

HAMAD BIN KHALIFA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING RELIGION AND ITS
APPLICABILTY: A CASE STUDY OF THE AKAN RELIGION

BY

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A Dissertation Submitted to the College of

Islamic Studies

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Islamic Studies - Comparative Religion

April 2018

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on Al Faruqi's method on the study of religious phenomena which has been developed in his book entitled "Christian Ethics". The prime objective is to apply his method on the study of African Traditional Religion. It exposed and examined the usefulness of Al Faruqi's methods of studying religion, specifically, the principles of disengagement; theoretical principles, and meta-religion, in relation to the Akan religion in Ghana. Information's about the Akan religion in this study however was based primarily on a set of texts published in the 21st c. in English by native intellectuals. Though the study on one side argued that, Al Faruqi's methods just like any other method of studying religion cannot be said to be free from some forms of criticism, on the other side, it pointed out that, the method's tremendous contribution to the study of religion in general cannot as well be undermined. The study in its attempt to apply Al Faruqi's methods - jointly via, a descriptive, comparative, interpretative and exegetical methods - highlighted how his principles contribute to the understanding of the Akan religion in Ghana. And as such, it has been envisaged that, this work will help readers appreciate the uniqueness of Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion, and as well, discover how his method can be applied in studying African Traditional Religion in general.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe it to Almighty Allah, for his infinite mercies and guidance since the beginning of my life. I equally extend my profound gratitude and appreciation to all my family members and friends, both home and abroad, also I will like to gratefully acknowledge my program coordinator Prof. Dr. Badrane benlahcen, my thesis supervisor Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Zain, and my examiners Prof. Dr. Mohammed Khalifa, and Prof. Dr. Eltijani Abdelgadir Hamid Rahma who despite their tight engagements took time off to see me through this work. I also express a deep gratitude to all academic and non-academic staff of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, especially individuals from the College of Islamic Studies who had helped me immensely in their own special ways. Thank you one and all.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, in the persons of, Abdallah Ali Cisse and Barakatu Hussein.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Generally, questions related to the study of religion could fall under three main categories, including: what is religion?, why do we study religion?, and how do we study religion?. While the “what” relates to the content of religion, the “why” delves into the rationale behind studying religion. Finally, the “how” examines the appropriate methodology to study religion. Enquiry into the content and the rationale behind studying religion are questions that are usually tackled within the domain of theology and philosophy. However, questions concerning the appropriate methodology for studying religion remains a major concern for comparative religion.

One important feature of various works on comparative religion is to find out the appropriate methodology for studying religion; or to put it differently, finding the best way to guarantee objectivity in the study of religion. Theological approaches, particularly in connection with the study of religion, are not without problems. This is because, they look at a particular religion from its own supernatural categories, which does not guarantee high levels of objectivity. Other approaches that are used by some scholars in the study of religion are adopted from the humanities and the social science disciplines. These approaches, however, perceive religion from different perspectives including historical, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological, and sociological. Furthermore, these methods have also been criticized for their inability to provide a full picture of what exactly the essence of religion is because they examine religion from humanities or social science perspectives.

In as much as scholars have had disagreements regarding the appropriate methodology for studying religion, the meaning or essence of religion in itself has also been subject to debate throughout history. This is clearly understood from W.J Boot’s statement: “no

‘neat’ definition of religion exists”⁽¹⁾. This statement meant that, none of the available definitions of religion is satisfactory. The problem of the essence of religion becomes more complicated when the meaning of the African Traditional Religion is considered; an area of research that has engaged the minds of many scholars, both Africans and Westerners for decades⁽²⁾.

Some early western views on Africa suggested that, the continent before colonization was a Dark Continent where people had no idea of God⁽³⁾. In other words, the natives did not have political organizations, nor any type of religion, prior to the genuine faith and higher standards of culture introduced by Arabs⁽⁴⁾. This view might implicate that, there is nothing called African Traditional Religion. Contrary to this view, however, there is another western view that suggests that, the Africans knew God long before colonization, and that they had their own religious systems⁽⁵⁾.

In his contribution regarding the nature of the African religion, Mbiti⁽⁶⁾ claims the existence of African Traditional Religion, pointing out to some forms of difficulties when studying it, including, finding the appropriate methodology. According to him, the main difficulty in studying African Traditional Religion is that it has no sacred writings. Furthermore, the written records are scarce except for those taken from communities who

1 - Should Confucianism Be Studied as a Religious Tradition?, W.J Boot, Journal of Chinese religion XVIII (1990): PP.143-159.

2 - See for instance, J. S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, Heineman, 1969, E. B. Idowu, African Traditional Religion, S.C.M., 1973, Leo Frobenius, The Voice of Africa, Hutchison, 1913, E. W. Smith, (ed.), African Ideas of God, Edinburgh, 1966, John Oman, The Natural and the Supernatural, C.U.P., 1931, Evans Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, 1965, C. Bouquet, Man and Deity, Heffer, Cambridge, 1933, R. H. Stone, In Africa’s Forest and Jungle, New York, 1899, Noel Baudin, Fetishism and Fetish Worshipers, New York, 1885, R. F. Burton, Abeokuta and the Cameroons Nits, Vol. London, 1863, T. J. Hutchison, Impressions of Western Africa, 1858, and also, R. S. Rattray, Religion and Art in Ashanti, O.U.P., 1927.

3 - African Traditional Religion, E. B. Idowu, S.C.M., 1973, p.87.

4 - The Voice of Africa, Leo Frobenius, Hutchison, 1913, Vol. 1, p. xll.

5 - See, Religion and Art in Ashanti, R. S. Rattray, O.U.P., 1927, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, P. A. Talbot, O.U.P., 1926, The Ewe/Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, A. B. Ellis, Chapman, 1894, Faith, Fancies and Fetish, S. S. Farrow, London, S.P.C.K., 1926.

6 - He is a Kenyan-born Christian religious philosopher and writer. He is an ordained Anglican priest, and as of 2005 a canon.

were in contact with Islamic culture and European traders, explorers, and missionaries. These written records date back to the nineteenth century. It has also been noted that, religious objects such as shrines, altars, magical and medical objects, sacred stools, masks, and religious dress, from which a certain amount of historical data can also be examined, do not last for many generations due to the climatic conditions in tropical Africa. Therefore, only few religious objects are available today which date back to more than one and a half century. For this reason, the historian of African Religions is primarily left with oral sources in the form of: local dialects, concepts, myths, stories, proverbs, prayers, ritual words, secrets of religious personages, songs, and music, from which he/she may gather some evidence regarding the history of Traditional Religion ⁽⁷⁾.

In view of these methodological difficulties, this work aims to discuss the nature of African Traditional Religions by focusing on the Akan religion in Ghana. It attempts to explore the usefulness of Al Faruqi's methodology to the study of African Traditional Religion. In other words, the work is an enquiry into the nature and meaning of the Akan religion on the basis of Al Faruqi's methodology.

1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS IN THE TOPIC

1.2.1 AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING RELIGION: Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion can be divided into four main principles, and these are: principles of disengagement, the theoretical principles, principles of meta-religion, and lastly, principles of dialogue. The first principle, the principles of disengagement, is a prerequisite that forms the basis for an objective study of religions. It is made up of two main parts namely, suspension of judgements and living with life facts. With suspension of Judgement, Al-Faruqi meant a separation or disconnection from one's own religious

7 - Traditional Religions in Africa, John Smith Mbiti, found in Historical Atlas Of The Religions Of The World, By Ismail Raji al Faruqi and David E. Sopher, Macmillan Publishing, New York, 1974, p. 61.

beliefs, presupposed feelings or any form of misconception before studying a particular religion. Life fact for him is a religious experience. And as such, living with life fact in this context will involve putting oneself into the religion that one studies, in order to be able to perceive and view the religion in the way and manner its adherents perceive and view it.

The second principle, known as theoretical principles, are those principles that govern the understanding and comparative study of religions, of which there are five: 1. Internal coherence, which means the absence of internal contradiction within the teachings of the religion, 2. Coherence with cumulative human knowledge, meaning the absence of contradiction between the teachings of the religion and cumulative human knowledge, 3. Coherence with religious experience of mankind, meaning the absence of contradiction between the teachings of the religion with the religious experience of mankind, 4. Correspondence with reality, meaning the absence of contradiction between the teachings of the religion and reality, and finally, 5. Upward march of man towards ethicality as the main goal of religion, which means the teachings of religion should be geared towards uplifting the moral status of its practitioners.

The third principle, meta-religion serves as the basis for evaluating religions, and it is made up of the following: the assertion that, there exist only two realms: the Ideal as and the Actual. The assertion that, the Ideal is important to the existence of the Actual, the assertion that, the Relevance of the Ideal to the Actual is in the form of command, the assertion that, the existence of Actual realm is in itself Good and not evil, the assertion that, the Actual realm in itself is not perfect by nature, and finally, the assertion that, Perfection of the cosmos is the sole responsibility of man.

The fourth set of principles, according to him, are the principles of dialogue, and they are those that should be observed in order to ensure success in an interfaith dialogue. These

include: no religious pronouncement is beyond critique, internal coherence must exist, proper historical perspective must be maintained, correspondence with reality must exist, freedom from absolutized scriptural figurization, and dialogue should be conducted on areas where there is a greater possibility of success such as ethical values. This work only focuses on the first three methods, namely the principle of disengagement, theoretical principles, and the meta-religion.

1.2.2 APPLICABILITY: Applicability in this context means how this method can be applied.

1.2.3 AKAN: The word "Akan" linguistically means the first, foremost, former place, rank or time; at the first, before, formally, previously. It is one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana, and as a religion, one amongst the other forms of the African Traditional Religion.

1.2.4 AKAN RELIGION: The Akan religion is the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Akans, resulting from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Akans, made up of traditions (myths and rituals) passed on from one generation to the next, which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Akans.

1.3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The Akan religion in Ghana is a type of religion that is generally seen and understood to be strongly connected to the social and cultural life of the Akan people. It is unlike Christianity or Islam in that it does not have a single founder. Instead, it is attributed to the Akans themselves, and its teachings are believed to have been handed over orally from the past generations to the present. However, due to its lack of a central leader, as well as religious texts, scholars are just beginning to wrestle with the problem of its history, and the method to be used in studying it. This problem is heightened due to the

fact that the meaning of religion itself is ambiguous. Its definition has remained a perennial philosophical problem and there is little agreement as to what it is. It is defined on one hand, as a set of beliefs and practices rooted in revelation or the divine, which aims at transforming humans, and on the other as a discipline in the university, which is taught and understood as a subject. The ambiguity in the meaning of religion could be said to have created methodological problems in relation to the study of religion, which has probably accounted for the reason why most African theologians have contented themselves in describing the African Traditional Religion and its practices, instead of investigating what the term African Traditional Religion really stands for.

This work therefore is an attempt to contribute to the existing works on the methodological approaches to studying religions in general, with special focus on the Akan religion, by exploring a new avenue for studying the religion based on Ismail Al Faruqi's methodology.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion?
2. In what ways is his methodology applicable to the Akan religion?
3. And how does the application of his methodology help in understanding the Akan religion?

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives below forms the focus of the study. They include, to:

1. To explain Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion.

2. To investigate various approaches that have been used in studying the Akan religion and African Traditional Religion in general.

3. And finally, to explore ways and means Al Faruqi's methodology can be used to understand the Akan religion.

1.6 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The scope of this research is the Akan Religion in Ghana. This is because the Akan religion currently serves as one of the major forms of the African Religion in Ghana, and as an ethnic group the predominant among the others ⁽⁸⁾. In addition, many scholarly works on the religion are available making it easier for data collections and referencing. Furthermore, the search covered the Akan Religion because the researcher is himself a Ghanaian who has lived amongst the Akans and understands the Akan language. This makes it easier for him to directly access Akan sources without much difficulties.

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

By attempting an investigation into the Akan religion, and the applicability of Al Faruqi's methodology in studying it, the study finally serves the following purposes:

1. It contributes to the existing works on the methodological approaches to studying religions in the sense that it explores a new avenue for studying the nature of religion based on Isma'il Al Faruqi's methodology.

2. The work also contributes to the ongoing debate regarding the meaning and nature of African Traditional Religion itself by way of investigating the essence of the Akan religion in Ghana.

8 - The Akan as an ethnic group forms (47.5%) of the Ghanaian population, followed by the Mole Dagbani (16.6%), the Eve (13.9%), the Ga-Dangme (7.4%), and the Mande who form the smallest ethnic group (1.1%) in Ghana. See: 2010 population and housing census: Summary report of final report, Ghana statistical service, Sakoa press limited, May 2012, p. 5.

3. Furthermore, studying the Akan religion contributes towards exploring what Akans actually know, feel and think about their religion.
4. This study, moreover, forms a good basis for a successful comparison between the Akan religion and other world religions, which will help understand and appreciate the behavior of practitioners of other religions.
5. Another purpose the study serves is peaceful coexistence. In other words, understanding the Akan religion will help people of other religions to promote peaceful coexistence with the Akan traditionalists in Ghana.
6. Studying the Akan religion helps us to know the Akan culture and way of life which includes their language, beliefs, arts, literature, drumming, dancing, music, inheritance, occupation, moral values, festivals, socio-political institutions, customs as well as rites and practices.

1.8 METHODOLOGY

The choice of methodology in this study is informed by the nature of the study itself. Since this study intended to explore how Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion could be applied on the Akan religion, the work by nature was explorative, and as such adopted a number of approaches that helped to achieve this aim. The first approach was, the descriptive approach. This was employed to depict the nature and meaning of the Akan religion. The second was a comparative/analytical approach, which was employed in an in-depth analysis of his methodology, as well as its application on the Akan religion in Ghana. The main argument of this work was that, Isma'il Al Faruqi methodology is feasible. This is because it can be used to study the Akan religion. And however, although his methodology in general is capable of being applied on other world religions, it at the same time cannot escape some forms of human limitations.

1.9 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Some limitations of the research include its special focus on the Akan religion rather than all forms of the African Traditional Religion. This has no great negative impact on the study due to the similarities in beliefs and practices that exist between all forms of the African Traditional Religions. In addition, most information gathered on the Akan religion in this work was based on existing literatures on the religion, coupled with the understanding of the researcher as an African writing on an African Traditional Religion. Due to time constraint however, the researcher was not able to conduct and gather information via interviews and questionnaires. This limitation on the other side also, did not affect the study negatively because, the researcher tried as much as possible to rely on sources that are generally accepted as authoritative as far as studying the religion is concerned.

1.10 LITERATURE REVIEW

Works on African Traditional Religion can generally be grouped under three main categories namely, Early European works on African Traditional Religion, efforts of early African writers and scholars, and then, contemporary studies on African Traditional Religion. Despite the fact that all these works employed different approaches in studying the African Traditional Religion, one factor that binds them together is that they all describe and/or analyze an aspect of the African Traditional Religion, without necessarily evaluating its content. Early European works on African Traditional Religion is further divided into two. The first category includes works of Christian missionaries, colonial soldiers, and colonial administrators amongst whom were anthropologists, and ethnographers who were known to have lived amongst the Africans. The second categories of works are of those Europeans who never had any direct contact with the African societies but rather depended extensively on information provided by Christian

missionaries and colonial administrators. Both works, however, are seen as highly motivated by curiosity and personal interest. While colonial administrators aimed at gaining some knowledge about the African Religion in order to help in ruling the Africans, Christian missionaries on the other side, aimed at understanding the religion in order to be able to devise a strategy that best suits the African context in terms of spreading the Gospel.

It is important to point out that, not all of these authors made thorough investigation on the African Traditional Religion. Some of them such as the colonial civil servants, the missionaries, and the explorers mostly did their research on part time basis. The anthropologists and sociologists amongst them did examine the religion as it was. However, most of them including the theologians investigated the African Traditional Religion without knowledge of African Languages. Amongst the missionary works produced on African Traditional Religion during these periods include: “In Africa’s forest and jungle” ⁽⁹⁾ by R. H. Stone, “Fetishism and Fetish worshippers” ⁽¹⁰⁾ by Noel Baudin, “Abeokuta and the Cameroon Nit” ⁽¹¹⁾ by R. F. Burton, and “Impressions of western Africa” ⁽¹²⁾ by T. J. Hutchison. These works and many others, however, are particularly seen to be subjective in a sense that they could not see anything good associated with the African Traditional Religion. The anthropologists amongst the colonizing powers were seen to be less dogmatic compared to the missionaries. As a result, they had much more positive perception of the African Traditional Religion than the missionaries. Amongst the works produced by such anthropologist includes, “Religion and arts in Ashanti” ⁽¹³⁾ by R. S. Rattray, “The peoples of southern Nigeria” ⁽¹⁴⁾ by P. A. Talbot, “The Ewe/Yoruba

9 - Published in New York in 1899.

10 - Published in New York in 1885.

11 - Published in London in 1863.

12 - Published in 1858.

13 - Published in 1927.

14 - Published in 1926.

speaking peoples of the slave coast of West Africa”⁽¹⁵⁾ by A. B. Ellis, and “Faith, Fancies and Fetish”⁽¹⁶⁾ by S. S. Farrow⁽¹⁷⁾. These works, together with that of the Christian missionaries, the colonial soldiers and administrators, are by nature seen to be analytic and descriptive, and not evaluative. In other words, they attempted studying the African Traditional Religion without objectively evaluating its contents.

On the other side, works of early African writers and scholars on African traditional religion can be divided into two main categories namely, works by African nationalists of the pre-independence era, and, works by ordained ministers and clerics with Christian theological background of training. These works were seen to be more defensive in nature. Thus, the writers wrote extensively with the intention of defending the African Traditional Religion by correcting certain misconceptions that were portrayed by some early European writings on the African Traditional Religion. J. B. Danquah for instance, is an example of a nationalist. His writings were keen to disabuse the minds of Europeans concerning the widely publicized inferiority of the black race and the distortion of their culture in the writings of colonial writers and some Christian missionary authors. His famous book entitled, *The Akan doctrine of God*⁽¹⁸⁾ testifies to this fact. In this book, he strongly contended that Africans, with special reference to the Akans, have as much genuine belief in God as Europeans. The aim of African ordained Christian scholars and theologians who also wrote on African Traditional Religion, unlike the nationalists, was more religious. Amongst these writers are E.B. Idowu⁽¹⁹⁾ and J.S. Mbiti⁽²⁰⁾. Though their approaches are seen to be more theological than philosophical, they both have been

15 - Published in 1894.

16 - Published in 1926.

17 - J. O. Awolalu, *what is African Traditional Religion?* Studies in comparative religion, Vol 9, No. 1.

