

CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The study of religion originated from the existence of various religions. Various religions are derived from various races. Every human or race has their own belief and faith. Therefore, religious understandings differ among humankind. However, religion is a necessity in human life as it influences the cause, nature and purpose of the universe based on the teachings of a spiritual leader (Carla Mooney, 2015).

Western scholars believe that the study of religion originated from Western knowledge. According to Armin W. Geertz (2014), the study of religion or comparative science of religion was founded by a German scholar, Friedrich Max Muller in the 19th century and known as *Religionswissenschaft*.

The terms “religious science” and “science of religion” are considered new terms in the study of religion. According to Lourens P. Van Den Bosch (2002), Max Muller formulates three objectives in the study of religion. First, to identify the concept of religion. Second, to analyse the foundation in the soul of humans and third, to identify laws that the soul of man follows.

However, Rosmizi Abdul Rahman (2020), rejects the claim that the founder of the study of religion are Western scholars because the study of religion is a Muslim legacy. The Quran discusses the study of religion 1,400 years ago. Disciplines in the study of religion were developed by the Prophet’s companions and Muslim scholars after the death of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

For example, Ibn Hazm, the author of the book *Al-Fasl Fi Al-Milal Wa Al-Ahwa' Wa Al-Nihal* in the 11th century (Fatmir Shehu, 2013) and Al-Biruni, a Muslim scholar, are both often regarded as the fathers of comparative religion (Nurhanisah Senin et al., 2019). Thus, study of religion is regarded as one of the great contributions of Muslim's civilization to mankind's intellectual advancement (Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi W.Razali et al., 2014).

The study of religion improves the *aqidah* of Muslims because it differentiates between true and false religions. From a Muslim's perspective, Islam is the true religion because it is perfect as compared to others. Muslim scholars apply the study of religion as one of the Islamic preaching as well as to protect Islam from false arguments and other religions (Yusri Mohamad Ramli, 2017).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ninian Smart is a giant on whose shoulders many of the next generation of scholars stood because his writing has been widely used as textbooks for university and high school courses in religion and he personally has supervised many of the religious studies scholars who succeeded him (Christopher Buck, 2018).

According to George D. Chryssides & Ron Geaves (2014), in the 19th and 20th centuries, from Western understandings, the study of religion was transformed to utilizing a broadly phenomenological approach influenced by Ninian Smart. Ninian Smart has changed a confessional approach to the neutral academic approach in the study of religion (John J. Sherpd, 2009).

Ninian Smart's methodologies are developed to respond to the challenge of modernity head on by applying the scientific method in the study of religion (Nwaocha Ogechukwu, 2018). Ninian Smart emphasizes the analysis of worldviews to be the heart of his study of religion (Ghalkhanbaz Fatemah & Sadeghi Masoud, 2012).

He has introduced six dimensions of religion in his book *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, then added a seventh; the material dimension, in the book, *The World's Religions* (William M. Johnston, 2005). The book *The World's Religions* is a demonstration of Smart's impressive project because it is a systematic approach to the study of world religions and logically organizing the various aspects of religious phenomena within their respective dimensions (Christopher Buck, 2018).

While, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is one of the Muslim reformists in 19th century (Seema Alavi, 2015). According to Rosie Bsheer (2020), Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi was respected by the Mecca Community due to his being a prominent religious scholar and he was honoured by the Mufti of Mecca, Sheikh Ahmad Zaini Dahlan.

Seema Alavi (2015), expresses that *Izhar Al-Haq* is a combination between the sciences and the scriptures because in the late 19th century, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's writings emphasized science and rationality as part of Muslim heritage and Islamic scriptures as an appeal across the Muslim world.

German expert on Islamic Studies, Christine Schirrmacher assumes *Izhar Al-Haq* as an encyclopedia due to Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi extended the material of earlier polemicists like 'Ali Tabari, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiyyah (Maziah Mustapha & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2019).

