Al-Faruqi and His Views on Comparative Religion

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Abstract

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a prominent Muslim scholar who contributes a lot in Muslims progression. He was a pioneer in the development of Islamic studies in America and in interreligious dialogue internationally and an activist who sought to transform the Islamic community at home and abroad. The present article aims at discussing background of al-Faruqi and his views on Comparative Religion. Throughout his life, he succeeds in providing a proper guidance on how to study a religion which is disengagement. Besides that he used to introduce the idea of meta-religion of how to evaluate a religion. Lastly he tend to critique the ideas of the west on studying of other religion.

Keywords: Comparative religion, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Meta-religion.

Introduction

Since 1400 years ago, Allah swt has revealed Islam to Prophet Muhammad saw in it complete picture. Islam is not only a religion but merely a way of life which is deal with all sorts of human activities including politics, economic, legal regulations, social, etc. Not even so, Islam also concerns with other religions. Hence, Al-Quran and Prophet himself applied the religious tolerance during his lifetime.

Due to the encouragement of Holy Scripture, Al-Quran and exemplified in the life of Prophet, Muslims are inspired to encounter with fellow adherents of other religions. Muslims not even encounter, mingle, but we also studies about them. It has been reported that a numbers of Muslims scholars engaged in the field of *Religionswissenschaft* or Comparative Religion as early the end of the Medinan period. Some of them are 'Ali Ibn Rabban al-Tabari (d. 861 CE), Abu 'Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 869 CE), Abu Isa al-Waraq, Abu Ali al-Jubbai, Ibn Hazm (d. 1064 CE), Fahkr al-Din ar-Razi (d. 1210 CE), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), and the most prominent is Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-1051 CE) which known as the father of Comparative Religion. Obviously, Muslims contributions in the field is continues by later scholars, some Muslims contemporary are like Haji Abd Malik Karim Amrullah, abbreviated as Hamka (1908-1981 CE) as well as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986 CE).

In this article we merely study on al-Faruqi per se. We will look on his personal background, his contributions in the field of Comparative Religion, the methods that has been applied by him, interreligious dialogue which has been introduced and as well as his major work on the theory of Meta-Religion. At the end of the discussion, the author put her critical analysis over the study on al-Faruqi. These things will be discussed in detail further, Insya Allah.

2. Historical Background

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a prominent Muslim scholar who contributes a lot in Muslims progression. He was a pioneer in the development of Islamic studies in America and in interreligious dialogue internationally and an activist who sought to transform the Islamic community at home and abroad.

2.1 Early Life and Achievement.

Al-Faruqi was born in Jaffa Palestine on January 1, 1921 and grew up in a prosperous and scholarly family. His father, 'Abd al-Huda al-Faruqi, was an Islamic judge (*qadi*) and a religious man well-versed in Islamic scholarship.[1] Al-Faruqi received his first religious education at home from his father and in the local mosque at five. He began to attend the French Dominican College des Freres (St. Joseph) in 1936. This was followed by five years at the American University of Beirut, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1941.[2]

His first appointment was as a Registrar of Cooperative Societies in 1942 under the British Mandate government in Jerusalem. In 1945, at twenty-four became the district governor of Galilee. When Israel became an independent Jewish state in 1948, all came to an abrupt end and al-Faruqi became one of thousands of Palestinian refugees, emigrating with his family to Lebanon.[3] He then turned to academic by enrolled the next year at Indiana University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, obtaining his master's degree in philosophy. He was then accepted for entry into Harvard University's department of philosophy and was awarded his second master's degree in philosophy there in March 1951, with a thesis entitled *Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*. Joined PhD program in Harvard University, but due to financial problem, abandoned his studied and went out for work as a contractor. Even though he succeed in his career but because of loved to knowledge, he then embarked into studied again and received his PhD in September 1952 in Indiana University from the department of Western philosophy.

During studied, he felt unsatisfied with his religious education because he completed a doctoral degree in Western philosophy. So he traveled to various Muslims countries in order to study under leading Muslims scholars with different specializations. In 1954 went to Egypt to further his study of Islam in al-Azhar University. After completed his studied in 1958 returned to North America and invited to be Research Associated on Christianity and Judaism at the School of Divinity, McGill University. Thus gave birth to *Christian Ethics*.[4] He then began his professional career as professor of Islamic Studies at the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi from 1961 to 1963. During the following year he returned to America as a visiting professor of the History of Religion which attach to the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Chicago.

In 1964, he obtained his full time permanent position as associate professor of Religion at the Department of Religion, Syracuse University. Finally, 1968 joined the Department of Religion at Temple University as a professor of Islamic studies and history of religions. He retained the post until his death on 27 May 1986 assassinated in his house Bent Road, Wyncote, Pennsylvania.[5]

2.2. Major Works and Contributions

During an extremely active an productive professional life that spanned almost thirty years, he authored, edited, or translated twenty-five books, published more than one hundred articles, was a visiting professor at more than twenty-three universities in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia, and served on the editorial boards of seven major journals. Here are some lists of his important books which are as below:

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[1] Muhammad Tariq Quraishi, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi: Warisan Zaman yang Abadi*, tr, Ahmad Shah Mohd. Noor, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988), p. 6.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Esposito, John L. and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 24-32.