18 - Published in London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis group. 1944.

19 - See, E. B. Idowu. *African Traditional Religion*. S.C.M. 1973.

20 - See, John Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 1969.

credited for having written extensively on this subject, and as such have produced general texts to guide the systematic study of African Traditional Religion.

Contemporary works on African Traditional Religion features a period where the religion has consequently emerged as a full-fledged academic discipline thought in various academic institutions, using various systematic approaches including social scientific methods in teaching it. These approaches include, History, phenomenology, comparative studies, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. In short, as early European works on African Traditional Religion are descriptive in nature, early African works on the religion are defensive in nature, while contemporary works are characterized by systematic approaches to studying the religion. Two main critique can be made against all previous works on the African Traditional Religion and these are, one: the social scientific methods used in studying the religion in the contemporary times, can only tackle an aspect of the religion, and not the religion as a whole. Two: Almost all the approaches adopted by the previous works, one way or the other, ends up describing and analyzing beliefs and practices of the African Traditional Religion without necessarily evaluating the contents of these beliefs and practices.

An example of a methodology of studying religion that provides a mechanism for describing, analyzing, and evaluating the content of a religious belief and practice is that of Isma'il Al Faruqi. His methodology includes a proposed meta-religion which, according to him, serves as a theology free basis upon which all religions should be evaluated. There are lots of works addressing Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion and its application. Haslina Ibrahim ⁽²¹⁾ in her article entitled: The feasibility of Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles: sharing of research experience, focuses on how Al

21 - Dr. Haslina Ibrahim, currently teaching at the department of Usuludin and comparative religion, international Islamic University, Malaysia.

Faruqi's meta-religion can be applied on the four main religions in Malaysia namely, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism ⁽²²⁾. Many other works can also be found dealing with describing the methodology. One example is, an M.A thesis entitled: Ma'aalim manhaj dirasata al-Masiihiyya bayna Abi Mohammed Bin Hazm wa Ismail Raji Al Faruqi (Methodology of studying Christianity: A comparative approach between Ibn Hazm and Al Faruqi) ⁽²³⁾. Despite many researches ⁽²⁴⁾ on Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion and its application, none of these studies, however, attempted exploring how this methodology can be applied on African Traditional Religion. This, however, will form the main focus of this research. This research on the other side, aims at filling this gap by attempting to apply Al Faruqi's methodology on the African Traditional Religion, specifically on the Akan religion in Ghana, in order to explore how this methodology could enhance a better understanding of the religion.

22 - This study conducted an in-depth interview with learned representatives of the four major religions in Malaysia. The work on the basis of Al-Faruqi's meta-religion principles concluded that, there are five permanent or fundamental issues central to all religions, and these are; Reality/ies and its constituents, the relationship between/among the constituents (be it there is relationship or not), the purpose of existence/life, the notion of good and bad and the destiny of life.

23 - By Zeena Mohammed Baakha, International Islamic University of Malaysia, 1999.

24 - For example, an M.A thesis entitled, Manhaj Al Faruqi fii dirasati al Yahuudiyya (Al Faruqi's methodology of studying Judaism), by Linda Abulafia, University of Hadj Lakhdar Batna, department of usuludiin and comparative religion, 2009. Doctorate thesis entitled: Ismail Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and inter-faith dialogue: the man, the scholar, the participant, by Charles D. Fletcher, The Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, 2008. M.A thesis entitled: Al Faruqi's approach to comparative religion: A critical study of his book Christian ethics, by Mohd Murat Bin Md Aris, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2002. M.A thesis entitled: Al manhaj al finominologiyya fii dirasati al din wa tatbiiqaatihi inda Ismail Al Faruqi (Al Faruqi's perspective on phenomenology and its application in the study of religion), by Aamir Mahmoud Shinyur, college of Islamic studies, Hamad bin Khalifa university, 2015. M.A thesis entitled: A comparative study between the perspectives of Ismail R. Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Leonard J. Swedler (1929), by Maha Saad Elnashar, College of Islamic studies, Hamad bin Khalifa University, 2017. An article entitled: Al Faruqi between the history of religion and Islamic theology, by Abdulkader Tayob, Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa, 2013. An article entitled: Al Faruqi and his views on comparative religion, by Zuriati Bt Mohammed Rashid, Dr. Engku Ahmad Zaki Engki Alwi, Faculty of contemporary Islamic Studies, Sultan Zainal Abidin University, Kuala Terengganu, 2010. An article entitled: New trend in religious studies as developed and proposed by Al Faruqi, by Tasnim Abdul Rahman, Zuriati Mohd Rashid, Wan Sabri Wan Yusof and Ahmad Nabil Bin Amir, Sultan Zainal Abidin University, Malaysia, 2014. An article entitled: Ismail Al Faruqi on Musalim-Christian Dialogue: An analysis from a Christian perspective, by F. Peter Ford, 1993.

1.11 STUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

This study is organized into An Introduction, followed by four chapter, then a conclusion. The introduction consists of issues related to background of the study, statement of the problem, research question, objectives, methodology, scope of study, structure of the study, relevance of the study and limitations. Therefore, the introduction discusses why and how the research will be conducted.

Chapter one titled: The Akans of Ghana consists of discussions related to the Akan ethnic group, their world view, meaning of religion in general, nature of the Akan religion, sources of the Akan religion, and then, the trends and various approaches used in studying the Akan religion.

Chapter two of the study dealt with, the bibliography of Ismail Al Faruqi, early development of his methodology, and then finally, an exposition of his methodology.

Chapter three is titled: Applying the principles of disengagement and theoretical principles on the Akan religion. This is made up of a description of the Akan religion based on Akan sources, followed by the systematization of the information's gathered from these sources.

Chapter four which is the last chapter is titled: Applying the meta-religion on the Akan religion. This chapter evaluates the Akan religion on the basis of Al Fruqi's meta-religion by comparing the Akan metaphysics with Al Faruqi's meta-religion. This was done in order to explore the extent at which they agree and disagree.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AKANS OF GHANA

2.1 THE AKAN ETHNIC GROUP

2.1.1 The Akan People

Akan is a West African ethnic group and the largest ethnic group in Ghana ⁽²⁵⁾. It is made up of several sub groups including: the Ashanti, the Akwamu, the Akyim, the Akuapim, the Denkyira, the Abbron, the Aowin, the Ahanta, the Anyi, the Baoule, the Chokosi, the Fanti, the Kwahu, the Sefwi, the Ahafo, the Assin, the Evalue, the Wassa the Adjukru, the Akye, the Alladian, the Attie, the M'Bato, the Abidji, the Avikam, the Avatime, the Ebrie, the Ehotile, the Nzema, the Abbe, the Aboure, the Coromantins, and others. The largest and most popular amongst these sub groups in Ghana are the Ashanti, Fanti, Akyim, Akuapim and the Assin ⁽²⁶⁾. The language spoken by its members is known as the *Twi* language, while its religion is generally referred to as the *Akan Religion*. The word *Akan* is usually pronounced in the *Twi* language as *Akane*, from the root word *Kan* or *Kane* which means; the first, foremost or former place, rank or time, before, formerly, or previously ⁽²⁷⁾. This could mean that the *Akan* ethnic group is an ancient ethnic group, or that, the *Akans* were the first settlers of Ghana. However, for some, the root of the word *Akan* is *Ɔkanni*. And this literally means a nice, refined, well-mannered, civilized or a cultured person ⁽²⁸⁾.

Although it is generally believed that the *Akans* originally migrated to the present day Ghana, there has not been a unanimous agreement regarding their place of origin. Some have argued that, their place of origin is the Chad-Benue regions in Western Sudan,

25 - Base on the 2010 Ghana population census, the *Akans* are the predominant ethnic group in Ghana with 47.5% of the population, followed by the Mole Dagbani (16.6%), the Ewe (13.9%), Ga-Dangme (7.4%), and the Mande who form the smallest ethnic group (1.1%) in Ghana. See, Ghana statistical service, *2010 population and housing census: Summary report of final report* (Accra: Sakoa press limited, May 2012), p. 5.

26 - J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1968), p. 198.

27 - Christaller, *Christaller's Dictionary of the Akan Language* (1933), p. 224.

28 - K. Nkansa Kyeremateng, *The Akans of Ghana: Their Customs, History, and Institutions* (Accra: Optimum Design and Publishing Service, 2004), p. 26.

where they later migrated from and settled in the forest regions of Ghana around the 11th century ⁽²⁹⁾. Others suggest that, the Akans are originally from the north-west of Ghana, and north-east of Cote d'Ivoire, but later migrated to the forest regions of Ghana due to the growth in their population ⁽³⁰⁾. J.B Danquah opines that the Akans were originally part of the old Ghana Empire (on the bend of the Niger) before migrating to present day Ghana ⁽³¹⁾, perhaps after the fall of the Empire in the 1200s. Despite these differences in opinion, however, one thing that is mostly certain about the Akans is that they migrated from somewhere to the present day Ghana and are currently located in the southern and middle portions of Ghana, stretching from the coast in the south to the Gonja state in the north, and from the Volta in the east to the Côte D'Ivoire border in the West ⁽³²⁾.

There are seven clans of the *Akan* with each having its own totem. However, because the *Akan* are made up of several sub groups, there are different names for the various clans though their totem remains the same forming the basis for the seven classifications of the clans. The seven clans includes: the Abretuo clan which has the Leopard as its totem. This clan specifically leads the Awawu group of the Akan people. Another clan is the Aduana and its members have the dog as their totem. This clan on the other side leads the Akuamu group of the Akan people. Agona is also another clan and it has the parrot as its totem leading the Dankyira group of the Akan. Akona another clan uses the Bull (cow) as its totem and it leads the Adansi group of the Akan. The Asene clan on the other side has the Bat as its totem and it works with the Ayoko, Asona as well as the Agona groups of the Akan group, while the Asona clan has the Crow as its totem and leads the Akyim and Fanti groups of the Akan. The last clan is called the Ayoko and its totem is said to be the

29 - Chachah, Yao & Kuada, John, *Understanding the People and Their Culture* (Accra: Woeli Publishing, 1999), p. 12.

30 - Fynn, J. K., *A Junior History of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishing, 1975), p. 27.

31 - J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 198.

32 - Cosmas Justice Ebo Sarbah, *A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values* (University of Birmingham: Unpublished Thesis, 2010), p. 28.

Falcon, and this clan is known to be associated with the Ashantis of the Akan ethnic group. Though the clans are seven and each has its own totem, there are also sometimes more than one totem representing one particular clan ⁽³³⁾.

The *Akan* are best known for their proverbial wisdom. Proverbs are popular maxims used to express practical truths gained through experience and observation. They are expressed not only in words but also through music, particularly traditional drumming and dance, also through textile art specifically *adinkra* and *kente* cloths. Proverbs constitute an important characteristic of the Akan language(s) and are used to imbue communication with life. Proverbs, metaphorical guides for righteous living, provide a better understanding of the Akan outlook on existence, both physical and spiritual. One example of an Akan proverb is: *No One Points out God to a Child*. This proverb appears to be pointing out God's omnipresence so much so that even a child can know him without necessarily being taught about him. One thing that distinguishes the Akan from many of the other cultural groupings in Ghana is that they are a matrilineal people. Every Akan belongs to a clan or *abusua* (family) and is bound to that *abusua* (family) by blood relation. They believe that during intercourse the *sunsum* (spirit) from the father mingles with the *mogya* (blood) of the mother giving rise to conception. This joining of spiritual and physical components gives rise to the mother-child bond laying the foundation for the matrilineal system of descent by the Akan ⁽³⁴⁾.

33 - K. Akwadapa, *The Akans, Other Africans and The Sirius Star System* (2008), p. 20-21.

34 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), p. 24.

2.1.2 The Akan World View

The world view of the Akan consists of their idea about the universe, its structure and origin, and the relationship between the physical and spiritual world. The Akan account of how the universe (cosmos) came into being can be found in some Akan myths. According to one of these, *ɔdomankoma* (the Creator) first made the sky and then the earth, rivers and plants. Finally He created man and animals. The animals fed on the plants already created and, in turn, provided food for man. Man also needed protection in his environment and for this reason God created the spirits of the waters, forests and rocks. Thus, according to the Akan, everything was created in an ordered fashion, and every creature has its place and special or particular function in the universe. Associated to the creation myths is the explanation of how the creator came to be separated from men. It is generally believed amongst the Akans that before the separation, God and men lived very close to each other in a relationship which could be linked to that of a father and his children, then something happened which changed all this ⁽³⁵⁾.

The myth about how God finally separated himself from his creation is mostly given in an Akan narrative entitled: *Abrewa na ni mba*, which is literally translated as: The Old Woman and Her Children. According to this story, *Nyame* (God) and men once lived very close together so much so that, men could reach, touch, and feel Him. However, an old woman began to pound her *fufuu* regularly, and each day she decided to pound her *fufuu*, the pestle hit *Nyame* (God). Although *Nyame* (God) continuously warned the woman to stop hitting him or else he would move far away into the sky, the woman continued to pound her *fufuu*. So *Nyame* (God) in fact moved far away into the sky where the people could no longer reach him. The old woman, determined to find a way to reach *Nyame*

35 - Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: International Private Limited, 1978), p. 21-22.

(God) and bring him back instructed her children to pile all of the mortars they could find on top of one another until the tower of mortars reached where *Nyame* (God) was. The children complied, however, they were one mortar short of reaching *Nyame* (God). Because they could not find any more mortars the old woman told them to take one out from the bottom and put it on the top. When her children did so the tower of mortars fell to the ground causing mass destruction and killing many people ⁽³⁶⁾.

Other accounts of this same story exist but with slight differences. For example, in *Opoko's* ⁽³⁷⁾ narration of the same story he appears not to have included the point that *Nyame* (God) continuously warned the woman to stop hitting him or else he would move far away into the sky ⁽³⁸⁾. Despite this slight difference, both stories if understood symbolically and not from the literal point of view contains some good moral lessons including the following: Firstly, the cause of man's separation from *Nyame* (God) is attributed to man's own misdeeds. Which suggests that, the more man acts against the will of God the far he gets away from God. Secondly, it could also be observed from the story that human beings initially taught that it was within their physical power to reach *Nyame* (God). This scenario is reflected in the old woman's suggestion that, her children should bring together and pile all their mortars to form a ladder in order to reach *Nyame* (God). This human assumption, according to the story, was proven to be wrong since they were not able to achieve that. This therefore points to the necessity of religion or spirituality in Akan as an important means in restoring the original harmony, relationship or unity that existed earlier between man and *Nyame* (God).

36 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, p. 24-25.

37 - He was formally associate professor of religion and ethics in the Institute of African studies at the University of Ghana. He is an authority on African Traditional Religion, and a retired professor of religious studies at Lafayette College Pennsylvania.

38 - Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 23-24.

Regarding cosmology, or the Akan view about the structure of the Universe, Gyekye⁽³⁹⁾ points out that, the *Akans* have a dualistic concept of reality. In other words, for them, reality is made up of two parts, the seen (material) and the unseen (spiritual), with the unseen (spiritual) having more power than the seen (material). According to Gyekye, there is no distinction between the sensible (material) world and the nonsensible (spiritual) world in the sense of the latter being real and the former being unreal as in other metaphysical systems. Rather, both are real even though in ultimate terms the nonperceivable, is more real, for it is upon it the perceivable (material), or the phenomenal (physical) world depends for sustenance. Gyekye argues that, the distinction between the seen and the unseen world lies entirely in the perceivability of one and the unperceivability of the other. But the perceivability of the one – namely the world of nature – does not in any way detract from its reality. He argues that, from this perspective it would seem that reality in *Akan* conceptions is one and homogeneous. But this in fact is not the case. For the characteristics of the physical world are different from those of the spiritual world. And therefore, the *Akan* metaphysical world is a dual world with the activities of the inhabitants of the spiritual world extending to, and being ‘felt’ in, the physical world⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In addition to the *Akan* dualistic concept of reality, they also believe that all things both animate and inanimate within the physical world are endowed with varying degrees of *sunsum* (Spirit). One of the most important spirits the *Akan* revere besides *Nyame* (the Ultimate Spirit or God), is the *Nsamanfo*, which is the spirits of the ancestors. They consider *Asase Yaa* (Mother Earth) as the spirit in charge of the earth affairs. For

39 - Kwame Gyekye is Ghanaian philosopher, and an important figure in the development of modern African philosophy. He studies first at the University of Ghana, then at Harvard where he obtained his PHD. He is a professor of philosophy at the University of Ghana, and a visiting professor of philosophy and African-American studies at Temple University.

40 - Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (USA: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 69.

example, an *Akan* cannot weed, cut trees, plant or farm without asking permission from the spirit in charge of the earth affairs. They also believe in *Absom*, thus spirits that serve as intermediaries or deities between *Nyame* (God) and man. The *Akans* believe in the omnipresence of the *Nsamanfo* (ancestors), and this is made evident by their daily acts such as, the pouring of libation, throwing on the ground the first morsel of food, as well as periodic ancestral ceremonies known as the *Adae*. The *Akan* believe that each individual consists of certain material and spiritual elements. The material elements is made up of *honam* (body) and *mogya* (blood), whereas the spiritual elements is made up of the *kra* (life force/soul), *honhom* (breath of Divine Life), and *sunsum* (spirit). According to them, *Nyame* (God) bestows these material and spiritual elements on humans at conception and birth; however, when they “die”, the *honam* (body) and *mogya* (blood) join *Asase Yaa* (Mother Earth), whereas the *kra* (soul), *honhom* (breath of Divine Life), and *sunsum* (spirit) return to *Nyame* (God) ⁽⁴¹⁾.

2.2 THE AKAN RELIGION

2.2.1 Meaning Of Religion

Although there has not been a unanimous agreement regarding the etymology of the term *religion*, the term is believed by some to have been derived from the Latin word *religare* which means: to bind, signifying that religion is probably a system that binds or connects man to the supernatural. This derivation is however attributed to the Roman grammarian Servius (end of 4th century A.D) ⁽⁴²⁾, and is strongly supported by the Christian philosopher Lactantius (313. A.D) ⁽⁴³⁾. The most celebrated father of the Latin Church, St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) also made such a derivation ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

41 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, p. 25.

42 - Sarah F. Hoyt, The Etymology Of Religion, p.1, American Oriental Society, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1912), pp. 126-129.

43 - Ibid, p. 126-129.

44 - Ibid, p. 126-129.