According to Arian Hopf (2021), Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's strategies in study of religion, was acknowledged and applied by later authors and scholars as well. For instance, Muhammad Abu Zahra, a lecturer at Al-Azhar University, was inspired by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi (Oddbjorn Leirvik, 2010). The legacy of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi continues to develop in this modern era because Ahmed Deedat adopts and adapts Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's method in study of religion (Muhammed Haron, 2014).

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions are framed to assist in achieving the research objectives:

- 1- Who are Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi?
- 2- What are the methodologies used by Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion?
- 3- What are the similarities and differences in the study of religion from Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi understandings?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To introduce Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi.
- 2- To analyse the methodologies of the study of religion used by Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi.
- 3- To identify the similarities and differences in the study of religion from Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi understandings.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study of religion mainly from Western and Islamic perspectives. The data collected for this research is to generate new ideas in the study of religion mainly among scholars, researchers, and university students. Further research can be done based on the findings of this research.

In addition, this research assists the government or private agencies to advocate the study of religion among the community. According to Patrick McNeil & Steve Chapman (2005), social research provides vital data to the government to identify problems and solutions. However, it depends on the government to respond or to ignore the researcher's findings.

Furthermore, this research aims to resolve misunderstandings between Muslim and Western scholars on religious issues like war and extremism. The study of religion is an alternative solution to refrain from conflict between Islamic and Western communities (Khadijah Mohd Kambali @ Hambali et al., 2013). Muslim scholars disapprove of conflict as it is the main cause of decline and weakness of Muslim communities (Mohamad Zaidin Mohamad et al., 2017).

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on Ninian Smart as the Western scholar and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi as the Muslim scholar. Ninian Smart was selected by the researcher as he is one of the modern Western scholars in the study of religion. According to Bryan S. Turner & Oscar Salemink (2015), Western scholars define religion based on terms of various components or dimensions.

Ninian Smart defines religion based on seven dimensions namely ritual, experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, institutional, and finally, material. (Seth D. Kunin & Jonathan Miles. Watson, 2006).

Meanwhile, Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi was chosen by the researcher because he is a modern Muslim scholar in the study of religion. One of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's books, *Izhar Al-Haq*, is a noteworthy book in the study of religion. *Izhar Al-Haq* has been translated into various languages and is the main reference in debates and dialogues between Islam and Christianity (Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al., 2013).

This research analyses the theories related to the study of religion produced by both scholars using the content analysis approach. These theories provide fundamental information on the methodologies of the study of religion from Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi perspectives.

1.7 Definition of Terms

One of the discussions in the study of religion is the meaning of religion. However, the meaning of religion differs among Muslim and Western scholars as the understanding of religion is influenced by the source of knowledge. Robert Crawford (2002), quoted the definition of religion by Ninian Smart in his book, *What Is Religion?* Ninian Smart argued that religion is seven-dimensional; organism, ritual, doctrine, myth or narrative, experimental or emotional, ethical or legal, organisational or social, and material or artistic.

From the Islamic perspective, the term religion is *Al-Din*. According to *Kamus Al-Quran* (2010), the word *Al-Din* or *Din* is mentioned in the Quran 62 times. The meaning of *Din* has been divided into terminology and epistemology. *Din* according to the Islamic terminology refers to a follower and an obedient.

In epistemology, *Din* is a complete living system from God as a Creator of human beings (Rosmizi Abdul Rahman et al., 2013). According to Dr Haron Din (2015), religion is a relationship between humans and something that does not resemble a human being or other creations.

Various terms were used by scholars to refer to the study of religion. Muslim scholars use the term *Muqarannah Al-Adyan* which refers to comparative religion (Norsaadah Din @ Mohamad Nasirudin et al., 2018). *Religionswissenschaft* is a German term and at present, refers to a group of disciplines that study religion. According to Tim Jensen & Armin W. Geertz (2015), the term “comparative religion” is synonym to *Religionswissenschaft*.