[4] Al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*. (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967).

[5] Muhammad Tariq Quraishi, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi,* p.1.

1) *From Here We Start*, tr. from the Arabic of K.M. Khalid. 1953. Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies.
2) *Our Beginning in Wisdom*, tr. from the Arabic of M. al Ghazali. 1953. Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies.
3) *The Policy of Tomorrow*, tr. from the Arabic of M. B. Ghali. 1953. Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies.
4) *'Urubah and Religion: An Analysis of the Dominant Ideas of Arabism and of Islam as Its Heights Moment of Consciousness*. vol. 1 of *On Arabism*. 1962. Amsterdam: Djambatan.
5) *Usul al Sahyuniyah fi al Din al Yahudi* (An Analytical Study of the Growth of Particularism in Hebrew Scripture). 1964. Cairo: Institute of Higher Arabic Studies.
6) *Christian Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*. 1967. Montreal: McGill University Press and Amsterdam: Djambatan, Amsterdam.
7) *Islam and the Problem of Israel*. 1980. London: The Islamic Council of Europe.
8) *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, ed. 1982. Herndon, VA: IIIT
9) *Islamization of Knowledge*. 1982. Herndon, VA: IIIT.
10) *Tawhid: Its Implications For Thought And Life*. 1982. Kuala Lumpur: IIIT
11) *The Cultural Atlas of Islam.* 1986. New York: Macmillan.[6]

Meanwhile, some of his articles are as below:

1) "On the Ethics of the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Fidelity (*Ikhwan al Safa wa Khillan al Wafa'*)," *The Muslim World*, vol. L, no. 2, pp. 109-21; no. 4, pp. 252-58; vol. LI, no. 1, pp. 18-24.
2) "On the Significance of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ideas of Society," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, vol. VII, no. 2, pp. 99-107. Reprinted in *Muslim Life*, vol. XI, no. 3 (Summer 1964): 5-14.
3) "Meta-Religion: Towards A Critical World Theology", *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 3, No. 1, 1986, pp. 13-57.[7]

Throughout his life he was a leader and had a strong relationship with the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) of US and Canada, was a president of the American Islamic College in Chicago, a founder and president of associations of Muslim professionals such as the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, and chairman of the board of trustees of the North American Islamic Trust. Not even so, he managed to establish the Islamic Studies Steering Committee of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and chaired it for ten years. It was the largest professional association of professors of religion and it strong presence well-felt among the Islamic studies through a series of of panels convened every year at the annual meeting and the publications that resulted from the proceedings.[8] He was also one of those who proposed the idea of Islamization of knowledge and strived to develop, institutionalize, and implement the Islamization of knowledge was realized in 1981 when he and like-minded colleagues such as Sheikh Taha Jabir al-Alwani, Dr. Abdul Hamid Sulayman, and Jamal Barzanji established the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Herndon, Virginia.[9] On the other hand, in interfaith dialogues he served as the vice-president of the Inter-Religious Peace Colloquium, in The Muslim-Jewish-Christian Conference.

2.3 Life Involved in Dialogues

From the early publication of his *Christian Ethics* in 1967 to *Trialogue of The Abrahamic Faiths* in 1982, he demonstrated his interest and commitment to interfaith dialogue. He was a major force in Islam's dialogue with other world religions. He even established himself as a leading Muslim spokesperson for Islam.

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[6] *Ismail Raji al-Faruqi*, retrieved in Encyclopedia of Wikipedia, on 20th October 2005, in the web-site of http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail_Raji'_al-Faruqi, and Esposito, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, pp. 24-32.
[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail_Raji'_al-Faruqi,
[8] Esposito, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, p. 31.
[9] Ibid., p. 32.

He was speak from his mind and expressed himself. He was known and respected in both Western academic and ecumenical circles.

> John L. Esposito and John O. Voll described him as:

> *"His writings, speeches, and participation and leadership role in interreligious meetings and organizations sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the Vatican, and the Inter-Religious Peace Colloquium (of which he was vice-president from 197 to 1982) made him the most visible and prolific Muslim contributor to the dialogue of world religions. His writings and presentations set out the principles and bases for Muslim participation in interreligious dialogue and social action."*[10]

3. Methodology's of Al-Faruqi

After highlighting his major works, let us deal with his methodology in studying religion as well as in interreligious dialogue. Briefly, I divided the topic into three subtopics. At first we will look at the approach of disengagement, then the higher principles in studying religions as well as methodology in interreligious dialogue.