Others are also of the view that, the term *religion* takes its origin from the Latin word *relegere* which means: to go through or over again in reading, speech or thought. This view is attributed to Cicero. According to him, a man is said to be religious from 'religio', because he often ponders over, and, as it were, reads again [relegit] the things which pertain to the worship of God, so that religion would seem to take its name from reading over those things which belong to Divine worship. Because of this we ought frequently to ponder over such things in our hearts ⁽⁴⁵⁾. This derivation is supported by the Roman grammarian of the second century A.D. Aulus Gellius ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Augustine, on the basis of Cicero's derivation, suggested that, the term *relegere* (to go through or over again in reading, speech or thought) in the context of religion could also have taken its origin from the fact that we ought to seek God again whom we had lost by our neglect ⁽⁴⁷⁾. For St. Thomas Aquinas, whether religion takes its name from frequent reading or from a repeated choice of what has been lost through negligence or from being a bond, one fact about religion is that, it denotes properly a relationship between God and man ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Just as there has not been a unanimous agreement regarding the origin of the term *religion*, so has been the case regarding the definition of religion itself. Over the centuries till now, there has been several attempts by scholars to define religion from different perspectives ranging from the psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical as well as theological ⁽⁴⁹⁾. These definitions tend to suffer from one of two problems.

Either they happen to be too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most of us

45 - Sarah F. Hoyt, The Etymology Of Religion, p.2, American Oriental Society, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1912), pp. 126-129.

46 -Ibid, p. 126-129.

47 - Augustine, De civitate Dei, V.10, p.3.

48 - St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, second part, Question 81, second and revised edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province Online Edition by Kevin Knight *Nihil Obstat*. F. Innocentius Apap, O.P., S.T.M., Censor. Theol. *Imprimatur*. Edus. Canonicus Surmont, Vicarius Generalis. Westmonasteri.

49 - Momen M, *Understanding religion: A thematic approach* (1999), p. 52-73.

agree are religions, or they are too vague and ambiguous suggesting that just about anything and everything is a religion ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

For example, while Paul Tillich defines religion as man's attitudes and actions with respect to his ultimate concern ⁽⁵¹⁾, Robert Bellah defines it as a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence ⁽⁵²⁾. Frederick Streng for instance is of the view that religion is simply a means of ultimate transformation ⁽⁵³⁾. Joachim Wach on the other side attempted providing basic essential features by which a system should be identified as a religion. He as a result opined that, four main criteria's underline religious experience and these include, a response to what is experienced as Ultimate Reality, a total response of the total being, intensity, and the imperative to issue into action ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

In addition to this, Turaki before coming up with his own understanding of religion as consisting of a theory of being and a theory of meaning, listed a number of attempted definitions of the religious phenomena by various scholars. Among these include the definition given by Ray who sees religion as a meaning system or a theory of meaning. Geertz on the other side sees religion as a cultural system. For Idowu, however, it is the means by which God as a spirit and man's essential self-communicate. In this context, Idowu appears to be seeing religion as the result of humanity's spontaneous awareness of a living Power. Steyne on the other side maintained that, religion is a search for relationship to and with the supernatural ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

For Max Muller, religion 'is a perception of the Infinite'. And it is attractive because it can (a) imply a psychic activity of the whole person, and (b) signify an object of perception

50 - <http://atheism.about.com/od/religiondefinition/p/WhatReligion.htm> .

51 - Robert Bellah N, *Tokugawa religion, The values of pre-industrial Japan* (1957), p. 5.

52 - Ibid, p. 359.

53 - Rodney Taylor, *Neo-Confucianism, sagehood and the religious dimension*, p. 394.

54 - Ibid, p. 410.

55 - Turaki, Y., *Christianity and African gods: A method in theology* (1999) p. 70-89.

which is real. Generally, the definition appears vague. The phrase 'The Infinite' in the definition needs to be clearly defined, while the term 'perception' in the definition may suggest subjectivity and passivity rather than objectivity and activity. In other words, one is not just religious by merely 'perceiving' and not doing something purposeful and with intelligence about 'what' is perceived. In addition, there is the danger that the 'object' of perception may be something which exists in consequence only of the projection of a mental image ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

2.2.2 Nature Of The Akan Religion

It's important, however, to make a distinction between *Akan* as an ethnic group on one side, and *Akan* as a tradition or religion on the other side. *Akan* as an ethnic group as observed earlier is the largest ethnic group in Ghana and it includes subgroups such as *Ashanti*, *Fanti*, *Akwapim* with the *Twi* language as its main language. And what distinguishes one group of *Akan* in terms of language from another is the linguistic variant (dialects) ⁽⁵⁷⁾. *Akan* as a religion, however, currently has not more than five (5) percent of the Ghanaian population ⁽⁵⁸⁾, and it is seen as the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of *Akans* resulting from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present *Akan*, made up of traditions (myths and rituals) passed on from one generation to the next ⁽⁵⁹⁾. This therefore suggests that, it is possible for one to be an *Akan* by ethnicity, and not necessarily by religion. An *Akan* by ethnicity, will be someone who is born of an *Akan* descent, while an *Akan* by religion, will be someone who adheres to, and practices the teachings and *Akan* way of life. The *Akan* religion, like any other religion, can be

56 - E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A definition* (Landon: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), p. 70.

57 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, p. 24.

58 - Base on the 2010 population census, 71.2 percent of the population profess the Christian faith, followed by Islam (17.6%). Only a small proportion of the population either adhere to traditional religion (5.2%) or are not affiliated to any religion (5.3%). See, Ghana statistical service, *2010 population and housing census: Summary report of final report*, p. 6.

59 - J.O Awulalu, *What is African traditional religion*, Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 10, No. 2, (Spring, 1976) p. 1.

seen to have five parts, and none of these parts by itself constitutes the entire meaning of the religion. In other words, all these five parts come together to give a complete picture of what the Akan religion is all about, and they are: firstly, *Akan* Set of beliefs, secondly, *Akan* Practices, ceremonies and festivals, thirdly, *Akan* Religious objects and places, *fourthly*, *Akan* Values and morals, and *fifthly*, *Akan* Religious officials or leaders ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

The *Akan* set of beliefs show the way the *Akan* people think about the universe, and their attitude towards life itself. These set of beliefs revolve around, believe in the Supreme Being *Nyame* (God), spirits, human life, magic, the hereafter, and so on. The *Akan* religious practices show how the *Akans* express their beliefs in practical terms. And these includes, praying, offering sacrifices, performing ceremonies and rituals, as well as observing various customs. *Akan* festivals are normally joyful occasions when people sing, dance, eat and celebrate a particular occasion or event. *Akan* religious objects and places covers the things and places which *Akans* have set apart as being holy or sacred. Some are made by man, but others are taken in their natural form and set apart for religious purposes. They include places like shrines, groves, sacred hills or mountains and objects like rivers, amulets, charms, masks, and many others. The *Akan* moral values on the other side, are parts of the *Akan* religion which deals with the ideas that safeguard or uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them. These include issues relating to truth, justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, decency, respects, crime and punishment, rights and responsibilities and many others. Religious officials or leaders are also an important part of the *Akan* religion. And they are in many cases made up of trained men and women, who conduct religious matters such as ceremonies, sacrifices, formal prayers and divination. They are mostly regarded as

60 - John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (USA: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), p. 11-12.

experts and specialists in the *Akan* religion. This category of people may include, persists, ritual elders, diviners, medicine men, and even kings and rulers ⁽⁶¹⁾.

2.2.3 Sources Of The Akan Religion

The *Akan* religion unlike other world religions, does not have a holy book, neither is it associated with a single founder. However, there are places to look for and find the *Akan* religion if one wishes to observe or study it in practical life. Amongst these are *Akan* rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the people. The *Akan* religion can also be found in shrines, sacred places and religious objects revered by the *Akans*. Obviously, these are places where the *Akans* make or bring sacrifices and offerings as part of their religious rituals. The religion can also be found in art and symbols of the *Akans*. This is because, *Akan* arts often express *Akan* religious ideas. Music and dance as well, is another means through which *Akans* express their religion. This is because most of their songs deal with their religious ideas and practices. The *Akan* religion can as well be found in *Akan* proverbs, riddles, and wise sayings. This is due to the religious ideas and values contained in them. The religion can also be found in *Akan* names of places and people. This is because most of *Akan* names have religious implications. *Akan* myths and legends is also an important source of the *Akan* religion, since it served as the main tool for passing the *Akan* religious beliefs and practices from the previous generation to the current. The religion can also be found in *Akan* beliefs and customs. And though customs in general are not always religious, many of them contain religious ideas. And finally, the *Akan* religion can also be found or experienced in all aspects of the *Akan* way of life. This in other words suggests that, *Akans* make no distinction between religion and practical life ⁽⁶²⁾.

61 - John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p. 11-12.

62 - John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p. 20-29.

2.2.4 Trends And Approaches To The Study Of The Akan Religion

Early European Christian missionaries, colonial soldiers and administrators who worked in Africa are credited with having made the first real effort to study African Traditional Religion and culture. They were motivated largely by curiosity, personal interest and by the practical objective of gaining some knowledge about Africans in order to work and communicate with the host groups, resulting in the Africans' own view about their culture and religion being either overlooked or deliberately minimized. Christian missionaries in particular, needed to understand the language, basic ideas and concepts of the host groups in order to proclaim and preach the Gospel and thereby convert the people. A couple of them, especially those of the British and North American extraction, did in fact, spend some time with liberated African slaves in an effort to acquire a working knowledge of the culture and religion of their respective groups. With the help of local interpreters and assistants, some were able to translate hymnbooks and catechism texts in local African languages ⁽⁶³⁾. Rev. Johann Gottlieb Christaller for example, with the help of some native speakers compiled a dictionary of the *Akan* language in 1933 ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

However, most of these missionary works on African Traditional Religion presents the African people as being immersed in crippling superstitions, whose religion lacked any abiding value and who were therefore a fitting object of evangelism. For this reason, most early European writers about the *Akan* religion could not accept that familiar religious ideas found in the *Akan* religion for instance, were native in origin. They often attributed them to influence from abroad, either from the Middle East or Europe. Example of such writers is A. B. Ellis, a British Army officer and ethnographer, who lived amongst the *Akans*, and the authored a book entitled: *The Twi-speaking People of the Gold Coast*. He

63 - Fola Lateju, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion* (Nigeria: National Open University of Nigeria, 2012), p. 20-21.

64 - *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, <https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/christaller-i/>.

was of the view that, the idea of the Supreme Being among the *Akans* was a recent European importation. He as a result postulated that, the Akan Supreme Being (Nyame), was a 'loan-god' introduced by the missionaries ⁽⁶⁵⁾. Such an unsympathetic approach to the African Traditional Religion led to its description with terminologies like, animism, paganism, fetishism, ancestral worship, polytheism and many others. However, there exist some early European works on the African Traditional Religion that has shown some level of appreciative understanding and sympathetic attitude towards the religion. Amongst such writings is that of Captain R. S. Rattray who stayed amongst the *Akans* and wrote a book on the Ashanti's of Ghana ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Rattray's work can be categorized under works that have explored the religious beliefs and practices of a particular African ethnic group and society in detail, and in this case, the Ashanti group amongst the *Akan*. He used the anthropological approach to studying the *Akan* religion. As the head of the anthropology department created by the colonial power in Ghana, Rattray explains that he had an option to choose between two methods for gathering information about the *Akan* religion. The first was for him to do that through descriptions of customs and beliefs of the *Akan* religion handed over to his department by persons interested in working with the department. According to him, information gathered through this method will be difficult to classify, examine and verify, since it was handed over to the department by a second person. The second method was for him to gather the information himself directly from the seen, by making a detailed investigation into the beliefs and customs of the *Akans*. This however was the method he used. Regarding how he applied this methodology to the *Akan* religion he says ⁽⁶⁷⁾:

65 - Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 1-2.

66 - Ibid, p. 3-6.

67 - Rattray R. S., *Ahanti* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 6-11. Though both Rattary's anthropological method and Al Faruqi's phenomenological method involves the collection of data of the religion being studied, one major difference between both approaches is that, anthropologies

I approached these old people (elders in the Akan communities) and this difficult subject (their religious beliefs) in the spirit of one who came to them as a seeker after truth, the key to which I told them they alone possessed, which not all the learning nor all the books of the white man could ever give to me. I made it clear to them that I asked access to their religious rites such as are herein described for this reason. I attended their ceremonies with all their reverence and respect I could well accord to something which I felt to have been already very old, before the religion of my country had yet been born as a new thought, yet not so entirely new, but that its roots stretched back and were fed from the same stream which still flows from Ashanti today.

Rattray's methodology of studying the African Traditional Religion is what others term as the British functionalist approach. This approach however is in opposition to the evolutionist approach to studying religions which suggests that, all societies were supposed to be in the process of evolution during which they move from simple and primitive societies to complex and rational societies ⁽⁶⁸⁾. British anthropologists generally give more priority to the study of the sociological aspect of African culture, such as the kinship system, the political and social organization, with less attention to the cosmological and symbolical dimensions of people's lives, unlike the French structuralist approach to studying African Traditional Religion, which emphasizes more on African cosmological systems and implicit philosophies in their belief system ⁽⁶⁹⁾. However, despite Rattray's attempt to investigate the *Akan* customs and religious beliefs, few criticism can be leveled against his work. Kofi Bempah for instance has pointed out what he found to be some incorrect translations of certain phrases in the *Akan* creation story as mentioned in Rattray's work ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

The entry of indigenous African writers and scholars into the study of African traditional religion was a significant development in the evolution of the subject. This group of scholars include, African writers and scholars of the pre-independence era as well as

usually have a theoretical frame work before moving to the field or studying a religion, while phenomenologist do not.

68 - Gellner D. N., *Anthropological Approaches* (Connolly: 1999), p. 10.

69 - Ray B. C., *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and community* (New Jersey: Eaglewood Cliffs, 1976), p.7.

70 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth* (USA: 2010), P. 56-57.

ordained ministers and clerics with Christian theological background of training belonging to both the Francophone and Anglophone traditions. Most of them were strong nationalist writers and include people like Mbonu Ojike, J.B. Danquah, and Kenneth Kaunda. They were keen to disabuse the minds of Europeans concerning the widely publicized inferiority of the black race and the distortion of their culture in the writings of colonial writers and some Christian missionary authors. J. B. Danquah in particular focused on the *Akan* religion, and was furious especially with those European authors who sought to discriminate against the belief of indigenous *Akans* in God. He strongly in his book entitled: *The Akan Doctrine of God*, contended that, *Akans* just as other forms of the African Traditional Religion have as much genuine belief in God as Europeans ⁽⁷¹⁾.

J. B. Danquah's work can be categorized under works that investigate a single theme of the African Traditional Religion, covering the whole African continent, or a part of sub-Saharan Africa. His focus was on the *Akans*, and the main thesis as suggested by the title of his book, was to explore the *Akan* concept of God. However, unlike Rattray who was a European investigator of the *Akan* religion, J. B. Danquah on the other side, was an *Akan* himself by ethnicity and not by religion. In explaining his methodology, he points out that, he examined all anthropological evidence available at his disposal, ranging from: the *Akan* gods, fetishes, and customs, about 3,680 *Akan* maxims or proverbs, festivals, religious observances, the *Akan* calendars, folklore, family system, social and moral codes, racial history, racial fears and hopes, thus, the philosophy of the *Akan* life ⁽⁷²⁾. However, a careful study of Danquah's work, and his attempts to formulate a whole theory of the *Akan* idea of God, will make his approach fit under the French structuralist approach to studying African Traditional Religion. This approach focuses more on the philosophical dimension of people as determinant of social structure. The approach

71 - Fola Lateju, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, p. 23.

72 - J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. xxvii.

argues that, African religious systems are not just reflections of social economic relations, but coherent and autonomous spheres of thoughts and actions ⁽⁷³⁾.

Though the interpretation of Akan religious statements, rituals and practices and the conclusions expressed in J. B. Danquah's book are currently the prevailing views on the subject, Kofi Bempah ⁽⁷⁴⁾, however, has attempted pointing out what he found to be some internal inconsistencies in Danquah's conclusions ⁽⁷⁵⁾. For example, in his criticisms to Danquah he argues that it is either *Akans* worship God through their ancestral spirits or they do not. Certainly, one cannot accept both views as valid nor can one accept either view without demonstrating at the same time that the rejected view is inconsistent with *Akan* worldview and practices. In other words, he disagreed with Danquah who asserts that in Akan most worship of God is done through the ancestors who serve as intermediaries between Nyame (God) and Man. For Bempah, this assertion contradicts qualities *Akans* attribute to the Supreme Deity ⁽⁷⁶⁾.

He further criticizes Danquah for copying the Twi version, and the corresponding English interpretation, of the Akan creation story from Rattray's book, even though according to him, it is obvious that the last sentence of the Twi version as it appears in Rattray's book is incorrect. He criticizes Danquah as well for looking at the *Akan* doctrine of God through the spectacles of the Greeks and the Romans ⁽⁷⁷⁾. He argued as well that, though Danquah was an Akan by ethnicity, he was influenced by his Christian beliefs. In other words, he sought for elements in African Thoughts and practices that fitted comfortably into Christian theology. This made him exclude any idea that appeared to be incompatible

73 - Ray B. C., *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and community*, p.10.

74 - He belongs to the Asante group of the Akan people. He was formally a lecturer at the Chemistry department in Cape Coast University in Ghana. Kofi Owusu Bempah also served as a deputy minister under the Limann administration in Ghana before it was overthrown in 1981.

75 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, P. xliii-xlv.

76 - Ibid, p. xlv.

77 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, p. xlvi.

with the prevailing Christian theological thinking. And this made him arrive at conclusions that are not justified by Akan religious practices or the ends of these practices. An example of such a conclusion is Danquah's assertion that, what the *Akan* see as 'the good' is the family ⁽⁷⁸⁾. He also criticized Danquah for not mentioning significant concepts in Akan Traditional Religion such as the immanence of God in his creation, re-incarnation, and the pouring of libation ⁽⁷⁹⁾. These criticisms on Danquah's book, however, has not in any way affected the book's high reputation amongst *Akans*.

Early European and African works on the African Traditional Religion are seen to have paved way for contemporary works on the religion. These group of works represent a stage in the development of the African Traditional Religion where it has developed into a full-fledged discipline taught in academic institutions. And this has been the consequence of the cumulative efforts of researchers and writers both Africans and non-Africans. This trend adopts a systematic study of the African Traditional Religion by scholars of different intellectual hues and backgrounds with the general aim of presenting systematically the authentic experience of the sacred by the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa (within the Continent and in Diaspora) in their different socio-historical circumstances and backgrounds ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

Examples of works in this category dealing with the *Akan* religion includes, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and The Truth* by Kofi Bempah, *West African Traditional Religion* by Kofi Asare Opoku, and many other researches and theses written presented to various departments of African studies throughout Africa. Most of these works adopt the comparative-phenomenological approach to studying the African Traditional Religion, which explores the religion thematically with examples drawn from

78 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, p. xlvii.

