

TOWARDS FORMING AN ISLAMIC METHODOLOGY OF RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT: THE CASE OF AL-BĪRŪNĪ

Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman

Introduction

Religionswissenschaft, like most disciplines, has two components to it, viz., the content component, and the methodology component. By "content" is meant the subject-matters, and these include all religions that exist in the world today, as well as those which had existed before. By "methodology" is meant those procedures and approaches involved in the study of the religions. For the purposes of "islamization" of this discipline, obviously it is the methodology that is the issue here, not the content. Indeed, how could it ever be possible for an "islamization" of the content to take place whereas these contents, i.e., religions other than Islam, are in themselves well fixed and intricately formulated and determined entities, the alteration of any part of which will completely destroy the very essence and identity of these religions, making them into something other than themselves. Take, for example, the Christian *Trinity* and the Hindu *Trimurthy*, which are the foundational concepts in Christian and Hindu theologies. Islam does not recognize and understand the concept of shared divinity, either by one deity in many entities (hypostases), or by numerous deities. To reexplain these concepts in order to "islamize" them, will destroy their very essence, so much so that they can no longer be identified as *Trinity* or *Trimurthy*. Without *Trinity* and *Trimurthy*, defined and conceptualized as in Christianity and Hinduism, then there will be no Christianity or Hinduism. To cite another example—the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of metempsychosis, i.e., the *karma-samsara* doctrines. How could the *karma-samsara* of Hinduism, or Buddhism, be "islamized" whereas the very conception of metempsychosis, or rebirths, does not exist in

Islam at all, and to alter the nature of *karma-samsara* so as to make it "islamic", will give it a character completely other than itself, and hence destroy the very conception of what *karma-samsara* is. Without *karma-samsara*, as perceived by Hinduism or Buddhism, there will be no Hinduism or Buddhism. Such being the case, it is well advised, therefore, to take heed of the words of that Muslim scholar of Religionswissenschaft *par excellence*, Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, who points out that,

For verily that which goes beyond the truth (Truth), is a deviation; and disbelief is one nation in so far as it swerves (or digresses) from it (i.e., the Truth).¹

Indeed, no "islamization", or any form of rectification, for that matter, of the other religions can ever be possible, be it in the theological, doctrinal or ritualistic, aspects, for each religion is a holistic identity of its own. Also, the very nature of Islam does not permit compromises on matters of faith (*īmān*) and belief (*'aqidah*). The only alternative open for the adherents of the other faiths is either to embrace Islam consciously and wholeheartedly, and so become Muslims, or not to do so, and so remain outside the boundaries of Islam. Indeed, Islam does not recognize partial commitment to faith. This is because the belief-structure of Islam is complete in itself, complete from its very inception, i.e., the period of the Prophet (pbuh), and hence allows no further augmentation nor reduction in the matters of belief and rituals. In other words, Islam, as a faith and religion, is structurally

¹ Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *Fī Taḥqīq Mā li al-Hind Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-'Aql aw Mardhūlah*, or more popularly known as *Kitāb al-Hind*, 18.

Al-Bīrūnī says, "*Fa inna mā 'adā al-ḥaqq za'igh wa al-kufr millah wāḥidah min al-inḥirāf 'anhu.*" This book is translated into English by Edward C. Sachau, as *Albērūnī's India*, and the quotation above is from page 24.