHWĀ WA AL-NIHAL (THE DECISIVE WORD ON SECTS, HETERODOXIES, AND DENOMINATIONS)

The book is written in the first quarter of the 11th century. However its methodology still holds weight in the contemporary period as far as the study of other religions is concerned. Ibn Hazm claims that he refrains from misquoting the teachings of other traditions. He even maintains that he distorts not the meaning of the particular text under study. To maintain the characteristic of precision, Ibn Hazm proceeds directly to the main points, records the arguments of the opponents, and then sits down to rebut them one by one while assembling proofs based on logic and religious texts. His critique rests on the premise that a scripture, which is revealed by God, can't be inconsistent and contradictory in content.<sup>xviii</sup>

Ibn Hazm classifies the religious traditions known to him into six types. This classification reveals the in depth knowledge of Ibn Hazm with respect to other religions and denominations. The typology is sequenced as:



1. The category of the people who negate the existence of any facts, realities or truths. They can be identified as Sophists.
2. Those who acknowledge realities but maintain that the world is eternal. They discard belief in a creator or any providence in the world. They can be branded as Naturists or Atheists.
3. The group that believes in the existence of realities but consider the world as eternal. They however see the eternal Providence of the world.
4. The faction who believes in the existence of realities yet differs in its concepts of the eternity of the world. One group believes in the eternity of the world still other rejects this notion. Else they agree on the position that there is more than one creator and the providence of the world, but differ in regard to their statistics.
5. The people who rest their belief in the existence of realities; deem that the world is created and has a unique and Eternal Creator, but at the same time refuse the existence of any prophets and thus turn away from the notion of prophecy.
6. Those who believe that the realities exist and the world has a creator, Unique and Eternal, but struggle in differentiating between a prophet and a non-prophet (Aasi, Ghulam Haider 2010).<sup>xx</sup> After finishing up with description of the above mentioned religious denominations and philosophical views, Ibn Hazm takes into account, the claims and arguments of all these religious-philosophical worldviews systematically. He then identifies the irrational and unsound aspects of their ideas and beliefs. He deals with them on the basis of reason and sense perception. He asserts that his applied principles don't violate the understanding of adherents of a particular religion. First, he refutes the sceptical and nihilistic doctrines of the Sophists. Next, he argues against the eternity of the world, and then argues for the existence of only One, Unique, and Eternal Creator. Then he argues for the necessity of prophecy and the reality of the prophets. Although his treatment of these philosophical and religious ideologies is systematic and logical, he does not deal with any major religious tradition, consistently at one place. He discusses the doctrines and beliefs of these religious traditions under six categories. For example, all philosophical and religious systems that don't accept the phenomenon of prophecy are discussed together. Since Christianity and Judaism are closer to Islam than other religions, and share with Islam belief in God, in prophecy, and in the revealed books, they are dealt with in more than one place and more comprehensively than other religious traditions and philosophical ideologies.<sup>xx</sup>

Religious and world-views, beliefs and opinions, he asserts, should proceed from the actual phenomena from the things as they are in the real world, and not vice-versa. The observer who takes reality as he would like it to be rather than as it removes himself from reality. Additionally, it must be borne in mind that the objective knowledge of reality

involves not only sound scientific methodology, but also the will to abide by and acknowledge what the application of such methodology produces by way of new facts and evidence. Hence, the objective of knowing the truth and stating it as one finds it is equally a demand of morality and integrity, justice and truthfulness. Errors in observation and understanding and in description or reportage are certainly possible. But they must be critically examined and honestly dismissed when the evidence against them is adequate.<sup>xxi</sup>

