

CHRISTIAN MUSLIM DIALOGUE KARL RAHNER AND ISMAIL AL-FARUQI ON UNIVERSAL SALVATION

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Abstract

Muslim-Christian dialogue is essential for world peace. Members of Islamic and Christian faiths comprise over half the world's population. Only through dialogue can these two faith communities deconstruct the idea that the present historical moment is witnessing a "clash of civilizations." In our contemporary pluralistic world, dialogue can be extremely challenging. Many people labor under the misconception that respect for other religious beliefs require the rejection of one's own. As a way to meet this challenge, this paper will consider two concepts that enlist theological anthropology in recognition of religious differences: the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's concept of the *Vorgriff* and the Muslim theologian Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's interpretation of the *fitrah*. Believing that every human being is metaphysically open to God's revelation, these two theologians also accept the faith of every human being as genuine.

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INTRODUCTION

Muslim Christian dialogue is an essential component for world peace. Islam and Christianity are two world religions that compromise over half of the world's population. Needless to say, dialogue between them has the power to bring about peace and reconciliation in an era of the so-called "clash of civilizations." As Catholic theologian Hans Kung remarked quite rightly, "No peace among nations without peace among religions. And no peace among religions without a greater dialogue among them" (cited in Knitter 2010, 102). In our contemporary pluralist world, dialogue is crucial, if not, extremely challenging. The reluctance to dialogue comes from the misconception that with the respect of other

religious beliefs, one has to reject one's own. In a pluralistic world, rejection for absolute values is assumed appropriate. For Christians and Muslims giving up fundamental beliefs and values is a daunting task. Jesus serves as the absolute value for Christians, while Prophet Muhammad's revelation of the Qur'an serves as the absolute value for Muslims. Christian and Muslim theologians in interdisciplinary studies often hold religious commonalities as the starting point for dialogue, where the main principle is "The Unity of God's love and the love for one's neighbor." This fundamental principle serves as a common point between us and is indubitably the starting point of Muslim Christian dialogue. However, in our preoccupation of finding commonalities we might end up underestimating the major obstacle between us: the difference of following two different prophets, understood to have either revealed the last word of God, as with Muhammad in Islam, or to *be* the word of God, as with Jesus in Christianity.

In the absorption of finding commonalities we might demonstrate that we do not appreciate the differences between our religions, by disregarding the uniqueness of each religious belief. In considering the Christian theologian Karl Rahner's concept of the *Vorgriff* and Muslim theologian Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's interpretation of the *fitrah*, we can come to an appreciation that both faiths celebrate differences based on common anthropological insights that give respect to each other's religious context. This paper begins with the human person as a transcending being, naturally open to God's revelation. I will apply Karl Rahner and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's anthropologies with the intention to demonstrate that from both a Christian and Muslim perspective that respect, recognition and appreciation for difference between our faiths is consistent with both religious traditions.

CHALLENGES: THE PRESENCE OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM

The radical discontinuity between faith and reason, essential to the Enlightenment period, served as a major factor in religious decline in Europe. Intellectuals declared the unreasonableness of religious belief by questioning religious authority and dogma. Karl Marx believed that religion was the opiate of the people; Sigmund Freud argued that religion was for the irrational mind; and Nietzsche had the audacity to claim, "God is dead." For these philosophers, people who believe in God suffer a diminishment in human potential because a belief in God contradicts

reason and intellect. God did not die in the western world, however, faith renewed itself in spirit and form. In the light of the post-enlightenment scientific understanding of religion today, Christianity has become an accepted religion because it is equated with the West and therefore reason. In contrast, Islam has become the religion of the irrational mind. Consequently Muslims are depicted as the primitive Other.

The way the West articulates Christianity is perceived as authentic and therefore the exclusive way of “doing” religion. It is presumed that Christianity is a liberal religion reduced to philosophical ethics, that incorporates Enlightenment values. For many westerners, Islam’s so-called lack of rational discourse is a confirmation that Muslims are inferior. The West, which is for many synonymous with Christianity, sees itself as the universal standard and because it does demands emulation by other people and cultures.¹ One of the major challenges for dialogue between Christians and Muslims is the residue of western Colonialism in the widest sense that still exists today. The western world has, ever since its expansions, assumed a dominant role and continues to insist that western norms are universal, both secular and scientific. Since we measure every culture with a “western yardstick,” it is difficult, from a Christian and western point of view, to have a neutral starting point. In other words, as Christians in the West, we need to suspend all our judgments that derive from our preconceived ideas about the world (Abdelkader 2011, 11-17).