79 - Ibid, p. 1.

80 - Fola Lateju, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, p. 25.

most part of the African continent. The approach does not aim at presenting a theoretical explanation to the religion, but rather, it aims at describing and understanding the religious phenomena ⁽⁸¹⁾.

Kofi Asare Opoku for instance in his *West African Traditional Religion*, adopts this methodology. He explains that, his book attempts looking at the West African Traditional Religion from the point of view of the practitioners themselves. And though he made frequent references to the Yoruba, Ibo, Fon, Mande, Ewe, as well as the *Akans* of Ghana, the book in other words, not only attempted providing an observers account, but also allowed Africans who are involved to tell their own view of the religion ⁽⁸²⁾. Kofi Bempah also adopts a similar methodology in his *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and The Truth*. His focus in this book however was, a continuation of the process of research, exploration and reconstruction of the Akan Traditional Religion initiated earlier by J.B. Danquah. However, unlike J. B. Danquah who was an *Akan* by ethnicity and not by religion, Kofi Bempah is an *Akan* by ethnicity and religion. He therefore, attempted providing a general introduction to the *Akan* religion from an insider's perspective ⁽⁸³⁾.

2.2.5 Challenges Facing Contemporary Studies On The Akan Religion

The study of the African Traditional Religion had been in successive stages beginning from the early European Christian missionaries. These were in turn followed by colonial soldiers and administrators. After this, the colonial government sponsored and trained some ethnographers to study the African culture including the religion. This yielded better results but was still tainted by racism. It was after this that the early African writers and scholars who incidentally were defensive of their culture and religion came and this

81 - Jaco Bayers, *The Understanding Of God In African Theology: Contribution Of John Samuel Mbiti and Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Doctorate Thesis, University Of Pretoria), p. 85.

82 - Kofi Asare Opoku, preface of his book '*West African Traditional Religion*'.

83 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, p. liv-lviii.

eventually led to the contemporary stage in the study of the African Traditional Religion. Contemporary works on African Traditional Religion has not been without some difficulties. These challenges or key issues facing contemporary studies on the religion can broadly be categorized under three main groups namely, issues connected to the content of African Traditional Religion, and this has to do with, what constitutes African Traditional Religion. Secondly, issues of nomenclature and terminology, and this has to do with terminologies that have come to be associated with the religion, which are mostly rejected by African theologians. And finally, issues related to methodology and theoretical presuppositions as well as schemes of interpretation and this has to do with searching for the appropriate methodology for studying the religion ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

In an attempt to address these challenges, various consideration should be made when studying the African Traditional Religion and these include, firstly, the selection of the right person with the right tools or methodology to undertake the study is needed. As a result, this research attempts applying Al Faruqi's methodology on the Akan religion. Secondly, care should be taken not to confuse religion with culture, if not whatever investigation being undertaken will lead to a false conclusion. Thirdly, appearance should not easily be taken as reality. Thus, though the practitioner's understanding of his religion is important, whatever he does should not easily be counted as part of the religion under study, since there is a possibility that the practitioner might not necessarily be living in accordance with the teachings of his religion. Fourthly, the historian of the African Traditional Religion, should not be influenced by his own biases. In other words, he should not judge the religion from his own intuitions, perspectives or traditions ⁽⁸⁵⁾. Sixthly, the study of the African Traditional Religion should be done for the right purpose, which might include the following:

84 - Fola Lateju, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, p. 26.

85 - E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A definition* (Landon: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), p. 4-6.

1. Not for evangelical purposes, thus there is a need to include the African Traditional Religion into the study of the religious phenomena without the pretext of evangelism or the search for the elementary form of religion.
2. The study of African Traditional Religion should also be a means for understanding the behaviors of its practitioners, the reason being that, religion in general has a great impact over the moral conducts of its practitioners.
3. In addition to this, the study of African Traditional Religion should also be conducted for corrective purposes. Corrective purposes in the sense of clearing the misconceptions that exists in the minds of people regarding the teachings and practices of the religion.
4. The study of African Traditional Religion should also be for comparative purposes. This would make the researcher be in a better position to undertake an effective comparison between the religion and other world religions, in order to explore the similarities and differences that exist between them.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY

3.1 A BIOGRAPHY OF ISMA'IL AL FARUQI

Ismail Raji Abul Huda Al faruqi, is a prominent Palestinian Muslim scholar born to a very influential Arab family in the Town called Jaffa, on the first of January 1921AD, and lived till 1986. He later migrated and became a US immigrant following the

establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. He was born during the British mandate and his father Abdul Huda Al Faruqi was a Shariah scholar who served as a Qadi (judge of the Shariah court) during this period ⁽⁸⁶⁾. He received his early education from his father in the local mosques, and also from traditional Islamic schools ⁽⁸⁷⁾. In 1936, he was awarded a high school diploma from the French Dominican College Des Freres (St. Joseph) ⁽⁸⁸⁾. Already having a strong background in Arabic and French, he decided to join the American University of Beirut where he studied English language and later acquired a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the same university in 1941 ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

After his degree, he served as Assistant to the Registrar of Arab Cooperative Societies under the British Mandate government in Jerusalem in 1942, after which he became an administrative officer and then, later, a district magistrate in Galilee at the age of 24 before the Israeli occupation of Palestine ⁽⁹⁰⁾. The creation of Israel in 1948, however, resulted in making his family seek refuge in Beirut. This as a result brought his career to an end and made him later decide to pursue graduate studies in the United States ⁽⁹¹⁾. He was awarded two master's degrees in philosophy then a PhD. His first Masters' degree was awarded to him in 1949, from the Graduate school of Arts and Science in Indiana University, with the thesis entitled: "the ethics of reason and the ethics of life (Kantian and Nietzschean ethics)". The second was awarded to him in 1951 from Harvard

86 - Muhammad Tariq Quraishi, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi: Warisan Zaman yang Abadi, tr, Ahmad Shah Mohd. Noor* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1988), p. 6.

87 - Ilyas Ba Yunus, *Al Faruqi and Beyond: Future Islamization of Knowledge*, American Journal of Islamic Social Science, Volume 5, No 1 (1998) p 13.

88 - Shafiq Mohammed, *Growth of Islamic Thought in North America: Focus on Ismail Raji al Faruqi*, Brentwood, MD: Amana publications, 1994) p. 7.

89 - Muhammad Tariq Quraishi, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi: Warisan Zaman yang Abadi, tr, Ahmad Shah Mohd. Noor*, p. 6.

90 - Ismail Al-Faruqi, "Self-portrait", *Impact International*, Voll. 16, no. 11 (13-26 June, 1986) p.6.

91 - Ba-Yunus, "Al-Faruqi and beyond", p. 13.

University then, later, was awarded PhD in 1952 from Indiana University with the thesis entitled: *On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value* ⁽⁹²⁾.

However, before starting his PhD, he managed to work as a translator for the American Council of Learned Societies where he received \$1000 to translate three books from Arabic into English. He then turned to contract building where he prospered in his specialty of providing fully decorated and furnished homes for sale. It was after he had earned sufficient funds that he left this potentially lucrative career in order to re-enter academia for a PhD, though others have mentioned that he still was working on part time basis whiles doing his PhD ⁽⁹³⁾. After his PhD he received a fellowship from Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to study Islam and Islamic intellectual history at Al Azhar University in Cairo from 1954 to 1958 after which he went to North America where he spent two years at the school of divinity McGill as a research fellow. After this, he became an associate professor in the school of divinity ⁽⁹⁴⁾.

According to the then Dean of Divinity, Stanley Frost, It was while Al Faruqi was in the Institute as a Research Associate that his breadth of understanding for western culture and his innate sympathy for Islamic thought, as well as his evident sincerity of religious concern suggested to Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, then Director of the Institute, that Dr. Fārūqī should be attached for two years to the faculty of Divinity as a Research Associate to have the experience of living in a Christian environment and of bringing a critical if friendly Muslim mind to bear upon current theological trends ⁽⁹⁵⁾.

After this, he travelled to Pakistan and spent two years at the central Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan as a professor in Islamic studies. His major works includes:

92 - Zuriati Bt Mohd Rashid, And Dr. Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi, *Al Faruqi And His Views On Comparative Religion*, International Journal Of Business And Science, Vol 1. No. 1 (October 2010) p. 2.

93 - Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant* (Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Doctorate Thesis, 2008), p. 18.

94 - Ba-Yunus, "*Al-Faruqi and beyond*", p. 13.

95 - Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 20.

Arabism, The origins of Zionism in Judaism, and also, Christian ethics ⁽⁹⁶⁾. He served as an associate professor of religion at Syracuse University in 1964 and, in 1968, as a professor of Islamic studies and history of religions at Temple University. He remained as a professor there till his tragic death on the 27th of May 1986 in his house at Bent Road, Wyncote, Pennsylvania ⁽⁹⁷⁾. Al Faruqi throughout his academic and intellectual life has been concerned with a methodic study of religion. As a result, he attempted exploring how a historian of religion can successfully study a religious tradition other than his own objectively without any form of biases. The next section of this work, however, will focus on the methodology proposed by Al Faruqi for the study of religion.

3.2 EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING RELIGION

Though Al Faruqi's background in philosophy can be said to have influenced his ideas on religion. The earliest published evidence of his ideas on religion is traced to the series of lectures he presented in May 1959 at the University of Cairo. These lectures, however, reflected the ideas he developed over the four years in his studies at Al-Azhar University. In these series of lectures, Al Faruqi started by arguing that Inquiry and study of non-Muslim faiths is not something new to Islam, but rather was part of the rich historic legacy of Islamic thought whose influence has extended into modern times. Citing Ibn Hazm, Al-Faruqi pointed out that Ibn Hazm is one among many who studied other religions and have set out the principles of what is now known as textual criticism ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

96 - Ba-Yunus, *"Al-Faruqi and beyond"*, p. 13.

97 - Muhammad Tariq Quraishi, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi*, p.1.

98 - Lecture one in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 140-141.

He went ahead to introduce the methodology of the science of religion by describing various approaches including psychological, philosophical, phenomenological ⁽⁹⁹⁾, and the historical methods of studying religion. And although he appeared to have favored the historical method in the early development of his views on religion, he later was known to have favored the phenomenological methods over the others ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. Al Faruqi greatly benefited from the development of comparative religion as a modern science, and was also highly influenced by pioneers of this discipline including: Gerardus Van der Leeuw, W. Brede Kristensen, Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, and Rudolf Otto ⁽¹⁰¹⁾. In an attempt to apply his methodological ideas by laying out the schematic of world religion in history as gradual precursors of the expression of God's final message in Islam, he divided the world's religions into three broad entities of Eastern/Indian, Western/Greek and Arab/Semitic, and defined and contrasted each through their worldviews specifically in terms of their approach to this present world and that of the supernatural or divine world ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

According to him, while the eastern religions sought escape from this world considering it to be evil, temporary and illusory in favor of the eternal and good world, and the Western/Greek traditions viewed these two worlds as intimately connected with the

99 - Phenomenology of religion has been one of the most influential methods of comparative religious studies developed in the late 19th and early 20th century to replace the theological method of studying religion which was adopted by the early Christian missionaries. It was developed specifically from philosophical phenomenology generally associated with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who advocated for the use of epoche, thus, bracketing out ones unexamined assumption about something before studying it. In the mid-20th century, however, certain scholars including Gerardus van der Leeuw, W. Brede Kristensen, and C.J Bleeker employed this method into the study of religion by attempting to bracket out scientific and theological assumptions before studying any religion. This however was meant to study, describe, understand and incorporate the perspectives of the practitioners of a religion whose religion is being studied. See Douglas Allen, *Phenomenology of Religion* (1987), p. 1-37. Bilaal Al Talidi, *Al Namuthaj Al Ma'rifi Li Naqdil Al adyan Indal Al Faruqi (Al Faruq's cognitive model for studying religion)*, p. 3-4.

100 - Lecture Two in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 141-142.

101 - Muhammed Khalifa Hassan, *Juhood Ismail Al Faruqi Fii Ilm Taareekh al Adyan Fil Garb wa Indal Muslimiin (Ismail Al Faruqi's Contributions in the Study of Religions amongst Muslims and the West)*, p. 4-5.

102 - Lecture Three in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 143-144.

present world of humanity as a poor reflection of the higher world, the Arab/Semitic worldview on the other side, saw these two realms as completely separate with the superior realm influencing the human world through commands and laws ⁽¹⁰³⁾.

In Lecture Four, he sets out five metaphysical elements and uses these as a means to uncover the gradual unfolding of God's message and law to all humanity, and these includes: the otherness of God, the connection between the other world and the created world, the necessary is obligatory, whatever happens is the best, and finally, the potential of improvement. He concluded that Islam is as old as humanity, but it did not exist as 'Islam' and therefore Muslims need to search for the religion of God in the pre-*hijrah* periods. According to him, in order to undertake such an investigation one requires the use of the phenomenological tool of *epoché* to suspend any preconceptions he may possess in order to apprehend history as those in the past understood their religions ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾.

The last two lectures, very briefly, are at once an application of the five metaphysical principles, in which he highlighted the peoples of Sumer and Akkadia as possessing elements of the Arab religion and examined further the migration of people into al-Shām (region of present day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Jordan) who carried with them these same elements of the Arab religion. Even though, one needs not to assume that, these series of lectures reflect all of Al Faruqi's thoughts on religion, however, the continuation and repetition of many of these ideas, and refining them over the ensuing years, is not without reason to suggest that, this period in Al Faruqi's academic and intellectual life, represents an early developmental stage of his approach to the study of

103 - Lecture Three in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 143-144.

104 - Lecture Four in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 144.

religion, which formed the basis for the later development of his comparative and meta-religious principles, creating the essential foundation for his dialogical applications ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾.

3.3 EXPOSITION OF AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY

Generally, Al Faruqi's methodology could be divided into four set of principles namely, principles of disengagement, the theoretical principles, principles of meta-religion, and lastly, principles of dialogue. The first principle known as: the principles of disengagement is a prerequisite that forms the basis for an objective study of religions. The second, which is the theoretical principles are those principles that govern the understanding and comparative study of religions. The third principle, meta-religion serves as the basis for evaluating religions, while the fourth principle, which is the principles of dialogue are those that should be observed in order to ensure success in an interfaith dialogue. The application of his methodology in this work will focus on only the first three.

3.3.1 PRINCIPLE OF DISENGAGEMENT

As a prerequisite for guaranteeing objectivity in studying religions, Al Faruqi starts by proposing this principle. To disengage literally means: to get separated or disconnected from something or someone ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. In this context, what Al Faruqi means is that: a separation or disconnection from one's own religious beliefs, presupposed feelings or any form of misconception before studying a particular religion is a necessary condition for attaining objectivity. According to him, disengagement in this context happens when the comparatist or the researcher steps out of his own religious values and presuppositions for a while (suspending previous judgments), in order to put himself into the religion he is studying, were by he will begin to perceive and view that religion in the way and manner

105 - Lecture Four in "Muḥāḍarāt", quoted by: Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 145-159.

106 - <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/disengage> .

its adherents perceived and viewed it (living with life facts). This is very necessary so as to avoid any forms of biases that might affect his conclusions ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾.

The principle, in other words, involves an empirical study. The comparatist will have to be part of the religion, observe, question and record from the practitioners, what they feel, believe, think, know and judge about their religion. Archeological evidences could be relied upon in establishing the validity of the information gathered about extinct religions, however, with regards to living religions, establishing validity will involve several steps including, confirming the findings of the comparatist with the practitioners of the religion, checking the accuracy of their judgment on the basis of their traditions and scriptures, and, beyond that, engaging in constructive dialogue between the comparatist and the believers ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

For Al Faruqi, this principle cannot be compromised if only we seek for objectivity. He justifies this point by distinguishing between two distinct facts namely: scientific facts and life facts. Examples of scientific facts, according to him, are geological and biological samples which could be examined using an approach that does not necessarily require from the researcher to allow his understanding to be determined or shaped by the object of study. What this means is that, the biologist or geologist can still undertake his studies by observing from a distant the object of study without necessarily getting into direct contact with it ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

Religious facts on the other side, is an example of life facts. These are facts about life that are known and understood through experience. This therefore requires that the researcher gets direct contact with the object of study. This is done by suspending his previous beliefs and putting himself into the object of study in order to experience it in a fair and

107 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant ideas* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967) p. 4.

108 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 16 – 17.

109 - *Ibid*, p.3 - 5.

truthful manner. For Al Faruqi, though some aspect of religion could be studied using the approaches of scientific facts like geology and biology as mentioned above, religious facts will still remain as life facts and not scientific facts ⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

3.3.2 THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

These principles on the other side, are built on the notion that, the comparatist has to understand a religion before he compares it with another. However, In order to observe this function, which is: a better understanding of a religion, Al Faruqi proposes what he called the theoretical principles. According to him these principles regulate our grasping of meanings presented, the religio-cultural phenomena, and our conceptualization and systematization of them. They govern our understanding of all phenomena, and constitute the foundation of human knowledge in general ⁽¹¹¹⁾.

The first of them is the principle of internal coherence, which states that, validity of revelation should be measured by the absence of internal contradictions. This is because a revelation cannot be claimed to be from God while it contains within it some contradictions. The second is coherence with cumulative human knowledge, which means that, for the truth professed by any religion to be from God, it should on the other side, not contradict accumulated human knowledge since God operates not in a vacuum and that he uses the realities of human situation as a carrier of his divine message ⁽¹¹²⁾.

The third is coherence with the religious experience of mankind, which explains that, If God, or Truth is, and He is the source of revelation, His commands cannot contradict one another. For this reason, all revealed truths must cohere with the religious experience of mankind. The fourth is correspondence with reality, which means for a system of meanings, a cultural pattern or a system of religious truth to establish its claim to be a system, its truth must not contradict reality because contradiction of reality will suggest

110 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p.3 - 5.

111 - Ibid, p. 11.

112 - Ibid, p 11 - 14.

invalidation of the system. Finally, the last principle suggests that, the main purpose of religion is to lead man towards higher ethical values, and that any religion that claims to be from God should have this as its main objective and not the otherwise ⁽¹¹³⁾.