3.1   Disengagement

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in his doctoral dissertation, *Christian Ethics* began the discussion of Comparative Religion by connoting the important of disengagement.[11] He complained about previous books which written by West were filled with imposed standards from the authors into religions. Thus, these books were representing misinterpretations of religions. For example, after the events of 9/11 and 7/7 Muslims are being labeled as terrorists, fundamentalists, etc. These are misperceptions that have been imposed by the Western writers towards Muslims. He stressed that religion is made up of 'life-facts', the things which are livingly experiences by man.[12] Thus in order to understand about this life-facts one must apply disengagement or *epoche*[13]. It is a method to avoid the pitfalls of idealism and realism by wanting to approach an eidetic vision of religion (understanding of its essence) by suspending one's judgment or '*epoche*'.

In studying of religions, one must step out of his own presuppositions and values in order to step into those religion that one wish to study. To gain such insight into the 'life facts' of a religion, one must, in imagination allow his understanding to be touched and informed by them.[14] The longer one can sustain the effort, the deeper will be his experience of other religion. It does enable one to be sympathetic, to learn, and to understand the life facts of the religion. The researcher must willingly to be with and inside the 'life-facts' which he studies, he can not observed in distance. Not even so, this application also could create intimacy between the researcher and the religion under studies because it is involved emotional attachment. Therefore, the researcher could understand religion as there is understood by it adherents and let religion speak to itself.

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[10] Ibid., p. 33.

[11] Disengagement is also known as suspension of judgment. The approach has inspired, adopted, and advanced by the Western Phenomenological School and propagated by Dutch scholar Gerardus Van der Leeuw in his *Phenomenologie der Religion* in 1933 (*Religion in Essence and Masifestation*). Haslina Ibrahim, *Encountering Others: A Constructive Criticism on The Methods of Polemics and Apologetics in 'Ilm Muqaranah Al-Adyan*, the paper is presented at The International Seminar On Religious Curricular In the Muslim World (RCWW): Challenges and Prospects, organized by International Institute For Muslim Unity (ILMU), at the Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) on 6th – 8th September 2005.

[12] Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics,* p. 1.

[13] *Epoche* is derived from the Greek word *epechô*, which means 'I hold back'. In effect it means 'stoppage', suspension of judgment, the exclusion form one's mind of every possible presupposition. It involves in assuming the position of a listener who withholds judgment that arise from preconceived notions. For further detail please refers to Sharpe, Eric J., *Comparative Religion: A History*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1975, p. 224.

[14] Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics,* p. 1.

But, 'Disengagement' from one's own beliefs and values is worthwhile and not permanent. One is free to move back from the beliefs, values and meanings of the religion and culture that one is studying.

3.2 The Higher Principles.

Once one has stop the suspension of judgment, so he is in need of a 'higher principles' that could compare and evaluate the religion that which we are studying. Al-Faruqi outlined two kinds of principles; the first kind of principle is known as theoretical principles that regulate the ways in which we grasp, make sense of and put into order, the meanings that we discover in the other religions.[15] These principles are the foundation of the way we come to know, the foundation of human knowledge in general. There are five theoretical principles;

        i)   internal coherence,
        ii)   external coherence,
        iii)   the principle of unity,
        iv)   coherence with reality and
        v)   the principle of right purpose.[16]

i)   Internal coherence.
      The principle of internal coherence is also known as non-contradiction. Which means; the elements of the system may not contradict each other.[17] For al-Faruqi, to deny this principle is to deny that human thought and human discourse are possible as there is no point for a statement which is as true as its own opposite. The principle should apply to what believers in it call divinely revealed truth which means, man is so constituted that he can hardly understand, act upon, a statement which is self contradiction.

ii)   External coherence.
      The principle of external coherence is a statement of belief or doctrine must make sense in the light of what we already know.[18] Every new knowledge is referred first to the traditions of their respective disciplines and the coherence of this knowledge with other disciplines was then tried and the result was a thorough rebuilding of the traditions of these disciplines. Thus, the knowledge that already known is must cohere with human situation, place of revelation and space of time. For example; no revelation can be a law into itself. It must cohere with human knowledge in general and in particular, it must cohere with the accompanying human situation, the historical time and place of revelation. In other word, the revelation must be inlined with the knowledge that human already know.

iii)   The principle of unity.
      The principle can be derived from the principle of non-contradiction. All revealed truths must cohere with the religious experience of mankind, if they are revealed truths. Thus if God or Truth is, and he is the source of revelation, His commands cannot contradict each other.[19] In other word, this principle is uniting both previous principles which are internal and external coherence that means all revealed truth must cohere with the nature of mankind. Once it is contradicted the religion is prevails untruth and fault.

iv)   Coherence with reality.

The particular 'truths' which any religion claims must correspond with the reality we all experience or know outside of those 'truths'.[20] And contradiction of reality invalidates the 'truths'. That means all truths must cohere with the realities. Any command can not contradict with the experiences and knowledge that already known by people. If there is contradiction, the truth is invalid.

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[15] Ibid., p. 3.
[16] Ibid., pp. 4-7.
[17] Ibid., p. 4.
[18] Ibid., p. 6.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., p. 7.

v) The principle of right purpose.