Dialoguing from a Christian point of view needs to be wary of discriminatory discourses that the western colonial power has and still produces in their construction of other cultures and religions today. We need to be cautious of the ongoing mistake of filtering Islam from our own metaphysical system of thinking.² In order to dialogue we need to be careful to not compare Islam with Christianity in a binary system, as this often leads to the perception and construction of Islam and Muslims as the “dangerous Other” (*orientalism*). Indeed, western discrimination

¹ Indeed, German protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch “identified Christianity with Western culture, to the extent that he did not consider it possible for a non-Westerner to understand the Christian faith.” (See Kwesi Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 83.

² On this basis Ismail Raji al-Faruqi criticized the study of Islam from a Christian context, “We do not know of any analytical book on Islam, for instance, written by a Christian, which does not reveal such judgment of Islam by Christian or western standards.” (See, *Historical Atlas of Religions of the World* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 21). Although, it is worth mentioning that Christian scholars have criticized al-Faruqi for doing the same in his book *Christian Ethics*.

towards Muslims is a form of racism that grows out of western institutionalized definition that Muslims are uncivilized and cannot save themselves, hence adherents are in need of “white-man’s liberation.” In the western world, we have adopted the Durkheimian theory that the belief of a society is a reality, *sui generis*, where social integration is possible only if society’s members have their eyes fixed on the same goal and concur in the same faith (Durkheim 1993, 91). In a pluralistic world, the same goal might be conceivable through a common creed, but to concur in the same faith seems simply too idealistic and unappreciative of the diversity and uniqueness of each religious tradition.

From a western and Christian point of view then, dialogue is challenging because of colonial weight from the past that still persists today. In our attempt to dialogue, the colonial discourse of the West cannot be exorcised enough. Hence, from a Christian point of view, we have to understand that we operate within in a hierarchical white supremacist world-view, where thoughts and actions are often in terms of a western center and periphery. In our age of “clash of civilizations,” world peace means accommodation between civilizations on grounds of mutual equality, respect, and recognition for difference.

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Before I introduce Karl Rahner and Ismail al-Faruqi, I want to introduce my own religious tradition’s principles for dialogue, in order to show that from a Catholic perspective, dialogue is essential to our faith. For Catholics learning and teaching serve as integral components for interreligious dialogue. Pope Paul VI proclaimed in *Ecclesiam Suam*: “we begin a dialogue by listening” (*ES* #87). When we listen we profess a desire to learn about the Other’s experience of God. The Catholic standpoint, seen from official Church documents, continues to stress the importance of listening, and brings an equally significant component, that of “learning.” While it is important to understand the Other, it is also important to proclaim our absolute values—the Gospel of Christ. The Catholic theologian Daniel A. Madigan proposes, “Dialogue occurs best when the dialogue partners are well acquainted with the other’s key theological doctrines, thinkers, and hermeneutical principles” (Madigan 2012, 73). By learning and teaching we define a dialogue, not by the character of proclamation, but by exchange between equal partners. By

learning we signify our willingness to encounter Muslims in their experience and show respect for their cultural and religious context. By teaching Muslims about Christianity we invite them into our religious visions and values. The conviction of mutual communication through learning and teaching illustrates our openness to acknowledge that each person experiences truth through his or her particular and unique situation. This means that to understand another person's religious faith, one has to attend the other's religious belief in such a way that one learns what it means to a person in that particular context. As such, we understand that in dialogue there must be recognition of the uniqueness of the Other.

A Catholic perspective on interreligious dialogue was believed to experience a shift with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). While this is true, Pope Pius IX had already declared universal salvation in 1863,

Those who labor in invincible ignorance concerning our most holy religion and who, assiduously observing the natural law and its precepts which God has inscribed in the hearts of all, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life can, through the working of divine light and grace, attain eternal life (cited in Sullivan 2012, 68-9).

