

***Unraveling the Confusion  
of Religious Pluralism:  
Kalam Perspective***



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# The background

- A product of modern philosophy, emerged towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Spearheaded by modern Christian theologians/phenomenologist/ philosopher/ sociologists/ historians/comparative religion scholars
- New approach in understanding religious diversity and co-existence against the traditional Christian/religious approaches.
- Backed up by the development in the study of religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and globalization

# The Main Issues

## RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

**The Ultimate/Truth**



God

**Salvation**



Man

**The many religions**



Nature



**KALAM**

# The Classical Issues In the Modern Discourses



Ontological

Epistemological

Teleological

Axiological

What is religious pluralism?

# Systematic Kalam and Religious Pluralism

## Ontological - Meaning

- What is its meaning? (Is there any single meaning?)

## Epistemological - Sources

- What are the sources upon which its meaning is derived?(Modern epistemology vs traditional epistemology)

## Axiological – Value Judgment

- What good/values it propagates? (Is there such as good and evil? What are the meaning of good and evil? Does man commit evil in his action? What if he is predestined? What if he is free?)

## Teleological - Purpose

- What are its objectives?( Why there is a need for plural truth? Why the many truth claims? Why they exist in the first place?)

# Ontological - The Quest for meaning

- Philosophical meaning – John Hick, Peter Byrne, Alan Race, Leonard Swindler
- Theosophical meaning – Frithjof Schoun, W.C. Chittick, Sayyed Hossen Nasr
- Literal meaning – Diana L. Eck (the most definition/meaning subscribed)
- Religious Pluralism as Interreligious dialogue 
- Muslim Pluralist –
  - Mahmoud Ayoub, Osman Bakar, Hashim Kamali
  - Muhammad Legenhausen (non-reductive pluralism)
  - Abdul Aziz Sachadena (Qur'anic Pluralism)
  - Arif Kemil Abdullah (normative religious pluralism) 
- The local/Malaysian context

# Epistemological – Modern vs Tradition

- A modern philosophy that subscribes to its epistemology
- Sacred vs profane : as the bigger framework



- Scientific approach – objective, descriptive and neutral as opposed to traditional approach – bias, polemical and judgmental as in theology.
- Reductive approach to religion; religion as human institution; social institution
- Anthropocentric oriented; religion as pertain to human reasoning and experience; philosophical, Sociological, psychological, economic, historical, comparative
- Versus the Traditional approach – revelation/sacred 

# Teleological: Salvation as the purpose?

- **Salvation, being the core issue in religious pluralism.**
  - A theological question, that bothers many pluralists; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Hick, Alan Race, Paul F. Knitter, Leonard Swindler, John Cobb etc.
  - Every religion make a claim to salvation? What is salvation? Are there many paths to salvation?
  - Which theology? A theology of the Saviour; one is saved by faith in Jesus Christ.
- **The Truth/Ultimate/Reality/Transcendent/God**
  - Are there many truths or a single Truth?
  - How to make sense of the many Truths?

- **Tolerance and coexistence, another core issue**

- Eg. Diana L. Eck, religious pluralism; a pragmatic philosophy.
- RP devoid of theological importance.
- An evolution of definition and meaning? Or a distortion?
- Is this doing justice to the philosophy?

# Axiological: Good vs evil

- **Why God does not save all? Is God Just?**
- **Should there be only one way of salvation, others will not be saved?**
- **What makes man choose his way of salvation? Is he responsible for his choice?**
- **Does man commit evil if he made the wrong choice? What if his choice was predestined? What if he is free?**
- **Is there such as good and evil especially when it comes to human choices? What are the meaning of good and evil?**

# Traditional Kalam and Religious Diversity

- What is Kalam? (Meaning, objective, role and method)
- 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
- Is Kalam a biased discipline? Polemical & Apologetic? 
- How did the mutakallimun approach the issue of the Truth in other religions? Was there a single method?
- Were they affirming pluralism in religion? What about plurality?
- What does the tradition of Kalam teach us? 



# Conclusion

- Religious pluralism is a heavy-loaded term. The levelling of religious pluralism with religious plurality is disturbing as it ignores the epistemological, theological aspects involved in the formulation of the former
- A modern philosophy for understanding religious plurality.
- the by-product of a combination of circumstances - **modern philosophy and the study of religions, colonialism, emigration and globalization** - provided more avenues for interreligious encounter.
- Many resorted to its superficial/literal meaning for pragmatic reason.
- In the least, an objective inquiry into the philosophy should not abandon the root problem that bring about this philosophy; a problem in Christian theology; salvation.

# Conclusion

- We should differentiate between taking plurality as a phenomenon and as an ism/ideology/philosophy.
- Religious Pluralism posed problems to the Muslims as
  - it has its origin in Christian theology
  - it upholds the idea of many path to the truths
  - it propagates truth and religion as human institution
- A systematic and sound reasoning developed under Kalam may help to unfold the challenges it poses to the Muslims' faith