The right and proper use of, language, is to enable expression and communication but sound and sign have some other usefulness and cannot called language. The right and proper use of religion in this sense is somehow to improve and carry mankind upward and onward to higher ethical value, ultimately to God.[21] For instance, God is good, so religion which is propagated must propagate ethical value which is good which could symbolize the goodness of God. Thus, the purpose of religion must be correct, if religion is propagating something else, so that is not right. In this sense, human is not command to do something which he can not do within this time and space. Man is not urging to try to imagine of different things which are against human nature.

On the other hand, the second type of principle is named as principles of value. The principles of value are specialized to the matter of religion which constitutes the foundation of all religions and cultures. There are six principles of value which also known as six principles of evaluation and those are the principles of meta-religion. The six are;

i)   beings of two realms: ideal and actual,
ii) ideal being is relevant to actual being,
iii) relevance of the ideal to the actual is a command,
iv) actual being is as such good,
v)   actual being is malleable and
vi) perfection of the cosmos is a human burden.[22]

i)   Beings of two Realms: Ideal and Actual.

In fact, there are only two beings, the ideal and actual. Both are different beings. When we examine thoroughly, we could say that beings are of two levels; the first stage is the actual is fact. While, the second stage is the ideal being is ought to be value. Thus, there is nothing in between of ideal and actual beings, so anything that falls under the between is false. Because it is clear that there are two beings which are ideal and actual. There will be no other substance which contradicts with this principle.

ii)   Ideal Being is Relevance to Actual Being.

Ideal being is gives values to actual. In this sense, the ideal is the cause to actual to be its identity. God is concern with the world but not co-exist but rather related because He is the Creator, and the others are His creatures.[23] Through this relationship, both ideal and actual are relevance.

iii)   Relevance of the Ideal to the Actual is command.

God is relates Himself to actual through commands which is through revelation and scripture. Thus through these revelations, actual beings come to know Him. The ideal judges the actual situation, if relevant He will praise, if irrelevant He will condemn. On the other hand, God command is necessary in the world, if not the world would not exist. This is because world is the creation of God. Every being will go through this (following the commands of God) through natural law. Man is bond to the commands but he has the option, whether to obey or not. These commands is not applicable through force, man has the right to choose. Instead, man knows about the consequences (of violating the commands) yet he still chooses. Hence, for what man has done, it will be rewarded or punished.

iv)   Actual Being is as such good.

The world is good. Otherwise, if the world is evil, the existence of the world is questionable even if say it is evil (non valuable) presupposes its value. In a simple word, the world is perfectible which can be improved. This principle is deal with the realm of morality, so any striving for this perfection is morality. Human is capable to be good because by nature man is good as good as the world.

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., pp. 14-18.
[23] Ibid., p. 14.

v)   **Actual Being is malleable.**

God commands can be obeyed and there is no need extraordinary to be good but just to be ethical or moral person. Being good is possible to man, he has to change his conditions in order to be good i.e. by doing good things or bad things. Thus, value realization must be and can make possible.

The world is an ordered cosmos (good condition) thoroughly pervaded by law which is the law that is predetermined.[24] There can't be a vacuum or gaps in the cosmic determination but extras. For example, if a phenomenon turns on to be other than what it is expected, it is not due to shortage of determination but is filled and added with an unexpected determination.

vi) **Perfection of the Cosmos is a Human Burden.**

Due to those commands by God, man is subjected to involve in the cosmos and change it to a better position. Only man could do so, and this commands not applicable to other creatures. Man could not just lay back and wait, but rather man must takes the challenge to alter the world and make it a better place to live.

In short, from these principles what he meant was that God is realm of ideal being which is totally different from the actual being and the Only Transcendent. Ideal being is relevant to the actual, so God concern, not merely co-exist. Relevance in term of value, (through command) so God's acts are necessary and unavoidable in the actual being (via laws of nature). Actual being is good but imperfect. God created in such manner that in the purpose to be perfected by man. Obedience, perfection of actual is possible by ethical felicity. Obedience is not beyond man ability but rather man is moral in so far he is subject to the command (fulfill the vicegerency).

Generally, Meta-Religion which is a set of guidelines and principles that extended beyond the boundaries of any particular religion, and 'theologically-free' of study of religion.[25] It is concerns on a religion or person who recognized and worshipped the one God despite revealed religion being corrupted. In other word it is a concept which is close related to the concept of *tawhid* in Islam. This is because the ultimate goal of meta-religion is *din al-fitrah* which is a religion that beyond any human construction. Thus by removing all human construction of religion, one could deal with the truth which leads to reach *din al-fitrah*.

In other words, the six principles are the guidelines to measure revealed religions which are dealing with the concept of universal rationality.[26] Any religion which is not fit with the six is problematic. This is because for him, the six are religious logical facts which are not against universal rationality. For instance, the first principle of Meta-religion is beings of two realms, ideal and actual. According to Christians, Jesus Christ is a man of divine which sent by God. Thus he is partly man and partly divine. So based on the first principle, how could we classify him? Does he is the ideal, actual or an entity which is combines both elements. If he is categorized under the third category which is an entity of partly human and divine, so it is can not fit with the first principle of Meta-Religion. This is because at the first place, rationality acknowledges only two types of beings which are ideal and actual. Therefore the Christians are facing problem with their beliefs and doctrines because the teachings are against the universal rationality.