James Carroll, however, notes that the notion of universal salvation became more explicit with the Second Vatican Council, stating that one of its major shifts was, "the idea that salvation is available outside the Catholic Church—and even to a definition of "Church" that allows it to apply to non-Catholic Christians" (Carroll 2012, 22). In *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II' asserts that Christ is offered to all of us, as seen through his sacrifice on the cross, and communicated by the Holy Spirit (*RM* #10). The dogmatic constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, emphasizes the dignity of each person and the Church's role of compassion and solidarity with the entire human race (*GS* #3). *Gaudium et Spes*'s assessment of culture further serves as a sign for dialoging as it speaks against discrimination of any culture because it is contrary to God's intent (*GS* #29). *Lumen Gentium* provides us with a similar perspective. This dogmatic constitution acknowledges the sanctity of other religions and explicitly talks about the Church's inclusion of Muslims. It reads, "Salvation includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims..." and further affirms God's universal salvation (*LG* #16). The document *Ecclesiam Suam* affirms that the motivation for dialogue is the Church's belief in God's love for all. While the Pope insists on the Catholic message, he feels compelled to

communicate; he also insists on the respect of the Other's freedom and integrity. *Nostra Aetate*, maintains the essential unity of the human race because the One God is everybody's creator (NA#1) and further affirms that salvation is something God has initiated for the whole of creation. Carroll points out that with Vatican II, "the Church's exclusivity changed. Roman Catholicism no longer understands itself as the only way to God" (Carroll 2012, 23).

From a Catholic point of view, we can appreciate that the notion of dialogue is an integral part of our faith. We profess universal salvation through the absolute presence of God, and as such, we may say that we do not hold exclusive truth. The Catholic official teaching declares that Christ is necessary for salvation in which Catholics understand the event of Christ's death and resurrection to be what leads us towards union with God and the whole of humankind. Jesus is the universal cause of salvation and this entails the Christian creed that all human beings are related to Jesus by means of faith necessary for salvation. The Church also proposes a universal offer through Jesus' saving grace: "Christ has objectively redeemed all men, and he calls and directs them to the Church" (*Acta Synodalia* III, 1). Catholic teaching emphasizes the universal saving grace of Christ. It moreover, recognizes that Muslims and Catholics can find commonalities in the faith of the One God of Mercy and Justice, and this can rightly apply as the very possibility for dialogue (Sullivan 2012, 74).

This ideal, however, is far from simple. It is after gaining sufficient knowledge about the Other that we will find grounds for arguments that do not reconcile with our held doctrines. Thus, after learning and teaching about each other's religious values and beliefs, we might encounter some disagreements between our faiths. Karl Rahner's theology does not begin with the search for commonalities; rather he recognizes and appreciates difference between faiths by beginning with the human person and her natural inclination towards God.

KARL RAHNER

Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg, Germany in 1904. At the age of eighteen he joined the Society of Jesus, and remained a Jesuit all his life. The order's teachings stimulated his interest in theology and philosophy. His work is shaped and influenced by the spirituality of Ignatius Loyola, especially Ignatius' proclivity for "finding God in all things",

the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas, the transcendental method of Immanuel Kant, the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and the work of Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Marechal. The suppression of theology by the Nazis made Rahner leave Germany for a position at the Diocesan Pastoral Institute in Vienna. When the Gestapo again threatened his teachings, he continued to assist people who suffered from Nazism through his pastoral and academic writing. He wanted to contribute to a renewal of Catholic theology and was especially critical of the Church's role vis-à-vis fascism, which he feared would drive people to reject the Church. Karl Rahner was censored several times prior to Vatican II, but with the Councils' transformation, he became according to Carroll, "no longer a problem but a solution" (Carroll 2012, 23).

Karl Rahner is motivated by two goals: to make theology intellectually respectable to people of his day and to make theology serve a larger spectrum of Christian faith and life. As such, he sees interfaith dialogue as crucial. Taking seriously the pluralistic world that we live in, Rahner evokes the theology of Vatican II and states,

For better or for worse, everyone has become everyone else's neighbor. If, therefore, one does not want to hold the absurd opinion that the existence of man can be regulated and preserved in the same living space independently of his views and opinions – in other words, that culture is not at all important for life on the biological and civilizational, social plane of human existence, - dialogue between world-views becomes possible and indeed necessary for life... Dialogue then becomes the only possible mode of co-existence...(Rahner 1991, 35).