“Comparative religion” is an abbreviation for the method of comparative, cross-cultural and historical study of religion (Muhammad Khalifa Hasan, 2010). The term “science of religion” is the product of a deliberate investigation of religious facts in accordance with a clearly defined scientific method (Ali Scott Vitkovic, 2018).

Another term is the “science of comparative religion” or “hierology”. According to Ali Scott Vitkovic (2018), “science of comparative religion” is a branch of the study of religion that refers to the systematic comparison of past and present religious principles and practices. Meanwhile, “hierology” means the science of the sacred (J. Estlin Carpenter, 2018).

“Religious studies” and the “study of religion” are terms used by Ninian Smart in the book, *Religion and the Western Mind*. Both terms refer to an attempt to delineate and explain the nature of religion (Ninian Smart, 1987).

1.8 Literature Review

The literature review is a guideline for the researcher to achieve the objectives of the research. This research has two inquiry questions to review past research. First, what are the concepts in the study of religion in Western and Islamic understandings? Second, what are the methodologies in the study of religion from Western and Muslim scholars' perspectives? The researcher reviewed articles, books, and journals to review past research.

The study of religion from a Western understanding is discussed by Oliver Freiberger (2019), in the book, *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies*. Oliver Freiberger explained the relationship between the concept of the comparative method and the study of religion. The author concludes three issues. First, religious study is an academic discipline. Second, human basic and academic activities are scopes of the comparative method. Third, description and classification are two comparatives in the study of religion.

Comparative religion and comparative theology are two different approaches to the study of religion. Catherine Cornille (2020), stated in the book, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, that the aims of comparative religion and comparative theology differ. Comparative religion seeks to gain understanding of religious phenomena while comparative theology seeks to deepen and advance the theological truth.

The methodology of Western scholars in the study of religion is mentioned by K.N. Tiwari (2014), in the book, *Comparative Religion*. The author differentiates the study of religion from theological and philosophical discussions, debates, and dialogues because the description of the characteristics of religion without prejudice is the aim of religious studies. However, the author accepts debates and dialogues as part of the study of religion if their purpose is to gain understanding of other religions.

Conversely, Craig Martin (2012), the author of *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, applied a functionalism and a hermeneutics of suspicion approach in the study of religion. The author explained that the functionalism approach is analysing the role of religion in society and the hermeneutics of suspicion or interpretation means suspicion on religions studied. However, utilisation of hermeneutics of suspicion is only applicable to doubtful religious claims or practice.

Nevertheless, George D. Chryssides & Ron Geaves (2014), explained in the book, *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods*, that understanding religion is fundamental in understanding individual and social life. Thus, the aim of studying religion is to relate religious behaviour and endeavour in understanding religious behaviour. The study of religion involves a variety of academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, theology and psychology. However, the authors refute endorsement and criticism in the study of religion.

Emeka Charles Ekeke & Chike Ekeopara (2010), in an article entitled *Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Religion: A Historical Perspective*, focused on the role of phenomenological approach in the religious studies. The authors state that the phenomenological approach refers to the participation of a scholar in the religion to gain understanding of the meaning and manifestations of the religious phenomena. The phenomenological approach emphasises on neutrality in the religious studies.

However, John R. Bowen (2014), explained the suitability of an anthropological approach in the study of religion in the book, *Religions in Practice: An Approach to Anthropology of Religion*. The author mentioned the suitability of the anthropological approach due to three reasons. First, a long-term relationship with people through fieldwork to gain understanding of other religions. Second, learning from a local perspective. Third, connection across social domains using the anthropological approach.