As a whole, I am strongly believe that Meta-Religion theory which proposed by Ismail Raji Faruqi is the most appropriate principles to examine the validity of one's religious doctrine on the basis of universal human logic.

In the field of Comparative Religion, once we want to study about other religion, temporary suspension of judgment or *epoche* is needed in order to know the religio-cultural perspective of the religion under study, then go out from the *epoche* and finally ready to evaluate the facts and figures which gained from the study by adopting the theory of Meta-Religion. Uniquely, the theory is dealing with universal rationality which is the basis of scientific and objective studies. Not even so, al-Biruni, the father or *Religionswissenschaft* also applying the method of suspension of judgment by saying that 'all text must speak for itself'.

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[24] Ibid., p. 17.
[25] Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, *Meta-Religion as a Basis for Studying Religions*, unpublished article, p.1.
[26] Haslina Ibrahim, *Encountering Others.*

Not even so, al-Faruqi also explained about the Islamic Meta-Religion. From here, he associated Islam with the universal rationality whereby;

i) Islamic Meta-Religion is not a priori condemning any religion, but assumes that every religion is God revealed until history proven that it is human made.

ii) The historical background of religion is link with revelation on the basic that there is no person that God had not sent them prophet to teach them on *tawhid* and morality.

iii) Islamic Meta-Religion acknowledges man is inborn inquisitive nature to know God.

iv) Islamic Meta-Religion suggests a critical, rational examination on one's own religion on the human addition, alteration of man's original religion.

v) Islamic Meta-Religion honors reason as to revelation neither can discard the other without imperiling itself.

vi) Human is good, not fallen sinner, free and responsible.

vii) Islamic Meta-Religion assumes, world is not created in vain, not the work of a blind force.

viii) Islamic Meta-Religion is an institution, not a mere theory, to appreciate pluralism of laws.[27]

Above all under the topic of Islamic Meta-Religion, al-Faruqi indirectly explaining the corruption of revealed religions like Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and the like. Whereby these religions have been distorted by men and thus became the human made religion. Being created by men, obviously, some of their doctrines are go against the universal rationality and not fit enough with the six principles of Meta-Religion. If we go deeper, we could find that only Islam which is fit to the six principles of Meta-Religion. Even so, al-Faruqi stated that Islam accords special status to Judaism and Christianity. By said that the two are the religion of God, their messengers are the prophets of God and their scriptures are the revelations of God.[28] Yet Quran condemned exclusivist claim on the former prophets by the Jews and Christianity.[29]

Islam on the other hand is not religion of *ex nihilo* but reaffirmation of the same truth by the preceding prophets of Judaism and Christianity. Islam is together with Hanifism (the monotheism and ethical religion of pre-Islamic Arabia, Judaism and Christianity) a crystallization of one and the same religion. Islam perceives other religions that the phenomenon of prophecy is universal which is taken place throughout all space and time.[30] Even al-Quran confirms this, along with man's accountability.[31]

It is from God's absolute justice, no one is to be held responsible unless God conveyed His law through prophecy.[32] Al-Faruqi explained that even some of the prophets are known but some are not, but this does not mean of their non existence.[33] In order to proof the universality of prophecy, al-Quran stressed that the content of the message of prophecy is the same.[34] So the essence of teaching are go around *tawhid*, the oneness of Allah, and morality, to do good and avoid evil. And lastly the law is relevant to the historical situation of the people.

Meanwhile, to all mankind, Islam addresses that man as equal, to put them as integral member of society.[35] The main purpose of man's raison d'etre is reason for creation which is to be vicegerent on earth. Al-Quran acknowledges that man is created in the best form.[36]

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[27] Al-Faruqi, "Meta-Religion: Towards A Critical World Theology", *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 3, No. 1, 1986, pp. 56-57.

[28] Ibid., p. 41.

[29] Al-Quran 2: 140, 3:84, and 5:69. All English translation of these verses please refers to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'Én,* new edition, (USA: Amana Corporation, 1992).

[30] Al-Faruqi, Meta-Religion, p. 44.

[31] Al-Quran 17:13-15.

[32] Al-Quran 13:24.

[33] Al-Quran 4:164.

[34] Al-Quran 16:36.

[35] Al-Faruqi, Meta-Religion, p. 46.

[36] Al-Quran 56:4.

God implanted in man religion *naturalis (fitrah)* whereby man possesses a senses *communis* to know God. Not even so, prophets have sent to people in their own tongue. From here it is clear that in Islam there is no such idea of faller sin man, man is innocent or good by nature.