Vorgriff

Like Kant, Rahner starts with the human subject and the possibility of knowledge. He examines the human experience of knowledge as the experience of absolute and limitless transcendence. Referred to as a transcendental Thomist, Rahner was deeply influenced by Aquinas' theology and the notion that all knowledge has *a priori* conditions of possibility. Inspired by St. Thomas Aquinas, he questions "Is it possible to gain knowledge of the non-sensible God?" Rahner attempts to interrogate the possibility of metaphysics. Like Aquinas, he sees the ability to reach ultimate truth through *excessus* (excess), which serves as the very condition of humanity's possibility of experiencing the world.³ The

³ Rahner follows Heidegger's *in-der-welt-sein*, which is the human experience of the world. However, in order for the human spirit to be in the world, he/she must

excessus for Rahner is the *Vorgriff*, the unthematized grasp of the *infinite horizon* before it is thematized in words and images. For Rahner the *infinite horizon* is God. Rahner presupposes within human nature the *a priori* grasp of being itself within which metaphysical objects can be known (Vass 1985, 32). In the light of this principle, he seeks to demonstrate that a human being's *Vorgriff* brings about a person's fundamental experience of God. The *Vorgriff* for Rahner is not part of nature, but part of the *übernatürliches Existential* (supernatural existential) that makes the human person open to transcendence—*capax Dei* (open to God). Our ultimate goal is to unite with God, to see God as God is. This is not however directly accessible.

According to Karl-Heinz Weger, Rahner recognizes “*a priori* structures in man [sic] and agrees that the term *a priori* points to something in man ...that is already present and previously given, something, in other words, that has not simply been acquired on the basis of experience” (Weger 1980, 12). All knowledge, however, is *a posteriori* knowledge, because without *a posteriori* experiences, the person inhabits nothing that can be known about his/her *a priori* constitution. The *a priori* constitutes our ability to self-transcend *a posteriori* experiences—the categorical reality of everyday experiences in the world. The *a priori* aspect of our knowledge is not constituted by *a posteriori* reality (ibid.). We can only experience what we do because we always see our categorical world in the light of a transcendental *a priori*. Rahner presupposes within human nature an *a priori* grasp of being itself within which metaphysical objects can be known (ibid., 32). In the light of this principle, he seeks to demonstrate that a human being's *a priori* brings about a person's fundamental experience of God. This speaks to his conviction that the finite human being is present to herself as a question and as such open to endless possibilities, that the moment we become aware of our finitude, we have actually already surpassed it (Rahner, 1992, 74). In this way we can become aware of God as the infinite horizon of our consciousness.

For Rahner, human beings are metaphysically constituted to question who they are. The person is constantly striving to understand who she is, which naturally leads her to place everything into question. The answers

simultaneously be a “being-set-apart” and “against the world.” This is possible through *Vorgriff*. For example: My consciousness of being finite, in contrast to infinite, reveals that I can stand outside myself and make judgments of myself. When I ask questions about myself, I experience myself as a personal subject. And when I put myself into question, I stand outside myself, transcending myself.

and explanations that she finds only lead to more questions. Each answer or achievement never fully satisfies. It simply provokes a new question. The human capacity to put everything into question affirms the possibility of an infinitely expanding horizon (Rahner 1978, 32). As a transcendental Thomist, Rahner begins with investigating the conditions of the possibility of knowledge and confirming that at the center of human nature is a longing for knowledge of the utterly mysterious One. Our desire for truth shows that human nature is capable of being raised to the supernatural order, which can reach the infinite because we inhabit the potentiality of doing so. Thus, our desire for truth is in our natural inclination to reach our ultimate end. For Rahner, the quest for truth is, paradoxically, both the meaning and the aim of human life (Weger 1980, 156). The subject's self-consciousness is pre-reflective and pre-conceptual, in constant anticipation of and openness towards infinite reality, the horizon of all knowledge and freedom (Rahner 1978, 33).