3.3.3 PRINCIPLES OF META-RELIGION

Following from the first two principles (principle of disengagement and the theoretical principles), Al Faruqi states that ⁽¹¹⁴⁾:

There is no escape, therefore, in the comparative study of religions, from some evaluation of the content examined; and it is the principles of such evaluation that are here in question. This is a grave and very task; but it is not impossible. Such principles are not ready-made; and we may not reach them even after long and hard research. But continue this hard work, we must

This, in his view explains another function of the comparatist or the historian of religion.

As reflected in the above statement, the task of the comparatist should not be limited to just understanding a religion and comparing it with another, but it should go beyond that.

That is, he has to evaluate whatever content he is dealing with. And in order to be able to objectively evaluate these contents, Al Faruqi proposed the principles of meta-religion which in his view represent the religious experience of mankind. For him, these principles constitute the foundation of all religio-culture, and as a result, it is on this basis that all religions must and should be evaluated ⁽¹¹⁵⁾.

These principles are six and they include the following: Being is of two realm which is ideal and actual, Ideal being is relevant to actual being, Relevance of the ideal to the actual is a command, Actual being is as such good, Actual being is malleable, And finally, Perfection of the cosmos is only a human burden ⁽¹¹⁶⁾. For him, the truth of these

113 - Ismail Al Faruqi, Christian Ethics, p 11 – 14.

114 - Ibid, p 10.

115 - Ibid, p 11.

116 - Ibid, p 22 – 30.

six principles are self-evident and could be established without necessarily resorting to Theology.

Starting with the first one, he argues that: being is of two types, the ideal and the actual and both belong to two different realms of existence. This appears to be suggesting that: while the actual represents the physical world and all that is within it, the ideal represents a transcendent form of existence beyond the physical world which determines and gives the physical world its value. This two divisions of existence is self-evident to an extent that its denial results in self-contradiction as and when one cognizes or evaluates ⁽¹¹⁷⁾.

He justifies this assertion by indicating that: without the existence of the transcendent being to determine the value or principles of determining values for physical beings, it will be impossible for the physical being its self to judge or determine the basis for its own judgment in the sense that, all that exist within it are alike, and as such there will be no grounds for judging one with the other. And since there exist such thing as judgment in the actual, and the actual world by nature cannot provide the principles for such judgments, this presupposes the existence of another realm, in this case the ideal, from which such principles are derived, a denial of which is a contradiction ⁽¹¹⁸⁾.

The second principle implies that: the ideal being is relevant to the actual being, meaning, the ideal being is of great use and importance to the actual being. This he justifies by pointing out that: since the ideal realm acts as principles of classification of actual beings, without which the actual can't be what it is, nor to be able to make evaluative judgments, it follows then from this that, the ideal is and should be of great relevance to the actual ⁽¹¹⁹⁾.

The third principle on the other hand suggests that, not only is the ideal realm relevant to the actual, but as well, its relevancy to it is a necessity that could meaningfully be seen as

117 - Ismail Al Faruqi, Christian Ethics, p 22.

118 - Ibid, p 22.

119 - Ibid, p 23.

a command. Values, which constitutes the ideal realm and ought to be followed or realized in the actual realm, could either be realized or not realized, without necessarily having an effect on the ideal realm in its self. But however, the realization of these values in the actual realm becomes necessary due to the necessity of natural law which in itself is identical to the ideal ⁽¹²⁰⁾.

Differently put, Justice as an example of value existing in the ideal realm will not be affected, whether if realized or not realized in the actual realm. However, in as much as the actual realm does not contain such a value by nature, and yet needs it for its judgments, implies that it's realization in the actual realm has become a necessity, and as such must be realized as per the natural law.

The fourth principle states that, the actual being is good, though not perfect. It is good in the sense that, it is capable of actualizing the ideal which is good in itself, a function that if happens to be false, will have made the purpose of the existence of the actual realm in itself questionable. In other words, the actual realm wouldn't have been able to actualize the ideal good, if it wasn't in itself good. This means that, man on the other hand, though not a perfect being, will not have been able to actualize the ideal if he was by nature an evil being ⁽¹²¹⁾.

For this reason, the physical world and all that exist within it including man, should not be seen as evil, but rather as an imperfect form of goodness that on the other side should be improved. As such, any religion or philosophy that declares this world as fundamentally and essentially evil, sets off with a false start and denies its self the right to contend in what is valuable and not valuable for man ⁽¹²²⁾.

120 - Ismail Al Faruqi, Christian Ethics, p 24 – 25.

121 - Ibid, p 27.

122 - Ibid, p 27.

According to the fifth principle, actual being is malleable. To be malleable literally means, to be capable of being controlled or influenced by external forces ⁽¹²³⁾. This principle however, is built on the notion that, though the actual realm is such that, it is determined and made into what it is by the ideal realm, it is at the same time by nature malleable, to an extent that, it could possibly be determined by outside factors besides the ideal realm. And it is this openness to receive new determination and thus deflect from its normal causal threads that makes it malleable ⁽¹²⁴⁾.

In other words, despite the fact that, the world and all that is within it including man is created by the ideal, and as a result, must be subjected to complete obedience to its commands, man by nature, being susceptible, is capable of being influenced by other things, which ends up making him become something else, something other than he would otherwise have been, had he obeyed the ideal ⁽¹²⁵⁾. This therefore explains the fact that even though the ideal realm is by nature supposed to be realized in the actual realm, its realization or non-realization still remains a possibility.

The final principle is that, perfection of the cosmos is only a human burden. This means that, it is the responsibility of man and not any other, to mold the actual being into the likeness of the ideal. According to Al Faruqi, the elements, organic matter, plants, animals and all other members of the actual realm with the exception of man, are mercilessly subject to inevitable laws of the ideal realm. Man on the other side, is the only member of the actual realm who despite not being free from the natural laws, is still capable of deflecting the courses of the causal threads of destiny to ends other than what has been destined ⁽¹²⁶⁾.

123 - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/malleable> .

124 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 29 – 30.

125 - Ibid, p 29 – 30.

126 - Ibid, p 30 – 31.

His significance in creation on the other side, lies in the fact that, he is the only creature who holds the key to the entrance of the ideal into the actual realm. He stands in between the ideal and actual realm as a mediator, and he is the only one through whom the values of the ideal could be realized in the actual realm. This therefore is what makes the perfection of the world, his sole responsibility ⁽¹²⁷⁾.

3.3.4 PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE

In addressing a Christian audience in series of ecumenical discussions he was invited to participate in, Al Faruqi explained that, the necessity of dialogue is self-evident simply because both Christianity and Islam exist in the world, interact and each makes ultimate claims to the truth demanding a critical appraisal best done in a spirit of dialogue. He saw dialogue to be a dimension of human consciousness. According to him, besides it being a category of the ethical sense, and an education at its widest and noblest, it also serves as the means for the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas ⁽¹²⁸⁾. He further argued that, dialogue is the only kind of inter human relationship worthy of man, and as such, it serves as the means through which truth can be searched for, and adhered to ⁽¹²⁹⁾. This appears to be suggesting that, his previous principles namely, principle disengagement, theoretical principles, and meta-religion can on the other side be applied in real life situation through a contractive dialogue amongst various religions.

In order to ensure a successful dialogue amongst religions, Al Faruqi did propose a set of guidelines to be observed during inter-faith dialogues, and these guidelines are made up of six rules including the following: all dialogue is subject to critique, any communication must obey the laws of internal coherence, communication must obey the laws of external coherence, Communication must obey the law of correspondence with reality, dialogue

127 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 30 – 31.

128 - Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Christianity: "Prospects for dialogue, Problems and perspectives,"* quoted by Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 184.

129 - *Ibid*, p. 184.

must be free from “canonical figurizations”, and finally, dialogue between Muslims and Christians should be centered upon questions related to ethics and not theology ⁽¹³⁰⁾.

Starting with the first rule, what Al Faruqi meant was that, in any meaningful or constructive inter-faith dialogue, neither side is permitted to make authoritarian statements, which are beyond critique, since this will simply refute the possibility of any meaningful discourse ⁽¹³¹⁾.

With the second principle, internal coherence, he meant that, the laws of logic must exist in communication, and this according to him will mean that, no paradox will be accepted as the final position, or conclusion in any dialogue. Regarding the third principle, external coherence, he meant that, coherence with all the history of man especially religious history is necessary such that any discourse does not fall into the pit of myth, esoteric stories or fanciful and unsubstantiated tales. In other words for this principle to be observed in any discourse, the subject matter should on the other side be partly verifiable empirically, and rationally understandable ⁽¹³²⁾.

The fourth principle suggests that, dialogue must correspond with reality. While the fifth principle suggests that, dialogue must be free from any dominant or dogmatic perceptions and interpretations, the sixth, and the final principle suggests that, dialogue should be conducted on areas where there is a greater possibility of success, such as ethical values, and not theology or ideological related issues. Not only did Al Faruqi list these six guidelines, he as well went ahead to give examples of the themes on which dialogue

130 - Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Christianity: “Prospects for dialogue, Problems and perspectives,”* quoted by Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma’il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 185.

131 - Ibid, p. 185.

132 - Ibid, p. 185-190.

amongst religions should be held, and these could be summarized as follows: Man's nature, God's will, and finally, Man's mission ⁽¹³³⁾.

133 - Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Christianity: Prospects for dialogue, Problems and perspectives*,” quoted by Charles D. Fletcher, *Isma'il Al Faruqi (1921-1986) and Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Man, the Scholar, the Participant*, p. 185-190.

3.4 SUMMARY

The above discussion on Al Faruqi's methodology could be summarized as follows:

Objective in the study of religion can be guaranteed if a researcher, before studying the religion, he suspends his religious beliefs and puts himself in the position of the practitioners so that he understands and perceives the religion the way its adherent do.

Understanding a religion is a prerequisite for comparative religion. To understand a religion, however, requires from the researcher to know the extent at which the religion in question is free from contradiction; the extent at which it corresponds to the cumulative human knowledge; religious experience of mankind as well as reality; and as to whether the religion is aimed at the upward march of man towards ethicality or not.

The comparatist needs not to limit himself with comparisons but should go beyond that to the level of evaluation. For him to be able to do that, his basis of evaluation should be the religious experience of mankind which, according to Al Faruqi, is as follows:

The assertion that existence is of two realm, the ideal as well as the actual. The assertion that, the importance of the ideal to the existence of the actual, the assertion that, the relevance of the ideal to the actual is in the form of command, the assertion that, the existence of actual realm is in itself good and not evil, the assertion that, the actual realm in itself is not perfect by nature, and finally, the assertion that, perfection of the cosmos is the sole responsibility of man.

The necessity of Inter-faith interactions, whether on the level of academic comparison or activist dialogue, is self-evident. And in order to ensure or guarantee success in any inter-faith dialogue, both parties are supposed to observe the following guidelines: One, no religious pronouncement is beyond critique. Two, internal coherence must exist. Three, proper historical perspective must be maintained. Four, correspondence with reality must exist. Five, freedom from absolutized scriptural or dogmatic perceptions or

interpretations. Six, and finally, dialogue should be conducted on areas where there is a greater possibility of success such as ethical values.

Al though Al Faruqi in his life attempted using his methodology on studying religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism, he has never attempted using these methods on the African Traditional Religion. Peter Ford on the other side, in his assessment of Al-Faruqi's methodology, praised Al Faruqi for his emphasis on reason and rational arguments but argued that Al Faruqi's methodology was problematic. In his argument, however, he pointed out that Al-Faruqi's insurances on an internal coherence which necessarily excludes paradox is generally not shared by Christians and, in fact, it disregards entirely the possibility that within Islam itself there are premises which resists simple amalgamation ⁽¹³⁴⁾.

Taking into consideration Ford's assertion that Al-Faruqi's approach to religion may already be considered outdated while his legacy remains significant ⁽¹³⁵⁾, this work will attempt exploring how useful Al Faruqi's approach will be when applied on studying African religions with special focus on the *Akan* religion in Ghana.

134 - F. Peter Ford Jr, *Ismail Al-Faruqi on Muslim-Christian Dialogue: An Analysis From A Christian Perspective*, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation (2007), p. 278-279.

135 - Ibid, p. 278-279.

CHAPETR THREE

APPLYING AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY ON THE AKAN RELIGION:

1. PRINCIPLE OF DISENGAGEMENT

2. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

APPLICATION OF AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY ON THE AKAN

RELIGION

PRINCIPLE OF DISENGEMENT AND THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

In order to apply the principle of disengagement on the *Akan* religion, as a Ghanaian Muslim, I first had to suspend my previous judgments on the religion. This was necessary in order to prevent any form of biases in my final conclusion. The second was for me to live with the religious phenomenon, thus the *Akan* religion for a while, in order to understand it from the perspective of its practitioners. This factor also had duly been observed by virtue of me being a Ghanaian Muslim and living amongst the Akan and observing their religion for a while. This was followed by gathering information about the Akan religion. However, in the course of gathering information on the religion, preference was given to the *Akans* views of their own religion through gathering information from works written primarily by *Akan* natives and intellectuals.

This was to ensure that my religious background as a Muslim does not influence my understanding and description of the *Akan* religion. The gathered information were then systematized based on Al Faruqi's theoretical principles. And this involved organizing, classifying and distilling meanings in the collected data. Some attempts were also made to see the extent at which the *Akan* religious beliefs and teachings are consistent. The systematization of the gathered data in this context led to the categorization of the *Akan* religious beliefs and practices into essence and manifestations of the religion as presented below:

4.1 ESSENCE OF AKAN RELIGION

4.1.1 Spirituality

Spirituality is the foundation on which the *Akan* society, culture and belief system is built; for this reason, the *Akan* universe is considered essentially spiritual. In *Akan*, all things, animate and inanimate within the universe are believed to be endowed with varied degrees of spirits ⁽¹³⁶⁾. The spiritual elements of man after death, according to *Akans*, will have to return to the Absolute Spirit in order to reunite and become one with it simply because it was originally from it and was part of it. Man, on the other side, is completely ignorant of the fact that he is by nature part of the Absolute Spirit itself (God/Nyame). The essence of the *Akan* religion, therefore, is a form of spirituality embedded in the totality of rituals, beliefs, practices and behavior patterns perfected by the *Akan* people throughout the passage of time, and it is geared towards making man get in touch or reconnect himself ones again with his Ultimate Source, thus, the Universal Spirit known as, *Nyame* (God) ⁽¹³⁷⁾.

4.2 THE MANIFESTATION

The manifestation of spirituality as the essence the of the *Akan* religion can be illustrated in several ways. In this wok, however, I will be focusing on only three namely, the *Akan* conception of Divine, the *Akan* conception of man, and the *Akan* conception of morality.

4.2.1 The Akan Conception of Divine

4.1.1.1 NYAME

The name of God in *Akan* is *Nyame* and besides this name, however, He (God) has several appellations in *Akan* religion that seek to convey traditional ideas about His nature, works and potency. An example is *Ɔboadeɛ* (Creator, Creator of all things) which also contains the notion of a potent God – since He must logically be potent (indeed,

136 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, p. 24-25.

137 - Kofi Owusu Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth* (USA: 2010), P.13-14.

omnipotent) to be able to create all things. *Onyankopɔn* and *Onyame* are often used interchangeably, although some *Akan* thinkers have sought to distinguish between them (138).

The *Akans* hold the view that *Nyame* (God) is a singular being unlike other creatures and, as well, is uncontainable by the universe. They conceive Him as primordial, Supreme and an uncreated being through whom all other things came into existence. This *Akan* belief of God's boundless power is conveyed through the various names and attributes given to God in *Akan* (139).

4.2.1.2 Lesser Deities (Abosom)

Besides *Onyame/Nyame* who is seen as the Supreme Being in *Akan*, the lesser deities (*Abosom*) are seen as constituting the second stage in the *Akan* cosmology. The third and final stage in the *Akan* cosmology, however, is occupied by man and the material world. In the *Akan* tradition these lesser deities consist of: *Asase Yaa* (the earth deity), *Tete Abosom* (tutelary deities), *Suman Brafo* (physical objects or instruments regarded as gods), *Mmoatia* (forest-dwelling spirits), *Sasabonsam* (monstrous evil spirit), and finally *Nsamanfo* (ancestors).

4.2.1.2.1 Asase Yaa (the earth God): this is an *Akan* term that denotes the idea that the earth in itself is a divine being. This deity however is considered as a woman and usually addressed with the name *Aberewa* (Old woman). She is regarded as the second in command to *Nyame*. During the offering of libations to gods in any of the *Akan* festivals, *Asase Yaa* is given her drink immediately after *Onyame* is shown the initial drink signifying the special position she occupies in the divine hierarchy (140). Moreover, since she is considered the earthly deity, in other words the deity in charge of the earth, she

138 - Hasskei M. Majeed, *On the Rationality of Traditional Akan Religion: Analyzing the Concept of God*, (Accra: Legon Journal of the Humanities, 2014), p. 7.

139 - Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa* (London: Hurst Blackett Publishers, 1853) v. 2, p 126.

140 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 56.

automatically becomes the focus of many forms of *Akan* sacrifices. For example, the *Akan* farmer will have to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed fowls on the land he wishes to cultivate before planting anything. The belief underlining both of these rituals is that the farmers cannot cultivate the land unless granted permission to do so by the owners of the land – namely, *Asase Yaa* and the ancestors (*Nsamanfo*)⁽¹⁴¹⁾.

4.2.1.2.2 Tete Abosom (tutelary deities): these class of deities are highly venerated and usually regarded as *Onyame mba* (children of God). The *Akan* believe that, as children of *Onyame*, the *Tete Abosom* are commissioned by *Onyame* to serve the interests of human communities (villages, towns, states, etc.) who in turn offer regular veneration. As *Onyankopon akyeame* (linguists and mouthpieces of *Onyame*) they therefore function as intermediaries between God and man⁽¹⁴²⁾. They are seen closely associated with particular local sites as well as natural objects such as mountains, hills, rocks, trees, plants, brooks, lakes, and rivers⁽¹⁴³⁾.

These deities are however categorized based on the sector of the *Akan* society they are affiliated to. For instance, the river/thunder deity commonly is traditionally affiliated with the large-scale socio- political institutions of the *Akan*, and as a result is regarded as a State deity. However, regardless of the respective societal affiliations of these deities, all *Tete Abosom* share the common goal of protection, which is to say that the primary role of the *Tete Abosom* involves safeguarding human communities from danger and misfortune⁽¹⁴⁴⁾.

4.2.1.2.3 Suman Brafo (physical objects or instruments regarded as gods): Regarded as the second class of deities in the *Akan* cosmology, these deities consist of physical objects or instruments used in the practice of magic which have been elevated to the

141 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 56.

142 - John Pobee, *Aspect of African Traditional Religion*, (1976) p. 11.

