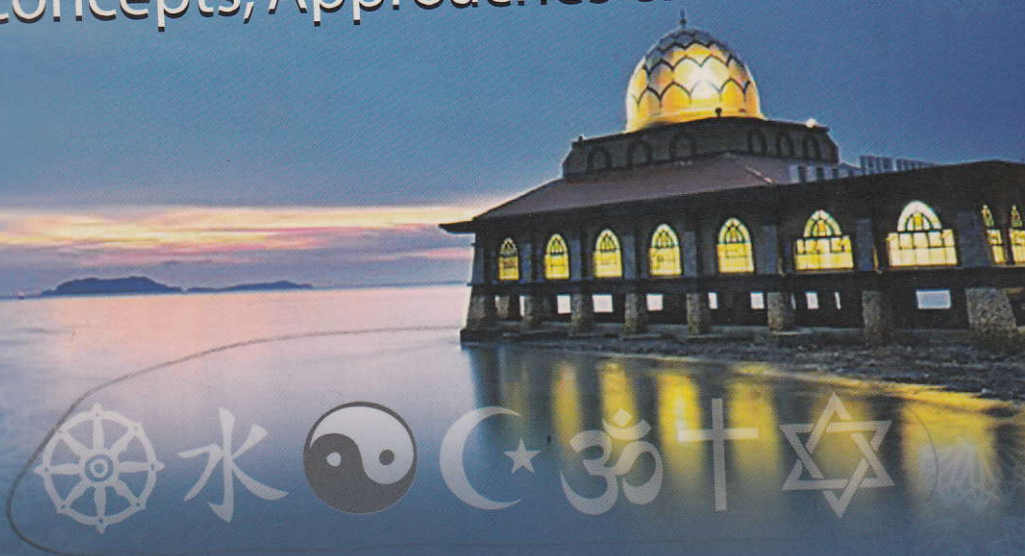


The Study of Religious Traditions

Concepts, Approaches & Theories



Abdurezak A. Hashi



IIUM Press
International Islamic University Malaysia

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To my wife and children



*Did you know the man?
M. L. ...
That is the origin of
many religions.
many*



Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians, Christians, Magians, and Polytheists; Allah will judge between them on the Day of Judgment: for Allah is witness of all things.

The Qur'an (22: 17)



Contents

	<i>Acknowledgment</i>	ix
	<i>Introduction</i>	xi
Chapter 1	Comparative Religion: An Overview of Its Concepts and Approaches	1
Chapter 2	Understanding Religious Traditions from Islamic Perspective: Concepts and Categories	27
Chapter 3	Religious Fetishism: Evaluative Remarks	77
Chapter 4	Theological Trialogue of Abrahamic Traditions	86
Chapter 5	Monotheism between Originality and Evolution: A Comparative Analysis of Socio-Anthropologists' Views on the History of Monotheism	100
Chapter 6	An Overview of Belief Systems	116
	<i>Conclusion</i>	123
	<i>References</i>	125
	<i>Index</i>	131

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May the Almighty, Allah (SWT), place our good deeds *fi mizani hasanatina*.

Introduction

Technological and scientific advances of our era transformed our world into global villages of various societies, where no man is isolated from the rest of the world. In this era of globalization, people of different faiths and cultures are living together side-by-side and interactively corresponding to each other by means of cultural, economic and diplomatic relations. In this globalized environment where “no man is an island,” mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence are necessary and inevitable. However, as noted by the contemporary Christian theologian Hans Kung (1992),¹ there could be no peace among the nations, without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions; no dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions. Nonetheless, while we acknowledge the importance of studying religious traditions, among the many questions raised is how to study religion? What is the commendable approach to study religious traditions? This is because, given the fact that religious practices involve inner experiences and sentiment, which are in most of cases subjective; can we study religious traditions in a neutral way? If the answer to this question is yes, then how that is possible? However, if it is not possible, then cross-religious comparisons would mostly break down, which eventually suggest a total relativism in the study of religion? While these and other similar concerns might pose a considerable challenge to the possibility of studying religious traditions neutrally, scholars in this field, are of the view that it is possible to study religious traditions objectively.

This book aims to address a number of issues related to the study of religious traditions, including the definition of comparative religion, issues of subjectivity and objectivity in the study of religion. It also aims to highlight number of approaches in the study of religious traditions. Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, this book includes six chapters. The *first* chapter offers a concise overview on the definition,

¹ Hans Kung, *Judaism Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. xxii.

history and approaches of comparative religion; it highlights the issues related to subjectivism and the challenges of having an acceptable method in the study of religion, and then reviews some of the available methods and approaches of the study of religious traditions. The *second* chapter presents a descriptive account on the Islamic understanding of religious traditions; it illustrates the basic concepts and categories of religious traditions through and within the Qur'anic verses. The *third* chapter is evaluative remarks on religious fetishism, while the *fourth* chapter is a comparative exposition of the unity of God among Abrahamic traditions. The *fifth* chapter illustrates the debates of the modern socio-anthropological theories about the history and origins of monotheism, while the *last* chapter offers a comparative overview of the belief systems.

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November, 2013