The act of self-transcendence demonstrates that inherent in human nature lies a potential to unify with God. Self-transcendence is made possible because God's self-communicating grace draws humans into self-transcendence. Because God has communicated Godself to us, we are beings with a natural transcendence, an absolutely unlimited openness to God. As finite human beings, however, we do not have the capability to actualize this potential by ourselves. We depend on someone who has actualized the fullness of human nature. For Rahner, this is Jesus Christ (Rahner 1991, 109). The core of the Christian message for Rahner is that God has, in fact, communicated Godself to us through Jesus Christ. This is God's self-communicating love, which is, in a Christian context, understood as grace. Christ is the being that has the power to actualize our potential. Thus, Jesus Christ reveals something about us: he reflects our very capacity to know. It is our metaphysical constitution actualized by Christ that makes it possible for us to hear the Word of God. Rahner argues that the incarnation takes away nothing from humanity's autonomy and originality but is rather "the unique highest instance of the essential realization of human reality" (Rahner 1978, 218). Karen Kilby expresses this effectively, "We can think about Christ in such a way that our understanding of who he is can be thoroughly integrated into our understanding of who we are" (Kilby 1997, 16). For Rahner, then, Christology is the beginning and end of anthropology. The idea of Christ is gained from the *a priori* structure of the person, what Rahner describes as the reflective coming to oneself of an *a priori* that is found in every human being.

Rahner holds to the core of Christian belief, that is, Jesus as our potential for recognizing our self. This leads Rahner to believe that everyone is an “anonymous Christian” (*ein anonymen Christ*). This term has led people to reject Rahner’s theology as inconsiderate for interreligious dialogue, as it is demeaning to assert that a person of another religious belief is unconsciously a Christian. Rahner however wants to hold on to the notion that each has the capacity to grasp revelation, while at the same time he does not want to abandon the belief that Jesus is in fact God’s revelation, the conduit between God and humanity. The very definition of “anonymous Christian,” however, is contrary to what has been represented. The term demonstrates not only that other belief systems are “acceptable,” but are *equal* to the Christian experience of God. In order to understand what Rahner means by “anonymous Christian” we have to consider what was central to this term, namely conscience.

Rahner applies the role of conscience to his definition of “anonymous Christian.” In a distinct Thomistic sense, Rahner holds that everyone is saved by following her own conscience, although this might mean for a Catholic to negate the laws of the Magisterium. In regards to other faiths, it approves that in following one’s conscience, one might not come to an explicit acceptance of the Christian message. As such, we can appreciate that the act of obedience to the voice of her conscience, regardless of faith, is equivalent to the Christian response of faith in Christ. By simply listening to one’s conscience, which is contextually shaped and determined, one is in fact following Christ, and is therefore an “anonymous Christian.” Rahner believed that a person might even be required by his/her conscience to reject the Gospel of Christ. Thus, a faithful Muslim who is most likely held by her conscience would be true to the Qur’an. And rightly so, according to Rahner (1991, 216).

Rahner’s application of conscience acknowledges that each person’s religious faith is influenced by historical and cultural circumstances, leaving different ways of responding to the call of God. The word of God, speaking through the conscience of a Muslim, might possibly guide her to the Qur’an, while the word of God through the conscience of a Christian might possibly lead her to the Gospels. In this respect, each individual understands God through her distinct experience of the world. Although, Rahner holds on to the core of Christian belief, that is, Christ as our potential to reach God, Rahner understands Christ to be the potential for *all*, but expressed in different ways. In this way, Rahner’s theology demonstrates that there can be various ways of expressing religious faith.

ISMAIL RAJI AL-FARUQI

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was born in Palestine in 1921. He graduated from the American University of Beirut in 1941 and later became the governor of Galilee. The occupation of Palestine in 1948 forced him and his family become refugees in their own country. In the course of time, al-Faruqi moved to the United States where he earned two masters degrees in Philosophy from Indiana University and Harvard University and completed a PhD in Philosophy at Indiana University in 1952. Al-Faruqi taught at several American universities and was the first Muslim scholar in America to dedicate himself to comparative religion from an Islamic point of view (Esposito and Voll 2011, 23-24).

Al-Faruqi stresses the use of history and geography as sources in his theological endeavors. In order to attempt dialogue between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, al-Faruqi goes back to the ancient sources, the religion and culture of Mesopotamia and Egypt, in order to show that these religions borrow from each other, and in this respect, carry the same identity, which was for him an original 'Arab' identity. Thus, by looking at the ethical religion of the Pre-Islamic Arabia, al-Faruqi understood that these three religions inhabited one and the same religious consciousness (al-Faruqi 1998, xii). Arabism was central to his scholarly work. Arabism and Islam were intrinsically connected, as Arabism was central to Islamic history, faith and culture. He regards Arabism as the medium for God's message and considers Arabness to be central to the three prophetic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Esposito and Voll 2011, 24-25). As such, he understands Arabs to be carriers of the absolute message of divine monotheism, which includes Jews, Christians, and Muslims as equal members under the moral law of the One God (al-Faruqi 1962, 12-13).