143 - Ibid, p. 10.

144 - Ibid, p. 11.

status of gods ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾. They are deities whose shrines are privately owned and who are also sometimes described as medicine ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾. Unlike the *Tete Abosom* whose main function is to protect the community, the *suman brafoo* are type of deities that can be influenced to kill or bring sickness upon one's enemies ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. Though a *suman* deity can be composed of any material, in most cases they are made out of elements extracted from plants or trees both of which are considered to be an important source of *Suman's* power ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾.

A person seeking assistance from a *Suman* may elect to visit the shrine of a *Bosom Brafoɔ* and place him or herself under the protection of a deity associated with a particular *Suman* ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾. After obtaining a *Suman* from a shrine or purchasing one, the person will likely be expected to privately worship the *Suman* at home on a daily basis in order to ensure the continued protection of the *Suman*. This daily home worship may involve the offering of prayers, libations, kola nuts, or the sprinkling of sacrificial animal blood on the *Suman* object of worship ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾.

4.2.1.2.4 Mmoatia (forest-dwelling spirits): *Mmoatia* in *Akan* language literally means little people. They are believed to be forest-dwelling spirits that assume the form of exceedingly short creatures that are no more than twelve inches tall with curved noses and yellowish skins and feet that point in the opposite direction ⁽¹⁵¹⁾. The *Mmoatia* are hostile towards those who wittingly or unwittingly enter their forest home uninvited. Trespassers are often beaten by the *Mmoatia* and temporarily held in rocky locales that are favored by the *Mmoatia*. In most cases the *Mmoatia* are sure to keep trespassers alive while in captivity by providing them sustenance in the form of bananas. After a period of

145 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 55-56.

146 - Ibid, p. 55.

147 - Kofi Asare Opoku, *Aspects of Akan Worship* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 287.

148 - Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples*, p. 57.

149 - Opoku, *Aspects of Akan Worship*, p. 287.

150- Ibid, p. 288.

151 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 73.

time, captives are released by the *Mmoatia* and instructed to return to their respective homes ⁽¹⁵²⁾.

The *Mmoatia* are renowned among the Akan for their expertise in plant medicine. They are not known for being selfish by hoarding their great knowledge of the medicinal properties of trees, herbs, and other plants, but instead they often share this knowledge with human beings most of whom later become specialists in plant medicine (*Sumankwafo*) ⁽¹⁵³⁾.

4.2.1.2.5 Sasabonsam (monstrous evil spirit): The main feature that distinguish this spirit from *Mmoatia*, *Suman brafoo*, and *Tete Abosom* is the fact that it is categorized as an evil spirit. It is said to be a forest monster believed to mostly reside in trees like *odum* (*chlorophora excels*) and *onyaa* (*ceiba pentandra*) in the forest. Goodness is never associated with this type of spirit. Moreover, it is common knowledge among the *Akans* that the *Sasabonsam* keeps company with those who utilize spiritual power for negative or destructive purposes like *abayifo* (witches) ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾. It is based on this that the Akan proverb states: *Sasabonsam kɔ ayi a, ɔsoɛ ɔbayifo*, which means: when *Sasabonsam* attends a funeral, it lodges with the *ɔbayifo* (a witch) ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

By virtue of it being a monster, its appearance is believed to be terrifying. It is said to have the head of an animal with long black hair, a flaming mouth and a long tongue which sticks out most of the time ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾. Based on a traditional description, It is said to have hooves, wings, and a unique tail, at the end of which is attached a snake head. It wraps its long snake-like tail around the trees on which it perches and uses its formidable wings to

152 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 73.

153 - Ibid, p. 73.

154 - Ibid p. 72.

155 - Ibid, p. 73.

156 - Ibid, p. 72.

fly into the deepest recesses of the forest. The *Sasanbonsam* preys on hunters, travelers, and other persons who enter forests intentionally or wander into them accidentally ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾.

4.2.1.2.6 Nsamanfo (Ancestors): They are regarded as spiritual beings that function as spiritual connection between the living and the dead. Though by nature they are counted among the deceased human beings, it is at the same time believed that they are now spiritual beings living in the world of the ancestors and are wiser and more powerful than humans ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾. It is important to note that though all ancestors are by default part of the deceased, not all deceased are counted as part of the ancestors. In *Akan* tradition, the attainment of ancestor hood depends upon the kind of life that a person led prior to death. As a result, the ancestors consist only of persons who have lived exemplary lives ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾.

In addition to this, ancestor hood in *Akan* tradition, is reserved exclusively for those persons who reach old age, produce children, and die what the *Akan* regard as a good death. For them, a good death is a death that is not as a result of an accident, suicide, cowardly violence, or so called unclean diseases such as lunacy, dropsy [edema], leprosy and epilepsy ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. Due to their role as spiritual intermediaries who are authoritative, influential and regularly visit their communities as family elders, their presence are usually acknowledged by their respective communities through prayers/petitions, pouring of libations, and many other offerings.

4.2.2 The Akan Conception of Man:

4.2.2.1 The Composition of Man

Another way through which the essence of the *Akan* religion manifests itself is through the *Akan* conception of man. It is generally held amongst *Akans* that man consists of two main parts, the material and the spiritual. And while the material part of him is

157 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 72-73.

158 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 36.

159 - Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors*, p. 130.

160 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 36.

represented by his *mogya* (blood) and *honam* (body), the spiritual part of him is represented by his *kra* (soul), *honhom* (breath of life), and his *sumsum* (spirit). The term *ntoro* is sometimes used in reference to man's spirit, while *sumsum* on the other side has been used in some cases to denote his *honhom* thus, the breath of Divine life that dwells within him ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

4.2.2.2 Destiny of Man

Before birth, however, there is a general belief amongst the *Akans* that man receives a destiny from God known as *nkrabea* which is largely perceived as unchangeable. The *nkrabea* in the *Akan* religion signifies the way and manner in which one's life was ordered, or the details of what a person is expected to do in the world. The *Akans*, in addition, hold a general view that God alone has control over human destiny and he alone can change or end it as and when he wills ⁽¹⁶²⁾.

This belief according to *Opoku* ⁽¹⁶³⁾ appears not to be reflecting the actual reality. The reason being that, in many *Akan* societies, several factors are known to have been influencing man's destiny from both negative and positive perspectives. The visitation of traditional priests is one example. According to him, there are instances where people consult a divinity to have a good destiny maintained or prolonged, or a bad destiny corrected. In addition, evil forces such as witchcrafts and other demonic powers are also known to be causing harm to human beings' destiny. A person's own act impulsive behavior or bad character can, as well, affect his destiny for the worse. In addition, people whose fates are revealed to them after they have consulted the oracle, in most cases, take appropriate measures to change their destiny if it happened to be bad or evil ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾.

161 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p.94-95.

162 - Ibid, p. 99-100.

163 - He was formerly Professor of religion and ethics in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, he is an authority in African Traditional Religion, and retired professor of religious studies Lafayette college in Pennsylvania.

164 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 102.

4.2.2.3 Man's Life Cycle

4.2.2.3.1 Birth and Naming Ceremony: In *Akan* societies, birth marks the beginning of the life cycle and it is celebrated with appropriate ceremonies to show its significance. It is a custom amongst the *Akans* to keep new-born babies from public view for seven days and to bring them out and name them on the eighth day during a ceremony. Prior to the eighth day, the child is considered as *ohoho* (visitor) and not as a member of the community. For this reason, the one week waiting period for the *Akans* is to see whether the visitor (the child) will return (die) or stay. And if the child happens to stay alive throughout the seven days, he is considered to have come to stay and not return (die). A naming ceremony (*Abadinto*) is conducted as a result to initiate him fully as a member of the family and society. The ceremony takes place in the early hours of the day about 5 or 6 a.m. before relatives and friends, and it is performed by a person of moral standing from the paternal family ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾.

During the ceremony, two containers are brought and filled with water and palm wine respectively. The person to perform the initiation rites pours libation and then asks the father or his representative about the name to be given to the child. The principal officiant then puts the child on his lap, calls out the name, and dips his right forefinger into the water to wet the child's tongue three times, and says to him: *wuse nsu a, nsu* (if you say it is water, let it be water). He then dips it again, this time round into the palm wine, and then wets the child's tongue three times saying: *wuse nsa a, nsa* (if you say palm wine, let it be pal wine) ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾.

After that, he adds the statement: *wuse tuntum a, tuntum* (if you say it is black, let it be black), and *wuse fitaa a, fitaa* (if you say it is black, let it be black). The moral significance of this ritual is that, in addition to the child being given a name, he is taught

165 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 103-111.

166- *Ibid*, p. 111.

right from this early stage how to leave a faithful, truthful and honest life. Naming ceremony in *Akan*, therefore, is also seen as an occasion through which a child is given his or her first moral instruction, an illustration of the extent at which man by nature is considered a moral being in *Akan* societies ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

4.2.2.3.2 Puberty Rites:

Puberty is the next most important stage of a child's life in *Akan*, and the initiation rites performed at this stage is meant to make the child into a fully developed person capable of undertaking his duties as a full member of the society. These rites includes the seclusion of the child in a camp away from home for a period of time, during which he/she is provided with a kind of training geared towards instilling in him/her ideals of manhood/womanhood to help bring about physical, emotional and psychological changes in him/her. The child's return to home after these rites signifies his/her reborn into adolescence and adulthood. Amongst the *Ashantes* in Ghana, however, only girls undergo such rites ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾.

4.2.2.3.3 Marriage:

Akan marriage customs has many variations depending on each clan. However, there are some basic features that are found to be common amongst them. For example, when an *Akan* boy meets a girl he wishes to marry, he is expected by the *Akan* custom to communicate that to his father. In most cases, this is done through his mother or any elderly person, preferably within the family. And if the mother happens to find the union highly impossible, she may possibly decide not to even communicate it to the father. However, when the union is assessed to be agreeable to the family and the father approves of it, the boy's family is made to immediately begin an investigation into the family history of the girl. The investigation centers around trying to find out whether or

167 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 111.

168 - *Ibid*, p. 112.

not there are any hereditary diseases in the family; whether or not there are records of any criminal activity in the family; and as to whether the family is of good moral standing. All this is done to ensure that a union with the girl's family may not bring disgrace or unpleasant consequences to the family ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾.

When the boy's family is satisfied with the investigation results, the father will then communicate the information to the girl's parent who would equally have to carry out their own investigations. A day is then chosen after both investigations by mutual agreement in order to begin the formal proceedings which starts with the boy's father performing the *Aponakyibo* (knocking at the door). This constitutes the formal betrothal where he provides drinks such as rum or whisky to the girl's family and also a bottle of rum to the girl's father. A token gift of money is also made to the girl's mother. Similar gifts, as well, may be made to other women in the mother's family in addition to the girl's brothers and male cousins. After this, the couple may be seen together but are not expected to consummate their relationship ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾.

The final ceremony performed to bind the couple in a legal wedlock is the performance of the *tiri aseda*, thus, the payment of appreciation fees. This involves the boy's father making a gift to the girl depending on how much he can afford in order to show his appreciation. After this, the boy is made to fix a date on which he will come for his wife. His maternal aunts on that date are made to go to the girl's house where she is already prepared for her husband. However, before taking her away, they are expected to give a bottle of schnapps and pay *Akonta seka*, thus a customary fees, to the girl's brothers and cousins. There is much merry-making on that day after which the girl is taken to her husband's home ⁽¹⁷¹⁾.

169 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 127.

170 - Ibid, p. 127-128.

171 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 127-128.

4.2.2.3.4 Death and After-Life:

In *Akan* tradition, death is regarded not as the end of life but as a transition from this present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits called *asamando*. It does not sever the deceased's connection with his family but rather extends the family relationship into infinity. As a result, the ceremonies and rituals being performed by the living for the dead is meant to emphasize the unbroken family relationship that exist between the living and the dead. Generally, *Akans* believe that society is made up of both the living and the dead and each has a specific role to play in fulfilling society's obligations ⁽¹⁷²⁾.

While it is the responsibility of the living to perform the funeral rites and provide proper burial for the dead, the dead, on their part, are expected to play a more important role in the society including protection, directing, intervening, providing guidance, and serving as elders of the family. Funeral rites in *Akan* are usually performed in four stages and these includes; preparation of the corpse, pre-burial mourning, burial, and finally, post-burial mourning ⁽¹⁷³⁾.

The preparation of the corpse normally starts when a family is informed of the death of one of its members. The preparation includes, bathing the corpse, dressing it, and laying it in state, by the family members. The pre-burial mourning begins when the corpse has been laid in state and friends, relatives and the general public are made to mourn and sympathize with the bereaved family. In the olden day, burial took place in the same day the death occurred, however, with the advent of refrigeration facilities, the body may be delayed for several days. Clothes worn on that day may either be dark red, brown, maroon, or ochre color. The post-burial mourning includes a public ceremony held about a week after the death. After this ceremony there are subsequent periods of mourning which occurs on the 8th, 15th, 40th, 80th, and on the first anniversary of the death. The first

172 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 133-135.

173 - Ibid, p. 133-135.

anniversary is generally held to be important and as such libations are poured and a meal called *Afirihyiaduane* is prepared in memory of the ancestors ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

The dead are believed to be capable of returning to the earth through reincarnation. This belief is illustrated by some *Akan* names given to children. An example of this is the name *Ababio*, literally meaning; *the person has return or come again*. This belief is also expressed in the custom of *Akans* naming children after their grandparents and other ancestors since it is believed that the name which a person bears influences his life. The idea of reincarnation in *Akan*, however, is quite distinctive from other religious tradition. The reason being that, in *Akan*, it is only the dominant characteristics and the spirit of the ancestor which are believed to be reincarnated in his descendant and not his soul ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾.

For each soul remains distinct and each birth represents a new soul. And even though an ancestor is regarded to have been reincarnated into his grandchildren by spirit, he still continues to live in the after-life by soul. Generally, *Akans* consider death as a journey hence the custom of putting some money into the coffin for the deceased to buy food. They also put calabash in it so he may use it in drinking water on his journey. His final destination, however, depends upon how he lived his earthly life. A person who has fulfilled his obligations in life gets to reunite with God (*nyame*) while a person who has not fulfilled is yet is reincarnated back to life ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

4.2.3 The Akan Conception of Morality:

In *Akan* religion, God (*Nyame*) is acknowledged as the final guardian of the moral code and of law and order. This is made manifest in the *Akan* proverb *Nyame mpe bone* (God is against evil). The ancestors are also believed to be acting as invisible guardians of morality and have the power to punish those who violate the traditionally sanctioned

174 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 136.

175 - *Ibid*, p. 138-139.

176 - *Ibid*, p. 138-139.

code, and reward those who keep it. Rewards and punishment, in *Akan*, are not carried out by supernatural beings only but also by human society. While in *Akan* societies, punishment for offences maybe physical penalty or the imposition of fine, other offences within the society may be dealt with by public opinion, and this may take the form of ridicules, social disapproval, or the offender being ostracized ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾.

Taboos in *Akan* societies are set of religious prohibitions instituted by traditional authorities as a means of maintaining law and order, and also to protect the moral integrity and well-being of the whole community. However, unlike ordinary wrong doings, they are taken very seriously; since it can require a blood sacrifice from those who decide to commit them. Traditional *Akan* thinkers usually divide taboos into seven groups, and these includes: Cultic Taboos, Moral Taboos, Economic Taboos, Social Taboos, Political Taboos, Scientific Taboos, and Environmental Taboos.

Cultic Taboos refer to taboos associated with the worship of a deity. They provide directives to the cultic priests, servants and the adherents or consulates in terms of who, when, where and how to worship or not to worship. These types of taboos include: visiting the shrine with slippers on; having sex near a shrine; visiting the shrine shortly after sex without taking a bath; swearing by the gods or ancestors for fun; showing disrespect to a cultic priest or devotee; Cultic priests or devotees violating their cultic vows or sexual purity ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾.

Moral taboos include: Murder i.e. (The intentional killing of an innocent person without just cause, awudie/amewuwu) ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾. Contrary to this, however, in the olden days and within *Akan* societies, people were always sacrificed at the death of a chief. *Akans* believed that the chief must have some subjects to serve him or her in the underworld.

177 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 153-160.

178 - Godwin Kwame Ofosohene, Master's Thesis, *The Concept of God in the Traditional Religion of the Akan and Ewe Ethnic Group Compared to the Bible*, International faith theological seminary (May 21 2006), p. 16.

179 - Ibid, p. 17.

Some of those sacrificed were slaves or strangers who found themselves in the community where the chief had died. However, with the coming of colonization ritual murder was outlawed and overt killings were done in secrecy to avoid the prosecution by the imperial courts. Despite the fact that in today's world human rights and the right of the individual to live is highly promoted, there is a common knowledge that ritual killing is still being practiced among certain communities of the Akan societies in secrecy ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾.

The concept of human sacrifice in *Akan*, though appears contradictory with the *Akan* law on murder, was still justified by Akan. The justification provided to resolve this apparent contradiction has to do with the fact that such sacrifices are seen by *Akans* as exceptional cases to the general taboo on murder. This exceptional case, on the other side, is been justified by them through the high status or position of the Chief.

Economic taboos designed to influence the means of production, distribution and management of wealth at both the individual and social or national levels includes: stealing of private or communal property, especially things of considerable value; fraudulent practices especially related to sacred objects and persons including the chief; shifting farm boundaries without authorization; uprooting of planted food items without authorization; farming near watersheds and or destroying sacred forests and bushes ⁽¹⁸¹⁾.

Political taboos directed at the protection and well-being of the traditional chieftaincy system and the rulers as well as the relations between them and their subjects include: the Chief should not travel alone or unaccompanied; He may only be called by his stool name; one should not insult or argue with the Chief angrily in public; it is a taboo to enter

180 - Laud Abban Brown, Thesis Of Master Of Theology In Biblical Interpretation, Brite Divinity School, Fort worth, *Ritual Of Blood Sacrifice As Evidenced In Colossians 1:20 And Its Implications In Akan Traditional Culture* (2006) p. 10.

181 - Godwin Kwame Ofosohene, *The Concept Of God In The Traditional Religion Of The Akan And Ewe Ethnic Group Compared To The Bible*, p. 18-19.

the palace or greet the chief with your sandals on; it is or taboo to strike the Chief; it is a taboo for the Chief to seduce the wife of his subjects or to be caught in adultery ⁽¹⁸²⁾.

Scientific taboos which besides having spiritual implications also could have some scientific explanations include: not having sex in the bush. Among the scientific explanation given to this is that it helps to ensure that sex does not take place in an unsafe environment such as the bush where there are dangerous insects, scorpions and snakes; not to mention micro-organisms. There is also the possibility of a heart attack or bleeding on the part of any of the parties, which could prove fatal, especially, if the farm or bush is far from home ⁽¹⁸³⁾.