#### 2.4 ISMĀ'IL RAJĪ AL FĀRŪQĪ

Ismā'il Rajī Abul Hudā al Fārūqī was born in 1921 in Jaffa, Palestine. He completed his Masters in Philosophy from Harvard in 1951. He had his doctoral degree from Indiana University by successfully defending his Dissertation, *Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*. To study Islam and Islamic history, Al Fārūqī enrolled himself at Al- Azhar university, Cairo from 1954-1958. Later he was invited by Wilfred Cantwell Smith to study at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies from 1958-59. It was here at McGill that he met Fazlur Rahmān and researched for his book *Christian Ethics*. From 1961-1963 he worked as Professor of Islamic Studies in Karachi, Pakistan and was involved in the development of the Institute's journal, *Islamic Studies*. He worked as a visiting professor of history of religions at the University of Chicago's Divinity school. In 1964 he became the Professor of Islamics and history of religion. John L. Esposito became his first doctoral student in 1968. In 1981 he helped in founding an influential institute, IIIT at Herndon, Virginia. He worked to outline, articulate and promote Islamic Methodologies and appropriation of knowledge in order to address the epistemological dilemma confronting Islam, using criteria internally generated by an Islamic value system. His interest in Comparative Religious studies and Islam led him to spearhead the creation of the Islamic Studies Section of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), in 1976. It was here that the stage for Muslim-Jewish-Christian dialogue was well set. On a fateful night of May, 27, 1986, Ismā'il Rajī al-Fārūqī along with his wife Lamya was mercilessly murdered at their residence at Philadelphia. This way the life of a great scholar came to an end, but his legacy continues to inspire the scholars.<sup>xxii</sup> The contribution of Ismā'il Rajī is enduring through his inspiring works on religion and philosophy. His *Tawhīd: Its Implications for Life, Trialogue of Abrahamic Faiths, Islam and Other Religions, Urubah and Religion: A Study of the Fundamental Ideals of Arabism*, is a great contribution social science, philosophy and humanities. However *Christian Ethics* lends him enormous fame. In the succeeding lines we may explore some of the arguments from that book with respect to comparative religion.

### 3 CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The full title of this book reads as *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its History of Dominant Ideas*. It was written in 1967. The preface of the book is contributed by Kraemer. Though the book deals mostly with the tenets of Christian religion, it specially acquaints the reader with the methodology of al-Fārūqī in studying religions of others.

At the outset al-Fārūqī identifies the shortcomings of the phenomenological method, the introduction of which we had in the preceding chapter of this work. He while identifying the greatest weakness in the phenomenological method observes that phenomenology fails to ensure religion a true substance and essence. It fails to supply a criterion on the basis of which one could be able to distinguish between religious and irreligious. Besides the phenomenological method employed by such scholars as Rudolf Otto, Chantepie, Mircea Eliade, G. Vander Leeuw, W C Smith and others signify that each religion has/had a peculiar historical path consistent with each member's personal psychological needs; this could in the eyes of al-Fārūqī lead to a level of relativism with religion becoming new every morning. This apprehension could be seen in the emergence of Baha'i faith and its teachings or the views of Swami Agnivesh about Hindu religion.

Having analyzed this, al-Fārūqī stresses on the need to contextualize, systematize and evaluate the religious data. He is bent upon to evaluate and judge the religious data in order to verify the truth claims made by various religions. He urges to approach the religion rationalistically and objectively. In other words he affirms that people belonging to different faiths can rationally understand the data and structures of religious beliefs and practices of other faiths. In other words the non-adherent can understand the facts and the meanings contained in the religion, if not, then there would be not possibility of any religion.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Celebrating the phenomenological tool of *epoche* however al-Fārūqī said that religion isn't a study of scientific facts, because the core of religion is a life fact and therefore religion can't be studied as a series of objective cold facts.<sup>xxiv</sup> However he termed *epoche*, the suspension of judgement, a temporary condition in the study of other religions. *Epoche*, according to al-Fārūqī could only be thought as a tool to understand phenomena. Afterwards the religious scholar or a historian should engage in evaluation.<sup>xxv</sup>

In his *Christian Ethics*, al-Fārūqī could be seen appreciating the phenomenological method and the general field of *Religionswissenschaft*. However he parts away from the discipline when he calls for the use of value judgements for the religions under study. In most of the cases he seems to follow the methodology of Ibn Hazm. "He followed the view that not to say things clearly is not to say them at all."

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The study of religions is one of the important academic pursuits of the present times. Muslim scholarship had long back taken up the study of religions in order to arrive at the cause of religious diversity and pluralism and at the same time at the understanding of religious phenomena. The pioneering works of Muslim academics have much to contribute to the comparative study of religions and devise the typologies and categories of religions within their cultural contexts. Muslim scholarship derives its inspiration from the Qur'an that puts *Tawhīd* at the centre for ascertaining the truth of any religion. It advocates for the un-biased and open-minded study of different religious scriptures and avoids judgment on any religion prematurely. However it also believes in evaluating religions and identifying the deviations that set in any religion over the time owing to the human desires, passions, and vested interests. Muslim scholarship not only evaluates other religious denominations but also evaluates sects within Islam with the intention of reaching to the truth and cause of deviations and differences. The approach and methodology adopted by the Muslim scholars mentioned above have great bearing on the current academia of religious studies as it was becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between religion and ir-religion or religion and pseudo-religion. Al-Birūnī, Sharistānī and Fārūqī have a lot to offer to the phenomenology of religion as it struggles to evaluate religions and justify the truth of *Tawhīd* (Monotheism).

## NOTES AND REFERENCE

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