Meanwhile, Ninian Smart's perspective in the study of religion is discussed by Ghalkhabaz Fatemah & Sadeghi Masoud (2012) in an article entitled *Ninian Smart and Transition from Analysis of Traditional Religions to Analysis of Worldviews*. Authors state, Ninian Smart believes that the scope of study of religion must be developed to worldviews. He regards the analysis of worldviews to be the heart of his study of religion. Ninian Smart proposes the dynamic phenomenology of religion or the historical- comparative method, the main concern of which is to set evolutions of religious phenomena in their historical context.

However, Nwaocha Ogechukwu (2018) in an article entitled *A Critique of Smart's Ritual Dimensional Theory in the Phenomenological Study of Igbo Priesthood of African Tradition*, explained Ninian Smart perspective's concern study of religion. Author states Ninian Smarts defines religion based on the specific example rather than through definitions. He is also concerned with describing rather than explaining the diversity of religious phenomena.

Christopher Buck (2018) explained more detail regarding Ninian Smart in an article entitled *Ninian Smart*. Author discusses the legacy of Ninian Smart in the study of religion. Christopher Buck has assumed Ninian Smart as one of the pioneers in the secular study of religion and a founder of the religious studies department in a British University. He promotes critical thinking, interfaith engagement and methodological elegance in the study of religion.

Within part one of the book *Religious Education: A Conceptual and Interdisciplinary Approach for Secondary Level*, Clive Erricker (2010) analysed phenomenological approach in religious studies. Author have expressed, Ninian Smart is the proponent of a phenomenological approach in study of religion. Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach influenced by the philosopher Husserl, mainly in relation to terms eidetic vision and *epoche*, and inspired by Van der Leeuw.

An article entitled *Ninian Smart: Reflections in the Mirror of Religion* by Christopher Key Chapple (2000), discussed Ninian Smart's methodology in study of religion. Author has assumed Ninian Smart's philosophical approach in study of religion as liberal, open-minded, optimistic and pragmatic. But the author has expressed that Ninian Smart is a pioneer in phenomenological rather than theoretical approach in study of religion and he acknowledges the importance of the study of primary texts such as Vedas, Torah and Quran.

The understanding of the study of religion from an Islamic perspective is explained by Norsaadah Din @ Mohamad Nasirudin et al. (2018), in a study entitled *A Research on the Understanding of Comparative Religion among University Students in Selangor*. The authors stated that the concept of the study of religion in the Islamic understanding is based on the Quran, hadith and opinions of Muslim scholars in the study of religion.

In addition, Mohd Yazid Saad (2012), in a dissertation entitled *Application of Comparative Religion as A Preaching Method Towards Non-Muslim: A Study of ABIM's Islamic Outreach Programme*, explained the concept of the study of religion. The author stated that the study of religion focuses on three topics of discussion. First, the existence of religion. Second, the development of religion and third, the religious phenomena. The study of religion aims to identify similarities and differences between two or more religions.

The Islamic methodology in the study of religion is discussed by Mohd Faizal Abdul Khir in two different articles. In an article entitled *Descriptive Comparison Approach in Comparative Religion: An Analysis of the Quran Approaches*, Mohd Faizal Abdul Khir (2013), states that one of the Quran's methodologies in the study of religion is descriptive comparison. The author explained how the Quran applies the analysis of descriptive comparison in the study of religion as its review of other religions is free from arguments.

Meanwhile, another article entitled *Normative Approach in Comparative Religion: An Analysis of the Quran* by Mohd Faizal Abdul Khir (2017), expressed another Quran methodology in the study of religion; the normative approach. There are two types of normative approaches; offensive normative comparison and prudential normative comparison. The author explained that the Quran applies prudential normative comparison and refutes offensive normative comparison. Refutation of offensive normative comparison by the Quran is because it contradicts with Islamic teachings.

In addition, Zuriati Mohd Rashid & Engku Ahmad Zaki (2010), in an article entitled *Al-Faruqi and His Views on Comparative Religion*, discussed Al-Faruqi's approach to the study of religion. The authors expressed three of them. First is disengagement. Second, are the higher principles and third being religious dialogue. The authors assume that Al-Faruqi's approach in the study of religion is based on scientific studies, rationality, objectivity, and is without prejudice.