Al-Faruqi adopts the view of the Mu'tazili theologian al-Nazzam that belief in God can be known through rational principles. He holds that the Qur'an is in harmony with reason and that human intellect is the method towards truth. The Mu'tazilites call themselves "people of unity and justice," which is common thought that runs through al-Faruqi's theology. Working in the West, al-Faruqi presents Islam through western categories and, like Rahner (although they were never in conversation), he wants to make Islam more compatible to western Muslim understanding. In this light, al-Faruqi stresses the need for reason, science, and ethics in the work of theology and emphasized that Islam was "the religion of reason par excellence" (al-Faruqi 1962, 27). Echoing the Mu'tazilites

principle, al-Faruqi stresses the importance of freedom and the rational capability of the human person in the assessment of theological discourse. His desire is to “transcend dogmatic theologies and get back to a theology-free metareligion by basing the analysis of religions on a set of self-evident principles,” which is for him, through human experience (Esposito and Voll 2011, 33).

Al-Faruqi encourages what he considers to be an objective and scholarly study of comparative religion and advocates for the need to transcend an apologetic or polemic approach in doing interreligious dialogue. Al-Faruqi’s method is said to present a philosophical and ideational view of Islam. In his theology he incorporates Arabism, Islam, and western Christian culture. In this light and with regards to interreligious dialogue, al-Faruqi’s desire is to reconcile Christianity and Islam by uncovering their deeper common ground based on the “higher principles of meanings, of cultural patterns of moralities, and of religion” (al-Faruqi and al-Faruqi 1986, 10).

Din al-Fitrah

Al-Faruqi evokes the concept of *Vorgriff* and contends that we are metaphysically constructed to know God and, like Rahner, he presupposes within human nature an *a priori* grasp through *a posteriori* knowledge that enables the person to recognize metaphysical objects,

Man [sic] recognizes God as transcendent and holy... This is not a repetition of man’s [sic] natural capacity to know through science. It is a new knowledge, a knowledge of the Holy, of the numinous, of God. This natural vision of God, or *din al-fitrah*, stands to be enriched by man’s [sic] other knowledge, i.e., the discoveries of his theoretical and axiological consciousness... Both faculties, the numinous and the theoretical-axiological belong to man [sic] (al-Faruqi 1998, 138).

Like Rahner, al-Faruqi holds that all people are ontologically the creatures of God, which means that all people are equal in their creaturehood and in their natural ability to recognize God and God’s law (ibid, 285). Like Rahner, he sees that faith arises from a relationship between God and human, a life affirming activity that encompasses all human action. For al-Faruqi there are two main approaches for knowing God: God’s revelation through the human person’s heart (*din al fitrah*) and God’s revelation to the prophets. Al-Faruqi proceeds from the Muslim faith in the One, Universal and Transcendent God (*Tawhid*), to contend that there must naturally be a universal faith innate in every human heart. He moves

from the *Tawhid* to the human person and claims that God has instilled in every human heart a natural religion, *al-din fitrah* that makes each of us equipped with a “sixth sense” to perceive God as God (ibid, 84). *Din al fitrah* is the ultimate base for Islamic anthropology and is expressed both in the Qur’an and Hadith as a natural faith that gives rise to a personal religion conditional in each person’s context. The Qur’an confirms, “God has instilled in all human beings a natural tendency towards true belief (30:30).” Muslims maintain that the *fitrah* is a natural capability of knowing and accepting the religion of truth (Juynboll 2007, 718). In this light, the Hadith, according to Abû Haytham, explains that the function of the *fitrah* is to move towards a respect of each person’s approach to religious truth. The Hadith expresses the doctrine of the *fitrah* in this fashion,

And if his parents are Jews, they make him a Jew, with respect to his worldly situation; [i.e. with respect to inheritance, etc.] and if Christians, they make him a Christian, with respect to that situation; and if Magians, they make him a Magian, with respect to that situation; his situation is the same as that of his parents until his tongue speaks for him; but if he dies before his attaining to the age when sexual maturity begins to show itself, he dies in a state of conformity to his preceding natural constitution, with which he was created in his mother’s womb.

