

Adis Duderija, *Islam and Constructive Interreligious Engagement*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026, vi + 280 pp. Bibliography, index. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-6669-7277-1

This book offers a systematic attempt to evaluate contemporary Muslim approaches to interreligious engagement through the framework of comparative theology, drawing primarily on Catherine Cornille's concepts of comparative theological learning and the conditions for dialogue. By examining a range of Muslim thinkers, the author seeks to assess the extent to which their theological orientations enable meaningful engagement with religious others.

The study's strength lies in its comparative ambition. By placing diverse figures such as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Mahmoud Ayoub, Mona Siddiqui, Imtiyaz Yusuf, and Muna Tatari within a single analytical framework, it offers a structured account of Muslim responses to religious pluralism. However, this methodological approach raises important concerns.

In Cornille's original formulation, comparative theology is epistemological, focusing on interpretive dispositions such as openness and willingness to learn, while doctrinal difference serves as a condition for learning rather than an obstacle. In Duderija's application, however, this framework shifts toward an ontological register, where doctrines are implicitly treated as facilitating or hindering dialogue. As a result, theological positions are evaluated not only in terms of dialogical disposition but also their perceived structural compatibility with dialogue.

This shift narrows the scope of legitimate interreligious engagement by overlooking the role of interpretation and privileging a single model of comparative theology over alternative approaches, such as philosophical dialogue or context-driven praxis. This tension becomes particularly evident in the author's evaluation of key Muslim thinkers.

Although Duderija discusses a wide range of Muslim thinkers, this review focuses on three—Ismail al-Faruqi, Imtiyaz Yusuf, and Muna Tatari—because they appear to occupy an implicit hierarchy within his framework: al-Faruqi is positioned lowest, Yusuf in the middle, and Tatari as the most adequate. This selection is not exhaustive but serves to illuminate the evaluative logic underlying the book.

Al-Faruqi is presented as insufficiently dialogical, largely because his *tawḥīd*-centered framework is interpreted as normatively evaluating other traditions rather than learning from them. However, this assessment appears reductive when examined in light of the structure of his argumentation, which is grounded in sustained engagement with Western philosophical debates, particularly on the objectivity of moral value.

In his doctoral work, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi critically engages philosophers such as C. I. Lewis and Immanuel Kant, especially their attempts to ground moral value in experience or rational autonomy. He argues that such approaches render the good probabilistic or subjective, and therefore insufficient as a basis for ethical obligation. In response, al-Faruqi reconstructs an account of value that preserves

objectivity while engaging these frameworks on their own terms, reflecting a mode of critical dialogue oriented toward trans-religious philosophical concerns.<sup>1</sup>

This dialogical pattern extends beyond philosophy into theological engagement. In his interaction with Reinhold Niebuhr, al-Faruqi does not evaluate Christianity from an external standpoint. Instead, he draws on the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ to highlight tensions between moral ideals and Western socio-political practice. By employing internal categories of Christian thought, his critique becomes a form of reflective, internal-theological engagement rather than doctrinal imposition.<sup>2</sup>

Seen in this light, al-Faruqi's method operates at the intersection of philosophical and internal-theological dialogue. While it does not conform to the expectations of comparative theology as interpreted by Duderija, it nonetheless represents a structured form of interreligious engagement. To interpret it as lacking "learning" therefore depends on a restricted definition of dialogue.

Imtiyaz Yusuf is acknowledged as dialogical but criticized for lacking theological depth, particularly for not addressing doctrinal issues within Islamic orthodoxy. This critique, however, presupposes that dialogue must begin at the level of doctrine. Yusuf's work instead offers an alternative model, in which engagement with Muslim-

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<sup>1</sup> Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. *On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*. PhD diss., Indiana University, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. "On the Significance of Niebuhr's Ideas of Society." *Canadian Journal of Theology* 7 (1961): 100–107.

Buddhist relations emerge from concrete social realities—conflict, coexistence, and ethical collaboration—and only subsequently moves toward theological reflection.