Environmental taboos on the other hand, intended by traditional authorities for the regulation of the ethical use of the environment include: clearing of sacred forests or bushes; felling of forbidden timber species; hunting of animals during forbidden seasons and sacred days; fishing in the sea on certain days e.g. Tuesday (Fante and Ga areas of Ghana); eating of totem animals; eating of sacred or forbidden fish; setting of bush-fires for hunting in certain forests or bushes; digging of graves for burial without due authorization from the chief; desecration of graves ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾.

182 - Godwin Kwame Ofosohene, *The Concept Of God In The Traditional Religion Of The Akan And Ewe Ethnic Group Compared To The Bible*, p. 19-20.

183 - Ibid, p. 22-23.

184 - Ibid,p. 24.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLYING AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY ON THE AKAN RELIGION:

META-RELIGION

APPLICATION OF AL FARUQI'S METHODOLOGY

META-RELIGION

Meta-religion according to Al Faruqi is the third aspect involved in the history of religions. It comes after the principle of disengagement and theoretical principles. While the principle of disengagement involves data collections through which the researcher is supposed to bracket his previous judgments or misconceptions about the religion he is studying, the theoretical principles involve the systematization of the collected data. And this includes, organizing, classifying, contextualizing and deriving meaning from the collected data. Meta-religion, on the other side, is a yard stick for assessing the systematized data. In other words, it is a set of evaluative principles meant for judging or evaluating the content being dealt with. This, according to Al Faruqi, is very necessary in order to avoid relativistic pluralism, thus a situation whereby each religion claims to have or possess the final truth ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾. These set meta-religion principles combine in an integrated method two set of metaphysics and ethical principles.

However, Al Faruqi's reasons for formulating this meta-religion principles, should on the other side not be misunderstood. In other words, it is not supposed to be seen as polemical just because it critically examines a religion but rather must be viewed within a specific context, thus, the context within which it was formulated. According to him, the principles were formulated objectively and aimed at drawing all religions together by way of uniting them under these principles. Doing this, for him, paves the way for a new world. Thus, a world with a new sense of oneness and humanity, where all members transcend polemical approaches in studying each other's religion. This new anticipated community of brotherhood, as he suggests, sets no member off from the rest of mankind; since by nature it is a world community with all members sharing a common world

185 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 22-23.

culture. This world which he terms as ‘‘religio-culture world-community’’ though is in the process of being created has its structures yet to be crystallized and frozen around a new set of universal principles ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾.

The creation of such a world is a necessity. Thus, necessary for fighting against the forces of division which could include; tribalism, racialism and nationalism, as well as, provincialism, relativism, and sectarianism. This new world, as Al Faruqi argues, seeks not to be divided into: a Christian, Muslim, Hindu-Buddhist, and Materialist world where each group claims possession of the final truth and as such strives towards converting the others. Rather, it seeks to form a larger religio-cultural community for mankind whereby all humans will strive as a single group in reviving a new sense of brotherhood which is geared towards achieving the universal destiny of mankind. And it is within this context that Al Faruqi formulated his meta-religion principles which, according to him, reflects the religious experience of mankind and should be used as the basis upon which all religions are measured. This will mean that, the more world religions agree with these principles the closer they get to each other ⁽¹⁸⁷⁾.

These meta-religion principles are made up of six elements, and these are listed as follows: (a) being is of two realms: Ideal and Actual, (b) Ideal Being is Relevant to Actual Being, (c) Relevance of the Ideal to the Actual is a Command, (d) Actual Being is as Such Good, (e) Actual Being is Malleable, and finally, (f) Perfection of the Cosmos is Only a Human Burden ⁽¹⁸⁸⁾. In the course of applying these principles on the Akan religion, though preference was given to the Akans perspective of their religion, these perspectives were not blindly accepted during the evaluation process without a critical examination. The evaluation process, in addition, was not polemical in nature seeking to promote a specific religion, neither did it arrive at an extreme conclusion that cannot be

186 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 1-2.

187 - Ibid, p. 2.

188 - Ibid, p 22 – 30.

considered for dialogue. Rather, it adopted a more systematic approach towards the Akan religious beliefs in the spirit of universal brotherhood and love while at the same time evaluating the corpus of the religion's stories or mythologies by means of systemizing its metaphysical concept including its ideas on value.

In the application process, however, the following steps were carefully observed:

1. Application of epoche in gathering information about the Akan religion
2. Understanding the gathered information in the light of Al Faruqi's theoretical principles
3. And finally, comparing Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles with the Akan metaphysics in order to find out the extent at which agree and disagree.

META-RELIGION AND THE AKAN RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

5.1 Being is of two realms: Ideal and Actual:

Applying Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles on the Akan religion will first require knowing the religion's position on the two realms of existence as proposed by Al Faruqi. A careful study of the Akan religion reveals that, its ideas on the nature of existence appears to be similar but not in strict conformity with Al Faruqi's ideas on the nature of existence. For example, according him, being is of two types: the ideal and the actual and both are distinct and in different realms of existence.

Similarly in the Akan cosmology, there is an idea of two main divisions of existence, thus, the material and the spiritual, and these two could further be divided into three stages. The first is the highest stage and it is occupied by the Supreme Being known by the Akans as Onyame (God). The second stage is occupied by the Abosom (lesser deities), and these includes, Asase Yaa (the earth deity); Tete Abosom (tutelary deities); Suman Brafo (physical objects or instruments regarded as gods); Mmoatia (forest-

dwelling spirits); Sasabonsam (monstrous evil spirit); and Nsamanfo (ancestors). The third stage, on the other side, is occupied by Nnipa (human beings).

In explaining the Akan concept of reality Gyekye pointed out that there lies not a distinction between the sensible (perceivable) and the nonsensible (nonperceivable) world in the sense of the latter being real and the former being unreal as found in other metaphysical systems. The distinction in the Akan tradition rather lies entirely in the perceivability of one and the unperceivability of the other ⁽¹⁸⁹⁾.

He further argued that the perceivability of one, thus, the world of nature does not in any way detract from its reality. However, although it will seem from this perspective that reality in Akan appears to be one and homogeneous, this is not the case since the characteristics of the physical world are not the same as that of the spiritual. The Akan metaphysical world is as such dual notwithstanding the fact that the activities of the inhabitants of the spiritual world extend to, and are 'felt' in, the physical world ⁽¹⁹⁰⁾.

A careful study of the Akan cosmology reveals that, even though it appears not to have provided arguments in justifying the existence of God, it acknowledges his Supremacy as the creator and does not in any way doubt his existence. The spiritual world in Akan is not regarded identical to the physical though there exists a strong relationship between both. Nyame (God) who is part of the spiritual world, in Akan, is regarded as the creator through whom the material or physical world becomes what it is. He is not a mental status of concepts or considered different from the material world on the basis of his reality as in other metaphysics and epistemologies but rather on the basis of his characteristics which, according to Gyekye, are different from that of the physical world. This therefore justifies the fact that the spiritual and the physical world in Akan are essentially two separate realms of existence that cannot be regarded as one.

189 - Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1995) p. 69.

190 - Ibid, p. 69.

From the standpoint of ethics, God (Nyame) who is part of the unseen world is acknowledged as the final guardian of the moral code and of law and order and this is made manifest in the *Akan* proverb *Nyame mpe bone* (God is against evil). The ancestors who are part of the spirit world are also believed to be acting as invisible guardians of morality and have the power to punish those who violate the traditionally sanctioned code and reward those who keep it ⁽¹⁹¹⁾.

This in a way suggests a clear distinction between values and its actualization within the *Akan* tradition. Thus, while values belong to the spiritual world, its actualization takes place within the physical world with the spiritual world being its guardian. This means that, had the spiritual and physical world been one and the same thing, it would have been impossible for the spiritual world to act as guardian for the moral codes in the physical world; since both realms are the same and one as a result can't be, or set, the criterion for the other. On this basis it could be argued that since, according to the *Akan* tradition, the Spiritual world is believed to be acting as guardian for the moral codes in the physical world, this presupposes that both realms, thus the spiritual and physical, are not identical.

And as Al Faruqi clearly states ⁽¹⁹²⁾:

Facts and values are two orders of beings. If this duality were not true, and fact and value belonged to the same order of being, it would be groundless to judge one "fact" by another..... and all that is asserted is that there are two realms of being, not one; and we call the argument therefore self-evident because its denial involves one either thoroughgoing skepticism, or in self-contradiction the moment he 'cognizes' or 'evaluates'..... Being therefore is not monistic. There are at least two realms

Though Gyekye speaks of the *Akan* metaphysical world as dual, this type of duality is not exactly the same as Al Faruqi's conception of duality. In other words, the fact that we can draw parallels between both concepts does not in any way suggest that they are identical.

The actual realm, according to Al Faruqi, is made up of space and matter including

191 - Opoku Kofi Asare, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978) p. 153-160.

192 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 22-23.

humanity, sensory perceptions and acts of consciousness ⁽¹⁹³⁾, while the Akan view of the physical world, as understood from Gyekye's argument, appears to be limited to perceivable things as opposed to non-perceivable ones.

Al Faruqi defines the ideal realm as transcendent being expressed on two levels. While the first level contains the realm of essence and ideal entities which could be understood as objects either physical or perceived ideas which can be actualized in this world, the other contains the realm of value which is made up of God *in percipi*, thus God's values from which the actual real ought to follow. According to him, however, though man is capable of knowing God *in percipi*, thus, God's values, he cannot in any way know God's essence ⁽¹⁹⁴⁾.

In the Akan tradition, man appears to be capable of knowing God's essence. And this could be understood from some Akan myths. According to such myths, the material and spiritual world once lived together before a permanent separation between them. In Opoku's narration of this myth he points out that, Onyame (God) and humans once lived very close together and humans could reach, touch, and feel him. Then an old woman began to pound her fufuu regularly using a mortar and a long pestle. She hit Onyame every time she pounded fufuu; so Onyame moved further and further away from humans and went into the skies ⁽¹⁹⁵⁾, and this marked the beginning of the separation.

He went ahead to argue that when the people realized what had happened, thus, the separation between God and man, they tried to find a way to bring God back into their midst. The old woman suggested that they should all bring their mortars together and pile them one on top of another to form a 'ladder' to reach [Onyame]. They discovered that they needed just about one more mortar to make a ladder long enough. The old woman

193 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *On Arabism*, p. 253.

194 - Ibid, p. 250-253.

195 - Opoku Kofi Asare, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 23-24.

then suggested that they pull out the bottommost mortar and put it on top. When they attempted to do this the whole construction collapsed on them and killed many⁽¹⁹⁶⁾.

If the above narration is interpreted literally, it will be suggest that while Al Faruqi argues that the two realms of existence, that is the ideal and the actual, are distinct and for that matter exist in two different realms separate from each other, the Akan tradition suggests a similar idea but adds that both the material and spiritual world once existed together before a complete separation occurred between them. The Akans further dividing existence into three stages by placing in between Onyame (God) and Nnipa (human beings) intermediaries known as Abosom (lesser gods), though does not contradict their original dualistic concept of reality, however, appears to be inconsistent with Al Faruqi's conception of duality.

Despite this, one could argue for a middle ground between both metaphysics on the basis of the distinction between the two realms of existence being a necessity in order to avoid relativism in ethics. Thus, while for Al Faruqi the ideal realm is a realm of values which ought to be followed by the actual and as such serves as the criterion for truth, in the Akan tradition the spirit world is believed to be acting as guardians of moral codes in the physical world. This makes the spirit world serve as the main point of reference as far as truth is concerned.

In addition to this Akan dualistic concept of reality, there exist some views within modern Akan scholarship that seem to be presenting a monistic Akan concept of reality instead. Kofi Bempah for example argues that the Akan concept of reality is a monistic one made up of only one Spirit, God, permeating everything including man. And thus any other spirit in the world is an individualized part of the Absolute spirit. Meaning, it is a part of the absolute Spirit (God) coming down to be individualized in a specific being or

196 - Opoku Kofi Asare, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 23-24.

creature. It is however due to some form of ignorance that makes the object within which the Absolute Spirit (God) is individualized not able to realize that it is the same and not separate from the Absolute Spirit (God). For him, this explains why in the Akan religion, it is possible to claim that man can become God again if he sheds his ignorance and realizes who he really is, thus God ⁽¹⁹⁷⁾. He describes the absolute as an eternal and invisible without name or form though there exist certain names and attributes used in describing his qualities. He is eternal and Omnipresent (existing before creation). He is the absolute Consciousness of Being ⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. According to him, Man as an example of an individualized consciousness or Spirit of the Absolute and he is immortal just like God the Absolute Being. He is immortal because he is by nature an immortal apparent individualized Nyame-Spirit in a perishable concretized energy form (body). This, according to him, is clearly expressed in the Akan proverb that, *Nyame nnu na mawu*, literally meaning, *God is immortal therefore I am also immortal*. This indicates that, though the body perishes the spirit is immortal. From an Akan perspective, man is seen to be made up of spirit and matter. His spiritual part is the apparent individualized Nyame (God) part in him and that is what makes him immortal ⁽¹⁹⁹⁾.

Death according to Bempah is only a means for separating the spirit from the body in order to reunite with its origin. As a result, the separated spirit after death goes back to its original state by merging into the Universal Spirit, Nyame (God). When this mergence occurs, the spirit may still hold on to its mind, emotions, feelings etc. However, though the spirit merges, the sense of the individuality persists except in the situation in which the spirit has fulfilled all its obligations while on earth. And it is in only this exceptional

197 - Kofi Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth* (USA: 2010), p. 71.

198 - Ibid, p. 62.

199 - Kofi Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, p. 72-74.

situation that the merge is complete and the individualized spirit loses its sense of individuality and assumes the power, wisdom and glory of Nyame (God) ⁽²⁰⁰⁾.

In Akan spirituality, a spirit that has fulfilled all the obligations entrusted upon it by the Absolute Spirit (God), realized its unitive identity with him, and shared in his glory, power and wisdom is called as *Nana*. This signifies the self-realized one and it is this state of spiritual consciousness in Akan that, according to Bempah, is known as the state of self-realization ⁽²⁰¹⁾.

One essential question arises in this context and that is, what really is the Akan concept of reality? Is it dualistic in nature or monistic? The answer, I think, highly depends on the perspective from which one looks at the Akan religion. While looking at the religion from a ritualistic point of view will suggest dualism as its concept of reality, viewing it from a mystical perspective might suggest monism as its concept of reality.

5.2 The Ideal Being is Relevant to the Actual Being:

According to Al Faruqi, since the ideal realm acts as principle of classification of the order and structure of actual beings, it follows from this that it provides the pattern by which the actual is or is not what it is, the standard by which the actual is or is not valuable ⁽²⁰²⁾. Meaning, so far as the ideal makes the actual what it is, it follows from this that, it is indeed relevant to the actual realm. Similarly, the fact that the spirit world in Akan consisting of God, ancestors, and the lesser gods or deities play a significant role in the day to day activities of the physical world, this shows that the spirit world's relevancy to the physical world cannot be questioned.

Starting with Nyame (God), the Akans generally regard him as the Overlord of society and the final authority in all matters. He is also regarded as the Final Point of reference and appeal and the Parent of Mankind who has below him the ancestors, the deities and

200 - Kofi Bempah, *Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth*, p. 85-86.

201 - Ibid, p. 114.

202 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 23-24.

the spirits all of whom derive their power from him. He is acknowledged by the Akans as the Final Guardian of the moral code and of law and order. There are many Akan proverbs indicating that morality flows from God amongst these is the proverb: *Onyame mpe bone* which means: God is against evil ⁽²⁰³⁾. Furthermore, God in Akan is considered to be everywhere and as such sees and hears all. He is therefore entrusted with the knowledge of all offences including those which may escape human detection. This idea of an omniscient God who sees and knows the secret deeds of men and brings them all under judgement is expressed in the Akan name for God *Brekyirihunuade*, which means, He who sees all even that which is behind him ⁽²⁰⁴⁾.

The ancestors, on the other side, are also known to have keen interest in the moral order. Seen as haven led exemplary lives on earth and perhaps trodden the moral path laid down by the First Grand Ancestor or Overlord of Society, they are believed to be acting as invisible guardians of morality. In addition, by virtue of they previously living in this world and now also familiar with the spirit world, the Akans hold the view that they know more than the living, and are mostly described as the source of moral sanctions in the society. As guardians of the moral codes and protectors of the society, they are believed to have been invested with the power to punish those who break societal customs, and those who keep it amongst the living ⁽²⁰⁵⁾.

The gods or lesser deities in addition to the Supreme Being and ancestors are also believed to be playing a prominent role in controlling morality in the Akan tradition. They abhor actions which may upset the harmony of the community or ruin family life. In addition they also administer punishment to those who infringe the moral code. Though in general God or the Supreme Being is held to be the source of morality while the lesser gods act on his behalf to ensure that his laws are upheld, and to punish those that infringe

203 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 153.

204 - Ibid, p. 155.

205 - Opouk, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 155-156.

them, the lesser gods also have their own individual taboos which their devotees are expected to uphold ⁽²⁰⁶⁾.

The Akans distinguish between two kinds of sins. The first is called *bone* and this may broadly be termed as wrong-doing, wickedness, evil or sin. This category of sins are those that can bring about conflicts or disharmony between men and may be settled without involving the entire community though the settlement might involve the pouring of libation. The second category of sins is called *mmusu* and this is understood as acts that bring disaster or cause misfortune. It has a wider implication because its consequences go beyond the offender and threatens the entire community and as such the gods can require a blood sacrifice for its settlement. Examples of this category of sins include, suicide, false swearing of oaths, and also anti-social acts such as witchcraft, sorcery, and back-biting ⁽²⁰⁷⁾.

In this sense just as, Al Faruqi argues that, the ideal realm may even be said to “cause” the actual to be what it is; since without it as structuring principle we can neither be said to have the actual, nor to make the evaluative judgement ⁽²⁰⁸⁾, the spirit world in the Akan tradition can be said to be governing activities of the physical world without which it would have been difficult to bring to judgement both good and wrong doers. The guardian of a moral code cannot be said to be irrelevant to those to whom the moral code is meant for. The main argument here is that, the spirit world in Akan is the standard of all that is good, moral or beautiful. It serves as the criterion through which valuableness or goodness in its most general sense is perceived and expected to be realized by men. This to a higher extent emphasizes the existence of two realms in the Akan tradition, thus the spirit and the physical, and the relevance of the former to the later. For if the spirit

206 - Opouk, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 156-157.