This Hadith evokes the understanding that there is a natural disposition innate in a child to know God. This knowledge develops depending on one’s individual upbringing. In other words, it is the parents who determine what religious belief the child will have. There is as such a respect for the person’s religious belief because it is presumed that the person’s religious faith is in conformity to his or her situation.

The *fitrah*, for al-Faruqi, is expressed as a “natural religion,” the “original religion,” the “religion of God,” “that consist of the unerring discoveries of the *sensus numinis* by which man recognizes God as transcendent and holy” (al-Faruqi 1998, 138). It is the *religio naturalis* that each person possesses by birth and transcends all religious belief. It is an *Ur-religion* that is manifested in all religions in history. It is a possession of each human heart, regardless of religion, culture and social context (ibid, 139). Al-Faruqi interprets the *fitrah* as an unchanging natural innate predisposition that each of us is given as a gift from God with the purpose to know God. Thus, the concept of *fitrah* differs somewhat from Rahner’s *Vorgriff*, in that the *Vorgriff* is not part of nature, but supernatural nature. Al-Faruqi’s understanding of the *fitrah* serves as the central component to Christian Muslim dialogue because it affirms a respect of

the different paths towards the One Universal God. Hence, like Rahner, al-Faruqi starts from below and sees human responsibility and accountability as the essential mean for transcending theological dissimilarities among Muslims and Christians.

For al-Faruqi, the *fitrah* functions as a natural law that leads us towards human fulfillment. The *fitrah* gives us a rational capacity to recognize God's law and therefore gives us a natural understanding of morality. Hence the *fitrah* guides us to act in accordance with God's law—to choose the good and avoid evil, giving the *fitrah* a strong ethical meaning, which in some way contradicts Rahner's *Vorgriff*. As such, al-Faruqi contends that to respond to the will of God becomes crucial for one's happiness, which is, for him, the ultimate goal of life (al-Rauf 1991, 25). Responding to our *fitrah* becomes necessary, because through it we live out our actual human nature as intended by God and are leads to integral human fulfillment. The *fitrah* is a universal imperative that each being is required to know because each of us has been equipped at birth with the capacity to know God's will. In this respect, as a person is required to respond to her own natural religion, Christians must respond to Christianity and Muslims must respond to Islam.

His understanding of the *fitrah* leads al-Faruqi to proclaim that the belief in absolute equality is in accordance with Islam because religion is made up by the living experience of the human person (al-Faruqi 1967, 1). The living experience of the human person will always be dependent on the person's context, her cultural and historical consciousness, and her capacity to understand the will of God. In this fashion, al-Faruqi claims that in order to understand the faith of one's neighbor one has to understand her lived experience. Al-Faruqi stresses the fact that we need to suspend all our judgments that derive from our preconceived ideas about the world. In other words, we need to situate ourselves in the Other's context in order to fully understand them. Only in this way, can we understand religion from the perspective of the believer. Al-Faruqi evokes the Catholic principle of learning and teaching in dialogue mentioned above, that true dialogue cannot occur unless one has accurately apprehended another's faith in ways that is acceptable to the adherent.

Al-Faruqi moves from his understanding of the *fitrah* to his second principle of knowing God: the revelation of God through prophets. In history, al-Faruqi, asserts, "every people have been sent a messenger, 'To teach them their own language'" (al-Faruqi 1998, 285). For al-Faruqi, the revelation of the prophets demonstrates that Muslims and non-Muslims are equal because they both have been subjects of divine

communication. All prophets carried one message that is shared among the religions, namely, love of the One, Universal, and Transcendent God. With this, al-Faruqi contends that religious diversity is not an attribute of the nature of God. Islam understands Christianity as a preceding religion, and draws on Christian doctrines. Islam sees the prophets of Christianity not only to be accepted but as standing *de jure*, as truly revealed religions from God. Islam is *sui generis*, in that, compared to Christianity, perceives the Christian condition as necessary for its own faith and witness (ibid, 75). Hence, Islam does not come about ex nihilo, but as a reaffirmation of the same truth presented by all the preceding prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and regards them all as essential for the Islamic faith. Al-Faruqi affirms that each revelation of the prophets were constructed in a code particularly applicable to its people and hence relevant to their historical/cultural situation and condition (ibid, 79). The difference in revelation, however, does not affect the core essence of revelation. Al-Faruqi contends that the Prophets conveyed the same message, the love of the One, Universal, and Transcendent God and the love and service to one's neighbor.