3.3 Inter Religious Dialogue.

As I mentioned earlier, Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi was a strong believer in inter-religious dialogue. For him, in order to success in dialogue, it must be conducted in a specific way. Thus, he outlined some guidance and following are the outline of the guidelines for an inter-religious dialogue according to al-Faruqi[37];

i)   Sincerity of Intention;
A successful dialogue depends on the intention of the dialogue partners. It should be for mutual understanding and establish a good relation for future life. Dialogue is a process of learning, therefore one must come with an open mind and pure heart so that learning can happen.[38] A good dialogue will result in both sides winning. It is not going to weaken one's faith in one's religion but instead will strengthen it. He coined it as "supremely ethical endeavor'. A dialogue should be held in a free and friendly manner. All efforts should be on brotherly relation rather than to be a champion and promoting the narrow interest of one's own religion.[39]

ii)   Respect of other religions.
It is necessary to build mutual trust in a dialogue process. He called himself as "citizen of the religio-world community" indiscriminant respect for all religions. For example, in his critique of Christianity, he repeatedly said that the intention was not to insult Christianity but rather to have a better understanding of it. [40]

iii)   Religion and human life.
Religion must be treated as an encompassing way of life. Thus studying religions is to consider the whole system unlike "western phenomenologists" whom limit the religion into the element of 'sacred' and 'holy'. He suggested that scholars of Comparative Religion should give more attention to the living major religions for the benefit of humanity at large.

Al-Faruqi's Methodology of Dialogue

Dialogue is involves comparing and contrasting claims, if true it must be acquiesced and if inadequate must be amended and if false must be rejected. The process looks simple but the practicality involves risk which a close-minded religious adherent will mistake for compromising one's faith. There are six methodologies of dialogue;

i)   No communication of any sort may be made *ex cathedra*, beyond critique.
ii)   No communication may violate the laws of internal coherence, paradox is allows when it is not final.
iii)   No communication may violate the laws of external coherence.
iv)   No communication may violate the laws of correspondence with reality, but rather the reality should be given a chance to collaborate and refute it.
v)   Dialogue presupposes an attitude of freedom vis-à-vis the canonical figurization.
vi)   Considering today's circumstances, 'ethical' questions are in priority to 'theological' questions.[41]

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[37] Wan Sabri, *Meta-Religion as a Basis for Studying Religions*, pp. 3-5.

[38] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[39] Ibid., p. 4.

[40] Al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 3.

[41] Ibid, p. 5 and Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths,* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), pp. 250- 254.

Al-Faruqi stressed that dialogue should begin with issues of commonalities. For him the common issue among all religions is ethics. Due to it, he proposed three ethical themes to be subject of dialogue;

   i)   The modern Muslim and Christian regard themselves as standing in the state of innocence.
   ii)   The modern Muslim and Christian are acutely aware of the necessity and importance of recognizing God's will, of recognizing His command.
   iii)   The modern Muslim and Christian recognize that the moral vocation or mission of man in this world has yet to be fulfilled thereof is the sole measure of his ethical worth; that in respect to this mission or vocation all men start out in this world with a *cate blanche* on which nothing is entered except what each individual earns with his own doing or not-doing.[42]

Based on the three themes, Al-Faruqi indirectly, as logical consequence, rejected a few concepts in Jews and Christianity like the concept of 'elect' and 'salvation without works'. For him these two concepts should be rejected because could not be proven by moral and rational laws.

4. Views on Western Methodologies

Al-Faruqi highlighted five stages of the historical background of studying religions which indicated the Western methodologies of study of other religion. Those five stages in which the study of religion has been conducted are as follows;
   i)   Classical antiquity.
   ii)   Judeo-Christianity.
   iii)   Modernity since the enlightenment.
   iv)   Contemporary approaches.
   v)   The phenomenological (SORE).[43]

i)   Classical antiquity (600 BCE-30 CE).

At the first stage al-Faruqi stated that man known very little about other religions. The attitude to others was very much antagonistic not by the attitude of faith, but by a complex of superiority of one's faith or unfaith to the religion studied.[44] Only in 6th BC, the Greek thinker lost faith and criticize religion, incoherence and false claim of its god, condemned god as immoral, that some curiosity about other religion development. For instance, those who were condemnation to religion; Thales denied the Greek gods authenticity, Anaximander said that sun and moon not gods of the Greeks but balls of fire, and Xenophanes said that all religion claims were unfounded.
After two centuries people have almost lost faith, until Herodotus (484-425 B.C.) give accounts some objective accounts of other religions of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Persians. They even were comparing their gods with the Greek's gods. The attitude to other religions was very much antagonistic not by the attitude of faith, but by a complex of superiority of one's faith or unfaith to the religion studied.

ii)   Judeo – Christianity (30 CE – 1400 CE).

Then at the second stage the awareness of others developed but Al-Faruqi said that the materials we have about Judaism from the post-Exilic period reported of Jewish hatred on non Jewish. He characterized the attitude towards others as hatred, fear, false complex of superiority and election.[45] Christianity unfortunate inherited the Jewish attitude. For both religions were formed in an atmosphere of struggle against overwhelming odds which the religions gained and crystallized their doctrines and world-views. Only certain acknowledge was given by the Christian to Judaism and the latter as preparation evangelical for Christianity. As Islam came in 7th century, Christian hatred and fear of Islam's expansion and conversion of Christians led several battles against Islam, the crusades (1095-1270) up to the colonial expansions of the Muslim world from (1600-1800). Thus their antagonistic attitude persists even until today.