207 - Ibid, p. 156-158.

208 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 23.

world was irrelevant to the physical world, its existence by nature as a realm would have been meaningless.

5.3 Relevance of the Ideal to the Actual is a command:

For Al Faruqi, the relevance of the Ideal to the Actual is a command. Command in this sense means ‘a necessity’. He argues that regardless of whether or not man obeys the command, the ideal realm persists in commanding. It judges the actual situation as praiseworthy or condemnable; whoever enters the situation stands under its command to realize the value in question; and hence, under its judgment as to whether he is, or is not, as he ought to be; whether he has, or has not, fulfilled what he ought to do ⁽²⁰⁹⁾.

For him, values which constitutes the ideal realm and ought to be followed or realized in the actual realm could either be realized or not realized without necessarily having an effect on the ideal realm in its self. However, the realization of these values in the actual realm becomes necessary due to the necessity of natural law which in itself is identical to the ideal ⁽²¹⁰⁾.

Let’s consider justice as a value existing in the ideal realm. The ability or inability to actualize it in this world does not in any way affect ‘justice’ as an ideal value. Rather ‘justice’ as an ideal value only serves as a criterion to tell whether or not one is being just. In other words, one will realize that he has been unjust in an action when the action happens to go contrary to what justice as an ideal means, necessitating the need to act in accordance to the ideal value of justice. In order to act justly, therefore, the ideal value of justice commands or necessitate that it is followed.

In the context of the Akan religion there is an aspect of the spirit world which also necessitates obedience, and these aspects include moral codes enshrined upon the living. For example, Asaase Yaa (The Earth Spirit) abhors suicide, the spilling of blood and

209 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 25.

210 - Ibid, p 24 – 25.

cohabitation in the bush. Such acts are considered by the Earth Spirit of the Akans as *mmusu*, thus, an act that brings disaster or misfortune to the land. The general belief held by the Akans is that when such acts are committed, the earth will refuse to yield; and an untold calamity will befall the land. To avert such punishment, however, sacrifices are therefore supposed to be made to the Earth Spirit ⁽²¹¹⁾.

The Earth Spirit in Akan is also known to be a keen upholder of truth. Whenever the truthfulness of a statement is in doubt, the person in question is challenged to touch the tips of his tongue with some soil to prove that he is not telling a lie. The assumption here is that the Earth Spirit will bring her vengeance upon him in case he is lying. Some Akan gods are also known to be against anti-social acts such as witchcraft, sorcery and back-biting. Offenders in most cases are brought to the shrines to confess their crimes. Failure to do so will make the gods strike them with various ailments or death ⁽²¹²⁾.

The Akan proverb *Onyame mpe bone* (God is against evil) strongly emphasizes that morality flows from God and the nature of the spirit world demands an appropriate response from the physical world ⁽²¹³⁾. For this reason, Akans in general are expected to obey these laws despite the fact that individuals have the choice to obey or not obey them provided they are ready to bear its consequence. This in a way reflects the possibility of man to disobey the natural law as argued by Al Faruqi ⁽²¹⁴⁾:

the realm of ideal being, therefore, is relevant to man, as member of the realm of actual being, in that it issues to the latter a —command which he can always miss; in that it furnishes for him the desideratum not necessary determination, of his being, his membership in the actual realm, his cosmic stand

To conclude with, it could be said that, the Akan religion is considered practical. Practical in the sense that it doesn't separate spirituality from ethics, or morality in man's daily

211 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 157.

212 - Ibid, p. 158.

213 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 153.

214 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 26.

activities. As part of the Akan Traditional Religion, there are rules that are set by the Spirit world to regulate the day to day spiritual life of the Akan. This command comes in different forms ranging from ethical values to directives regarding the will of the spiritual world that includes rules governing who, when, where and how to worship or not to worship ⁽²¹⁵⁾. These include taboos that are expected to be adhered to by all Akans practicing the Akan Traditional Religion. These rules are taken very seriously in typical traditional societies because some of them might require a blood sacrifice from those who decide to act contrary to them. Man, who is considered a product of God's creative will ⁽²¹⁶⁾, is expected to adhere to these commandments.

5.4 Actual Being is as Such Good:

According to Al Faruqi, the actual Being is by nature good and not perfect. He argues that if the actual being was not good in itself, it would not be valuable for any value in the ideal realm to be realized by it. Meaning, what makes the actual realm good is that it is capable of actualizing the ideal which is good in itself, a function that if happens to be false could make the purpose of the existence of the actual realm in itself questionable. In other words, the actual realm would not have been able to actualize the ideal good if it was not in itself good. This means that man, though not a perfect being, could not have been able to actualize the ideal if he was by nature an evil being ⁽²¹⁷⁾.

For this reason, the physical world and all that exists within it including man should not be seen as evil but rather as an imperfect form of goodness that should be improved. As such, any religion or philosophy that declares this world as fundamentally and essentially

215 - Godwin Kwame Ofosohene, *The Concept Of God In The Traditional Religion Of The Akan And Ewe Ethnic Group Compared To The Bible*, p. 16.

216 - Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, p. 85.

217 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p. 27.

evil sets off with a false start and denies its self the right to contend in what is valuable and not valuable for man ⁽²¹⁸⁾.

The Akan religion regards humanity as innocent. Man in Akan is by nature believed to have been born innocent and as such is expected to retain his innocence through personal efforts and not through redemptive efforts of any other being as found in other religions. The Akan conception of Man's destiny throws more light on this. In Akan, each man is born with his own destiny called Nkranea or Hyebea which it received from God. There are two explanations regarding how a soul receives its destiny. One explanation suggests that the soul before birth appears before God and receives its destiny from him. The other view suggests that the soul appears before God and obtain leave from him to come into this world. The soul tells Him its destiny and the approval it receives from God becomes binding. There is, therefore, no room for original sin in the Akan religion. Man is born with a pure soul with his own destiny ordained and endowed for him direct from and by the hands of God ⁽²¹⁹⁾.

In addition, the Akan religion does not have the notion of God punishing his creatures or servants in hell fire due to sins, wrong doings or any form of criminal acts; since he God is considered as good and loving. However, there exist the notion of reincarnation which is designed to elevate man from a state of weakness or imperfection to a state of perfection. So for example, if man, before birth, is giving his destiny but fails to fulfill them while on earth, he will be reincarnated after death with his original destiny to continue doing good from where he left off. Man will continue to be reincarnated till he is able to fully actualize his original destiny. This continues reincarnation in Akan is not in any way considered as a graded series of punishment for his sins in his previous incarnation but rather as an opportunity for him to be able to overcome his weaknesses,

218 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 27.

219 - Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 100.

build up or develop his power and capacities by reaching the state of perfection, good and virtue where he will no more be obliged to be reincarnated ⁽²²⁰⁾.

The Akan story of the separation of God from man also throws more light on the Akan perception of the material world as good even though not perfect. One version of the story points out that even though the relationship between God and man at the initial stages was very close, a permanent separation did occur as a result of an old woman's misconduct after she was continuously warned by God ⁽²²¹⁾. The main point of reference in this myth is that, if the material world was bad or evil in itself, the spiritual world (God) which is good by nature wouldn't have lived with it from the beginning. And similarly, had the material world been perfect by nature, man wouldn't have made a mistake that resulted in a permanent separation between the two.

5.5 Actual Being is Malleable:

According to the Al Faruqi, the Actual being is malleable. To be malleable literally means to be capable of being controlled or influenced by external forces ⁽²²²⁾. This principle as discussed earlier is built on the notion that, though the actual realm is such that it is determined and made into what it is by the ideal realm, it is at the same time by nature malleable. This means it could possibly be determined by outside factors besides the ideal realm. And it is this openness to receive new determination and thus deflect from its normal causal threads that makes it malleable ⁽²²³⁾.

In other words, despite the fact that, the world and all that is within it including man is created by the ideal and, as a result, must be subjected to complete obedience to its commands, man, by nature being susceptible, is capable of being influenced by other things which ends up making him become something else other than what he would have

220 - J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 82.

221 - Molefi Kete Asanti, Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, p. 24-25.

222 - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/malleable> .

223 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 29 – 30.

been if he had obeyed the ideal ⁽²²⁴⁾. This therefore explains the fact that even though the ideal realm is by nature supposed to be realized in the actual realm, its realization or non-realization still remains a possibility.

In the Akan religion, though the soul is considered as divine, it can at the same time be influenced by evil which is by nature undesired and condemned. In explaining how malleable the human soul could be, J.B Danquah mentioned that ⁽²²⁵⁾:

‘No evil stains or sings it’s (the soul’s) goodness, but evil can arrest its growth to its full hyebea (responsibilities) if the sunsum (spirit) is not prepared for its entry’

The malleability of man in Akan can, as well, be explained by the concept of reincarnation in the religion. In the Akan religion, man is reincarnated because he has not been able to fulfill his obligations or responsibilities enshrined upon him by God. However, it is believed that he is unable to fulfill these obligations not because he is incapable of fulfilling them but rather because of his imperfect nature making it possible for other factors to influence his decisions; thereby diverting his attention from fulfilling his obligations and responsibilities as enshrined upon him by God.

The Akan story of the separation between God and man also points out this imperfect and malleable nature of man. In the story as explained earlier, God and man once lived together and were very close so much that men could feel and touch God. However, it was as a result of an old woman hitting God with her mortar during pounding her fufuu that led God to move far away into the sky. The main argument here is that, if man by nature was perfect and as such was not susceptible to external influence, he wouldn’t have made such a mistake that had led to the permanent separation of God from him.

Due to the imperfect and susceptible nature of man in the Akan religion, his purpose in life is to strive and reach perfection. And this involves man shedding away his ignorance

224 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 29 – 30.

225 - J. B Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 86.

through fulfilling his obligations in order that he may discover his true origin, thus the state of Enlightenment or Self-realization called 'Nana'. Individuals who have been able to achieve this within Akan societies are called as 'Nana', and they serve as guides to others within the community. Such people, after death, will not be re-incarnated. Their souls or spirits gets united with the Absolute Spirit and become one with it. However, individuals who are unable to achieve this status before death, as mentioned earlier, will have to be re-incarnated till they fulfill their obligations of being a 'Nana'.

5.6 Perfection of the Cosmos is Only a Human Burden:

According to this final principle, perfection of the cosmos is only a human burden. This means that it is the responsibility of man and not any other to mold the actual being into the likeness of the ideal. According to Al Faruqi, the elements, organic matter, plants, animals and all other members of the actual realm with the exception of man are mercilessly subject to inevitable laws of the ideal realm. Man, on the other side, is the only member of the actual realm who despite not being free from the natural laws is still capable of deflecting the courses of the causal threads of destiny to ends other than what has been destined ⁽²²⁶⁾.

His significance in creation lies in the fact that he is the only creature who holds the key to the entrance of the ideal into the actual realm. He stands in between the ideal and actual realm as a mediator and he is the only one through whom the values of the ideal could be realized in the actual realm. This therefore is what makes the perfection of the world his sole responsibility ⁽²²⁷⁾.

Man in the Akan tradition is considered as a unique creature. A unique creature because he is the only creature that possesses a soul. This soul on is considered immortal since it came from an immortal source who is God. Though man's possession of a soul makes

226 - Ismail Al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, p 30 – 31.

227 - Ibid, p 30 – 31.

him unique, this uniqueness of his nature comes with a great responsibility which has to do with fulfilling a specific duty in the world. This duty is known in the Akan tradition as his destiny which was given to him by God prior to his coming to the world. As a result, he is expected to fulfill these responsibilities since he is accountable to God after death. A successful fulfillment of his destiny is, however, highly dependent on how much he is able to adhere to the commandments and laws enshrined upon him by God. And so far as these commands enshrined upon him could be seen as laws that are geared towards the protection and proper functioning of the material world, this is an indication that the perfection of cosmos remains the sole responsibility of man; since he alone is required to obey and as a result enforce these commandments.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above work has attempted uncovering the deeper ground between the religious experience of mankind, thus Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles, and the Akan religion in Ghana with the hope of establishing a harmonious relation between the religion and the religio-cultural world-community at large. The exercise as clearly stated from the beginning was not meant for polemical reasons, rather it was meant to evaluate the Akan religion after studying and understanding it from a phenomenological perspective. And this was done by way of systematizing the metaphysical ideas of the religion. The final outcome of this exercise, if accepted by the Akans of Ghana, will help foster the way for this new citizenship of the coming religio-cultural world-community in which Akans and practitioners of other world religions will begin to transcend polemical approaches when it comes to studying and understanding each other's religion.

Acceptance of the conclusion will, however, suggest that, the Akans will have to give new interpretations to those elements in their religion (including stories and mythologies) that are not in line with the meta-religion principles. Amongst these elements could

include some aspects of the Akan dualistic concept of reality which instead of perceiving man as the only being capable of mediating between the two worlds rather considered the smaller deities including the spirits of the ancestors as the main intermediaries between the seen and the unseen world. The story of the old woman and her children can also be considered for reinterpretation. The story in this case will be given a metaphorical interpretation rather than a literal one. Finally, Kofi Bempah's monistic understanding of the Akan concept of reality, though appears not to be representing the generally accepted view in the religion, should also have to be rehabilitated to be in line with Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles.

CONCLUSION

This work attempted applying Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion on the African Traditional Religion. It focused mainly on exposing and examining the usefulness of the principle of disengagement, theoretical principles, and meta-religion in relation to the Akan religion in Ghana. While the principle of disengagement in addition to theoretical principles were used in understanding the religion, the meta-religion principles were used in evaluating the religion. It was, however, demonstrated throughout this exercise that all these three set of principle are interconnected to the extent that they combine metaphysical, theoretical and ethical principles in one whole set of principles of understanding and evaluation. As a result, when any metaphysical system differed radically from these principles, it had to be rehabilitated by its adherents in order to be in line with these principles. By not doing so, the adherents will either have to ignore the internal inconsistency in their system or be ignored by rational human beings around them.

The application of the principle of disengagement on the Akan religion was done in accordance with the following steps: first, the suspension of judgments which was necessary for preventing any form of biases. Second, living amongst the Akan for a while which was necessary in understanding the religion from the Akan perspective. And third, gathering information about the religion from works primarily produced by Akan natives and intellectuals. These information's were then systematized based on Al Faruqi's theoretical principles which involved organizing, classifying and distilling meanings in the collected information. The systematization, however, led to categorization of the Akan religious beliefs into two main categories namely, the essence and manifestations of the Akan religion.

The application of the principle of disengagement, however, was not done without some difficulties. The main difficulty has to do with the extent at which one is capable of

completely breaking out from his preconceived ideas about the religious phenomena he studies. However, although it remains a fact that living with ‘life facts’, as Al Faruqi suggests, serves a great purpose in studying the Akan religion in Ghana, the difficulty that may arise when one applies this principle, will have to do with the extent at which one will be able to suspend his presupposed judgments before studying the religion. Despite these difficulty, the application process yielded a good result which was discovering the essence of the Akan religion together with its manifestations. While spirituality was seen as the essence of the Akan religion in Ghana, its manifestations were observed in different ways including the Akan conception of the Divine, the Akan conception of man, and the Akan conception of morality.

Although these conclusions were finally arrived at through the application of this principle on the Akan religion, it could also be argued further that the application process did not completely fulfill the requirements for Al Faruqi’s principles of disengagement. The reason being that his principles go beyond this level to the level of establishing validity of the accounts given by the Akans of Ghana about their religion. Al Faruqi is of the view that validity of the believer’s view of his religion should be established by comparing the view with the religious scriptures and traditions of the believers. This should also be coupled by engaging in constructive dialogue with the believers. On this basis it could be said that, before admitting the above conclusions on the Akan religion as representing what Akans truly feel, believe and know about their religions, as per Al Faruqi’s principles, these conclusions will further have to fulfill the following conditions: Firstly, be verified by the current Akan practitioners of the religion, secondly, the views of the Akans about their religion must be compared with their available oral and religious traditions, and finally, the Akans must also be engaged in a meaningful and constructive dialogue. This, I think, should be a further researchable area that should be explored by

researchers or historians of religion interested in studying the African Traditional Religion.

The application of Al Faruqi's theoretical principles through which the Akan religious beliefs were organized, classified and distilled, also yielded some results. It was found out that despite the fact that many Akan religious beliefs and practices are consistent with Al Faruqi's principle of coherence, there exist some beliefs and practices that appear to be contradictory. An example of this is the law of murder. This law was seen to have condemned the killing of innocent human beings on one hand, and on the other appeared to have condoned it when a chief died. One could definitely argue that this scenario might not bring in the evaluational system case of ultimate contradiction due to the status or the position of the chief, however, it could at the same time be further argued that the act still calls for a moral judgement since it sacrificed an elemental human value.

The meta-religion finally was used to evaluate the Akan metaphysics. And this was done through comparing it with Al Faruqi's meta-religion to bring to light the extent at which they both agree or disagree. During this exercise, however, it was discovered that though we could draw parallels between both metaphysics, both at the same time cannot be said to be identical. And as a result, the studies suggested a possible reinterpretation and rehabilitation of some aspects of the Akan metaphysics. These aspects include, the reinterpretation of the Akan myth concerning the separation between God and man, rehabilitation of the position of man in the Akan metaphysics so he becomes the sole intermediary between the spiritual and physical world, and finally, the rehabilitation of Kofi Bempah's monistic understanding of the Akan concept of reality so that it will be in line with Al Faruqi's meta-religion principles.

Based on the above analysis, however, it appeared so highly difficult to accept Peter Ford's assertion that Al-Faruqi's approach to religion may already be considered outdated

though his legacy remains significant ⁽²²⁸⁾. Contrary to this, however, this work demonstrated the opposite where the usefulness of his approach was brought to light when applied on studying world religions. One might ask again, to what extent is Al Faruqi's principles of evaluation flexible? And as to whether his principles account for diversity, tolerate and embrace differences? The answer for such question is perhaps yes. At the level of axiology these principles will allow a high degree of difference. This is because the yard stick is based on less and more realization of values in a human act, whereas at the level of metaphysics the basis for judgment is based on truth and falsity. To conclude this work, however, I would like to mention that Al Faruqi's methodology of studying religion is feasible. Feasible in the sense that it can be applied in studying all world religions. However, just like any other method of comparative religious studies, his method cannot be said to be free from some forms of criticisms despite its tremendous contribution to understanding religions in general.

228 - F. Peter Ford Jr, *Ismail Al-Faruqi on Muslim-Christian Dialogue: An Analysis From A Christian Perspective*, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation (2007), p. 278-279.

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