This “context–[inter]text[uality]–context” approach reflects a praxis-oriented mode of dialogue in which theology is responsive rather than primary. Rather than indicating a lack of depth, it reconfigures the locus of dialogue by privileging ethical engagement as its entry point. Even doctrines often seen as obstacles, such as *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*, in this framework can be read in terms of ethical commitment (Sīla-Adhiṭṭhāna) and communal formation (Sangha), revealing parallels with Buddhist notions of detachment (Viveka). By prioritizing doctrinal critique, Duderija risks overlooking this context-driven form of interreligious learning.

Muna Tatari is presented as the most successful embodiment of comparative theology, particularly through her sustained engagement with Christian theology and her emphasis on reciprocal learning across traditions. Her work reflects a clear alignment with Cornille’s model, as she not only studies but also incorporates insights from Christian thought into her own theological reflection.

However, her elevated status reveals an inconsistency. While Duderija emphasizes the importance of critically addressing problematic doctrines, Tatari does not engage these doctrines explicitly, yet this is not treated as a limitation. This suggests that methodological conformity to comparative theology ultimately outweighs other evaluative criteria, shaping a hierarchy based on proximity to a particular model of engagement.

The preceding discussion suggests that the main limitation of Duderija's analysis lies in a shift from an epistemological to an ontological understanding of interreligious dialogue. While Cornille locates the conditions of dialogue in interpretive dispositions such as openness and willingness to learn, Duderija extends this framework to evaluate doctrines themselves, implicitly treating them as structural obstacles. This move risks reifying doctrines and overlooking the role of interpretation. A more consistent application of Cornille's approach would recognize that the dialogical potential of any concept depends on how it is interpreted, rather than on its intrinsic content.

The interpretive nature of doctrine can be illustrated through concrete examples. In *Jesus and Jihad: Reclaiming the Prophetic Heart of Christianity and Islam*, Robert F. Shedinger reinterprets jihad, not as violence, but as a moral and social struggle grounded in early Islamic sources. He further employs jihad as a hermeneutical lens to re-examine the mission of Jesus Christ, particularly in terms of prophetic resistance to injustice.<sup>3</sup> Rather than collapsing doctrinal differences, this approach creates a comparative space in which both traditions illuminate one another. What is significant here is not only the reinterpretation of a contested concept, but the methodological shift it entails: a notion often seen as an obstacle becomes, through interpretive engagement, a productive site of theological reflection.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert F. Shedinger. *Jesus and Jihad: Reclaiming the Prophetic Heart of Christianity and Islam*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015.

A further implication of this critique is the need to recognize multiple valid forms of interreligious engagement. While the book privileges comparative theology as the primary model, the cases examined here suggest a broader spectrum: al-Faruqi represents philosophical dialogue grounded in shared intellectual problems, Yusuf exemplifies contextual and praxis-oriented dialogue emerging from social realities, and Tatari embodies comparative theological engagement focused on reciprocal doctrinal learning. These approaches are not inherently hierarchical but respond to different contexts, questions, and aims. Treating one model as normative therefore risks marginalizing other legitimate forms of engagement.

It is precisely at this point that the main limitation of Duderija's study becomes apparent. By privileging comparative theology as the standard against which all other approaches are measured, the analysis narrows the scope of what counts as meaningful dialogue. This is further reinforced by the tendency to treat certain doctrines as inherently problematic, thereby shifting the focus from interpretive practice to theological content.

While the book makes a valuable contribution by highlighting the importance of openness, learning, and reciprocity, a more expansive approach would retain the epistemological insights of Cornille while recognizing the plurality of dialogical methods across philosophical, contextual, and theological domains. Such an approach would provide a more balanced account of Muslim engagements with religious diversity and better reflect the complexity of interreligious dialogue in contemporary contexts.

Reviewed by:

***Nuruddin Al Akbar*** | Department of Politics and Government

Science, Universitas Diponegoro

ORCID: 0000-0001-6958-8753

[nuruddin.alakbar@gmail.com](mailto:nuruddin.alakbar@gmail.com)