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[42] Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, pp. 256-258.
[43] Al-Faruqi, Meta-Religion, pp. 14-26.
[44] Ibid., p. 14.
[45] Ibid., p. 15.

iii)   Modernity since the Enlightenment (1600-1900).

Meanwhile at the third stage, the important role of religion during the second stage is being replaced with reason.[46] Ethics and utility was replaced the creed and piety. Historically, reformed movement of Protestantism against Catholicism and the successful challenges of the scientists took place.

iv)   Contemporary Approaches (1900 onwards).

Under the period of 1900 onwards, with all the problems faced by the Christian in their religion, they penetrate to the outer world and gave birth to various cotemporary approaches of studying religions like anthropological, sociological, psychological, philosophical, theological and phenomenological approach. Each approach looks religion at certain perspectives that contribute to the reductionism of religion.[47]

Their methodologies are as below:

i)   The anthropological approach focuses on primitive religion. Religion is function of human conditions affected by natural environment which is bound by evolutionist axiom and empirical studies.
ii)   Sociological; religion as factor constructive or destructive humans in their society and based on empirical studies.
iii) Psychological; religion as states of consciousness, depressive in case of security which is projective in case of desire and hope.
iv)   Historical; depended on all these approaches to get the date.
v)   Theological; looks religion in it antagonistic view and the movement is led by Christianity which is exclusiveness.[48]

vi) Phenomenological School of Study of Religion.

The last stage is the study of the phenomenological method of studying religions, under this topic al-Faruqi identified two branches of phenomenological which are the reportages or the collection of data and construction of meaning; wholes or systematization of data.[49] Phenomenological method as whole is introduced to avoid all the shortcoming in the previous methodologies of studying religions. It is a method to avoid the pitfalls of idealism and realism by wanting to approach an eidetic vision of religion (understanding of its essence) by suspending one's judgment or '*epoche*'.

Not even so, the phenomenologists also taking the phenomena of religion as it is, allowing them to speak for themselves. All facts and experiences can and must speak for themselves and show their intentions. But unfortunately, they are interested towards primitive and ancient religions, not living religions. Their main methods are;

i)   Analysis of the religion culture as a whole. Searching for its origin, development; crystallization and decay, as well as misunderstanding.
ii)   Every religion data is considered as meaning not (a mere) fact. So it contains value.[50]

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[46] Ibid., p. 17.
[47] Reductionism is a process of reducing religion into certain basis which been perceived by its adherents. For instance, the anthropological method focused on the religions of the primitive societies and look at religion is function of human conditions affected by natural environment.
[48] Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, pp. 168-171.
[49] Al-Faruqi, Meta-Religion, pp. 20- 23.
[50] Ibid., pp. 20- 26.

At the same token, Al-Faruqi discussed the shortcomings of phenomenological school. Most of all al-Faruqi criticize;

i)   Judgment is needed, based on meta- religion, he stressed that suspension only temporary.

ii)   Desirability of judgment, religion is not a merely a scientific fact, but life fact a more respectful approach. Religious meaning must be lived in order to be cognized.

iii)   Possibility of judgment, common genre of meta-religion is different as surface but merely common to the essence.[51]

5. *The Critical Analysis*

Interestingly, the implementation of the theory of Meta-Religion is not regard as Muslim critique to other religions but merely focus on human and his rational critique. Due to above matter, meta-religion is not concern on the religions per se but focus on the rational coherence of religions.

In other word, al-Faruqi's principles of studying other religions are not consider as Muslim critique but rather a rational critique to other religions. Even though only Islam which could fit with those principles, al-Faruqi is not undermine other religions but his evaluation is focus on the truth.

Unfortunately, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi has assassinated before he could expend the discussion on meta-religion. Personally, I think, if he has time he could explain his idea better. The idea of meta-religion is first documented in his doctoral dissertation of *Christian Ethics* in 1967. During 1986 before his demise he managed to describe his idea in an article entitled *Meta-Religion: Towards A Critical World Theology*.[52] In this article he explained his idea further. Once he has the opportunity to explain his theory in depth, hopefully there will be no confusion and misunderstanding. And finally Muslims could adopt and adapt the principles easily.

Lastly, it is very unfortunate to the Muslims as whole and to Muslims students of Comparative Religion in particular. This is because this adequate theory is not been used in the academic field. It is rather being documented in such precious book of *Christian Ethics*. Some facts which contribute to the phenomena are simply because there is no successor to replace al-Faruqi in promulgating the idea and there is limited effort to provoke the theory to be implemented. One could say that meta-religion is quite difficult to understand due to it sophisticated language and complicated expression which is understood by the expert in the field. Hence, there are adequate Muslims scholars who expertise in the field of Comparative Religion. These people could understand the theory better because they are engaging in the same field of *Christian Ethics* which dealing in the issue of religious philosophy.