With the two primary avenues provided by God to recognize God, al-Faruqi contends that the Muslim can tell a Christian, "we are both equal members of a universal religious brotherhood. Both of our traditional religions are *de jure*, for they have both issued from and are based upon a common source, the religion of God which He has implanted equally in both of us, upon *din al-fitrah*" (ibid, 163). Al-Faruqi believes, as hearers of God, both the intrinsic faculty and the external witnessing of the prophets, defines our individual humanity with a special dignity. As witnesses to God we are each entitled to full membership in God's community, the universal human creation of Allah. With these primary sources to arrive to God's will, al-Faruqi claims that Islam is a dynamic religion, as it allows variety and multiplicity in its very commandment. As such, Islam is not a rigid religion. Al-Faruqi contends that God has given Muslims "many rooms with closed doors; yet Allah has given human beings the keys to those doors through human rationality" (Sodiq 2012, 134).⁴

⁴ When al-Faruqi argues that the prophets carried one message that is shared among the religions, it seems that he doesn't leave much space for appreciating differences, for example, doctrines that differ from Islam, like the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This simultaneously makes Islam superfluous because we can know everything through reason. However, the point for al-Faruqi, as I read him, is that the *fitrah* (which we all inhabit equally) leads us to the One Universal God, but that there are different ways towards God.

Nonetheless, like Rahner, al-Faruqi holds on to the core of his religious tradition, that is, Muhammad as the last prophet to convey God's message and therefore the Qur'an as the ultimate religious authority, the final and definitive revelation of God's will for all humankind (al-Faruqi 1998, 73). This makes al-Faruqi's agreement with the Hadith that "every man [sic] is born a Muslim," very close to Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christian." Al-Faruqi, as mentioned above, reads the Qur'an through Arab eyes, and concludes that the Arabs are ethically the best kind of people and therefore serves as an elite (Esposito 1991, 67). Thus, for al-Faruqi, Islam is the religion that expresses God's will in its fullest sense.

In sum, for al-Faruqi, everybody is endowed with the religion of God, through human nature. The *fitrah* becomes the corner stone of al-Faruqi's proposed system of interreligious discourse. Al-Faruqi recognizes that God has blessed all creatures with reason and understanding to grasp God's will and therefore simultaneously have the responsibility to act upon it. The grasp of God's will is dependent on one's personal and unique situation and therefore it will be expressed differently. Thus, behind all religious diversity stands the true religion that everybody inhabits, which is inseparable from human nature.

CHRISTIAN MUSLIM DIALOGUE: A POSSIBILITY

While there are differences between the meaning of the *Vorgriff* and the *fitrah* and the approaches of Rahner and al-Faruqi differ, they do relate on the basic idea that every human being is metaphysically constructed to recognize the One Universal Transcendent God. For Rahner, to recognize God, we are dependent on God's self-communicating love, which is grace, or *Vorgriff*. For al-Faruqi, we recognize God through the *fitrah*, which is a natural endowment created and given by God. This leaves us with a potential for interreligious dialogues, both teachings demonstrate an appreciation for each individual's unique expression of God, regardless of religious affiliation. Hence, as a Christian Catholic I can say that my faith is the way towards Truth, while I simultaneously can affirm that for my Muslim friends it is likewise. The inbuilt *Vorgriff* or *fitrah* in each person shows that we all have the potential to unite with God. Because we are all bearers and witnesses of God's message. This moreover shows how eminently God loves us and as faithful believers,

we are precondition to love each other. Al-Faruqi and Rahner's theological anthropology proclaims that human apprehension of God is always shaped by the interpreter's location and experience. This naturally leads to different forms of religions. Rahner and al-Faruqi do not abandon the core of their religious beliefs, however, Rahner sees our potential for actualizing our *Vorgriff* through Christ and thus claims that non-Christians are in fact "anonymous Christians." Al-Faruqi evokes the Hadith claiming that everyone is born a Muslim, which leaves him to claim that Islam shows the fullest expression of God. While they do not disregard the fundamental values of their religious traditions, they both believe that the human person is metaphysically constructed to perceive God, which articulates a universal road open to all human beings. Through their theological anthropology we can perhaps claim that each faith is nurtured through a tradition and culture that Christianizes or Islamizes the adherent.

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