Nevertheless, Haslina Ibrahim (2015), in an article, *The Study of Other Religions Beyond the Polemical Approach: Irfan A.H. Fattah and His Objectivity*, analysed the approach of Irfan A.H. Fattah in the study of religion. The author stated that Irfan A.H. Fattah's approach is unique due to a combination of traditional and modern approaches. Using an academic, objective, and impartial approach while avoiding methods of refutation, defence and being apologetic are the approaches by Irfan A.H. Fattah in the study of religion.

The study of religion is one of the methods of Islamic preaching and the book, *Izhar Al-Haq* by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is the author's contribution to Islamic preaching. The preaching methodology of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi was discussed by Wan Haslan Khairuddin & Indriaty Ismail (2013), in an article *Christianity and Dakwah Method of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi*. The authors explained that the preaching methodology of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is a manifestation of the Quranic exclamation of *Al-Da'wah bi Al-Hikmah, Al-Maw'zatu Al-Hasanah, and Al-Mujādalah bi Allati Hiya Ahsan*.

However, another article by Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al. (2013), entitled *Al-Kairanawi's Method of Critique on the Bible: An Analysis of Izhar Al-Haq*, discussed Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's critical approach to the Bible. The authors explained that the distortion of the Bible, abrogation of the Bible and refutation of Trinity were the main focuses in Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's critical approach. Historical arguments, analogical arguments and textual analysis applied by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in criticising are influenced by the Quran's critical approach.

Meanwhile, an article entitled *Critical Thinking of Rahmatullah al-Kairanawi in Religionswissenschaft* by Wan Haslan Khairuddin et al (2013) discussed the critical approach of Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in *Izhar Al-Haq*, his criticisms on the Bible, and the discussion on the doctrine of Trinity. Authors conclude that Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's critical approach in exposing the contradictions and confusion existing in Christianity, particularly in the Bible, is unique.

An article entitled *Rahmat Allah Al-Hindi Al-Kayranawi and His Book Demonstration of the Truth: Islamic Criticism of the Old and New Testaments: Islamic Criticism of the Old and New Testaments* by Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu (2017), examined Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's methodology and style of debate with Christian. Author has explained Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's awareness and adoption on many occasions of the methods and conclusions of Biblical criticism helped him achieve his goal behind the publication of *Izhar Al-Haq*.

Aisyah Rabiah Abdullah (2020), in a dissertation entitled *Rahmatullah AL-Kairanawi's Views on the Bible: An Analysis on his book Izhar Al-Haq*, discussed Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi's opinions regarding the four Bibles and the reasons behind his dealings with Christians and the writing of his book *Izhar Al-Haq*. Author concludes that Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi is one of the most prominent scholars of India, who confronted Christian proselytism towards Muslim. He applies a unique method of conversation and debating.

Observing the gap in previous research and the fact that Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi both have a different understanding in the study of religion, thus, this research focuses on the similarities and differences between Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion. Therefore, this research is relevant to be conducted.

1.9 Research Methodology

This research applies a qualitative methodology as it is part of a social science research. The qualitative methodology involves the process of collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. Data on the methodologies of Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi in the study of religion were collected and analysed in this research.

Library research is then used as a data collection method as it is able to collect existing data in the form of texts. Primary data sourced from the Quran, hadith, dissertation and thesis while secondary data sourced from the journal articles, conference and seminar papers, as well as books. The Tun Sri Lanang, UKM library and the USIM library were the main places in finding related books, texts, journals, newspapers and magazines.

A content analysis approach was applied by the researcher in data analysis. The aim of the content analysis is to categorise and compare ideas of Ninian Smart and Rahmatullah Al-Kairanwi in the study of religion. It is used to identify similarities and differences between the methodologies of both scholars in the study of religion.