As I mentioned before that meta-religion is applying objective and scientific studies, thus we Muslims can not abandon the theory as it is. It must be implemented anyhow. At the initial stage, Islamic institution of higher learning must borrow and practice meta-religion as whole. By doing so, Muslims not even promoting other Muslims contributions but also could evaluate other religions islamically (based on rational approach).

The domination of the West over the Muslim world also contributes to the failure of meta-religion. Western imperialism over Muslims is covers all aspect of life including in the academic field. The syllabus for Comparative Religion is solely adopts and adapts from the West. The West manages to impose their power and superiority by claiming that everything which is originated from the West is the best. Due to the fact, Muslims indirectly discredit to other Muslims contributions and become the best subscribers and adherents of the West by swallowing everything from West. Even worst, some Muslims do regard Western ideas and thought are the best and must be followed.

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[51] Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, pp. 172-183.

[52] Al-Faruqi, Meta-Religion, pp. 13-57.

In short, these are the possible factors which lead to the abandon of the theory. In order to overcome the problem, all Muslims must take part in promoting the slogan 'looks east policy' rather than 'looks west policy'. 'Looks east policy' means giving priority to the east rather than to the west. Muslims must support other Muslims work and contribution. As far as we concern, Muslims are the pioneer in the *Religionswissenschaft* but unfortunately, if we want to turn to some books like Encyclopedia of Religion or Dictionary of Religion, we are referring to the work of Mircea Elliade and Jonathan Smith. It is beneficial if we Muslims could expend the course and put some more effort to Islamize the field.

Furthermore, al-Faruqi in his writing, emphasis that reason is equal to revelation by saying that it is neither can discard the other without imperiling itself. In one extant, I am strongly agreed with him that reason and revelation are walking together and can not be separated. The main purpose of reason is to confirm revelation. But on the other hand, I am strongly believed that revelation holds a higher position than reason. This is because, revelation is derive from Allah which is Omniscient, meanwhile, reason is granted by Allah to man. Being a creature of Allah, obviously man is not perfect and so to reason. Therefore, revelation is not even superior to reason but hold special position than reason.

On the other hand, in term of interreligious dialogue, I assuredly believe that the most important thing is it must be held continuously and mobilize to all people. In this global era, communication make available to all, but yet there is less who talk about other religions. In other word, inter religious dialogue is not commonly discuss today. There is once a while, such dialogue has been conducted. That means, once in a blue moon, people are being reminded about religious harmony, then after some times, the same program might be held again. Due to this rare occasion, the dialogue fails to achieve it goal. This is because the issue of religious understanding, religious awareness is sounding alien to the masses. Then, without continuous reminding they will forget it.

At the same token, normally only certain organizations like educational institutes, universities, colleges, and some NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are conducting the discussion. But how about others? Those who stay in the remote areas would not hear about all these things. Then how could they dwelling with other fellow adherents? Thus these people are continuously carrying all sorts of misinterpretations upon religions among themselves regardless of their faith. Therefore, the program must be conducted in various areas in order to mobilize people about the important of knowing each other in order to create a better life.

Lastly, in the conclusion remark, Dr Kamar stressed on the important of human responsibility to overcome the pain across the globe because those are the indicators of human failures to handle the problems and provide proper solutions to the plight of humanity.[53] In order to do so, Dr Kamar addressed that all man regardless of his religion must hold this gigantic task and stand together to overcome it. I am strongly agreed with Dr. Kamar that all are play important role in order to change the today conditions. It is never too late to begin such a good work, if we do not start it now, otherwise we will regret to ever done it in future.

6. Conclusion

Undoubtfully, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's contributions in the field of Comparative Religion were huge. He was the propagator of Meta-Religion, a theory which is based on the human universal rational as well as applying the concept of theological-free. But unfortunate, after his demise the theory no longer has been abandoned due to Muslims attitude who subscribe everything from the West.

Not even so, he was the pioneer in interfaith dialogue internationally, especially in the west. He introduced certain guidelines for dialogue and again the theory of Meta-Religion has been applied here. Throughout his life, al-Faruqi demonstrated a succeed life in dialogue, for him dialogue is meant for religious understanding in order to correct those misperceptions over religions.

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[53] Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Interfaith Dialogue: Moving Forward; Setting Premises and Paradigms", *Religion and Culture in Asia Pacific: Violence or Healing?* ed. Joseph A. Camilleri, (Melbourne: Vista Publications, 2001).

As whole, his approached in Comparative Religion more or less were based on the scientific studies. His theory was solely depended on rationality, objectivity, avoid prejudice, as well as confine with human nature. These methods are tremendously important in studying other religions and must be applied.

As regard to Muslims, we are among the great academicians who promulgating new discoveries but the most unpleasant thing is Muslims are not united. There will be a tremendous development if all Muslims are united and all sorts of miseries could be handled wisely. It is similar as the phase 'together we stand, divided we fall'. Thus to realize it all Muslims must unite under one single umbrella which is Islam. We must refer back to our religious teaching and came to the core in order to create a better life. There is only one source which is Al-Quran and as-Sunnah. Otherwise Muslims would remind stagnant as today's situation.

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