

Methodological Problems in the Study of Islam, and Ali Shariati's Proposed Methodology for the Study of Religions

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Abstract

This paper intends to describe some of the problems involved in the methodological study of Islam, as well as the measures suggested by scholars (Muslims and non-Muslims) to correct and solve such problems. It then presents the methodology developed by Ali Shariati for the study of religions, and its application to Islam. The paper concludes by assessing Shariati's proposed methodology vis-a-vis the aforementioned problems and corrective measures.

Introduction and Description of the Current Problems in the Methodological Study of Islam

Religion, like other aspects of human existence, is a complex phenomenon, the study and understanding of which requires the use of all resources provided by human knowledge. Due to the vastness of the subject matter, scholars have increasingly tried to come up with classification schemes in order to facilitate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of religion and religious phenomena. This endeavour has taken on two separate yet interrelated forms: first, establishing "groupings among historical religious communities having certain elements in common," and second, grouping together similar religious phenomena in such categories that "serve to reveal the structure of human religious experience as a whole."¹

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These attempts have further led to the development of different methodologies and different principles of classification such as normative, geographical, ethnographic-linguistic, philosophical, morphological, phenomenological, anthropological, psychological, sociological, etc....² Each one of these methods has advantages and disadvantages. Keeping in mind the multi-dimensional aspect of religion, it is not surprising--and perhaps inevitable--that one approach alone is not capable of explaining everything about religion and usually sheds light on only one aspect of the religious phenomena. An unfortunate tendency among many scholars in the field of religion has been to attempt to explain everything through the use of only one specific method, thus falling into the trap of reductionism.

Besides the tendency towards reductionism, another significant problem in studying religion has been the lack of objectivity on the part of pioneers of this field. Having come mostly from a Christian background, these pioneers have tended to arrive at conclusions which implicitly or explicitly demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith. This problem becomes particularly significant in the case of Islam. Whereas some scholars considered Islam as an inferior expression of Christianity, others did not even bother to study or to refer to Islam either because they did not consider it significant or because Islam did not fit into their methodological framework.³ The narrowness of this attitude is evident, since as one contemporary historian of religions has remarked, "no study of the human religious venture that neglects the wealth of the Islamic tradition can be complete or valid."⁴

Historically, thus, the study of Islam has been hindered by the problems of reductionism and prejudice. Yet even as scholars gradually began to develop methodologies to correct these problems, the particular difficulties in studying Islam remained unsolved. In the foreword of *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, Charles Adams has referred to the basic historical problem in the study of Islam as being that

historians of religions have failed to advance our knowledge and understanding of Islam as religion and that Islamists have failed to explain adequately Islamic religious phenomena.⁵

According to Adams, this problem has emerged due to an "apparent lack of meaningful relationship between the systematic scientific study of religion on the one hand and the work done by Islamists on the other."⁶ The inevitable consequence of this lack of coordination between the two

groups has been that the student of Islam has been left without a reliable method by which he could properly organize, interpret and understand Islamic religious phenomena. Adams writes:

(T)he central concerns of the developing science of religion seemed of little relevance to students of Islam ... and ... the methods of historians of religion were finding little application as a means of illuminating Islamic material.⁷

Moreover, there has been an institutional element which has further complicated the issue. This institutional dimension has been particularly cited by Richard Martin, and he has shed some light on this otherwise less-obvious aspect of the problem. He writes:

The traditional berth of Islamic studies in oriental--and area--studies programs in select graduate centres at North American Universities is part of the problem.⁸

Muslim scholars, however, have described the problem with a different emphasis. The late Fazlur Rahman, for example, believed that the study of Islam, which he called "intellectual understanding or appreciation" of Islam, has suffered a great deal in the West not specifically because of the gap between historians and Islamists but mainly because of the lack of scientific objectivity on the part of western scholars. Citing the problems of prejudice, he explained that

(p)re-nineteenth-century Western treatments of Islam suffered from ... (religious prejudice), while nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholarship suffered particularly from...(cultural and intellectual prejudice)."⁹

What we draw from Rahman's statement is the idea that even the "objective" metrologies of post-enlightenment Western scholarship carry an inherent western bias.

This criticism has not gone without response. In an attempt to minimize possible prejudices, and to achieve a greater extent of scientific objectivity, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has suggested that scholarly research which concerns a religious community should be verified by members of that community itself. Thus for a statement to be valid about a religion, it must be true or valid for those "inside" that religious tradition, not just according to the evidence drawn by "outside" scholars. Smith's suggestion seems to

be a good starting-point for overcoming past prejudices in regard to the study of Islam. Yet it is still not a complete answer to the problem of scholarly objectivity. Rahman has pointed out the problems in applying this principle by referring to the fact that there is not a universal coherency among believers of any religion, including Islam. He has remarked:

There are many statements made all the time by some insiders that are repudiated by other insiders.¹⁰

Rahman's criticism has been further strengthened by William Roff's question: "How many--or how few--Muslims may in such circumstances constitute a court?"¹¹

Thus the problem of developing an objective or at least an unprejudiced methodology runs into the more basic problem of defining what is properly considered to be Islam or Islamic. Is it, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues, what Muslims believe? Is it something judged acceptable to the Muslim community? Or should one follow other tests of validity such as referring to the tenets of the religion itself, to the Qur'an as the revealed and infallible word of God and to historical accounts of the words and the conduct of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

Having briefly described the current problems inherent in the study of Islam--the problems of reductionism, of prejudice, the lack of scientific method and the lack of a generally accepted idea as to what constitutes Islam or Islamic--we now turn to the work of Ali Shariati. In discussing his approach to the study of Islam we should keep these problems in mind in order to evaluate whether or not he offers an adequate response.

Discussion of the Methodology of Ali Shariati as a Possible Solution to the Methodological Problems in the Study of Islam

Ali Shariati was a Muslim intellectual who had come from a long line of traditional and pious religious scholars, and who had studied modern ideologies yet without ceasing to be a believer.¹² Moreover he lived in a time when many Iranians were struggling with identity crises and when "new social groups, without ideological preparation, were confronted by new cultural problems...tied to Iran's dependence on the West."¹³ As a scholar familiar both with Islam and with western ideologies, Shariati was in a position to offer an intelligent critique of western ideologies and a credible defence of Islam. Thus he became a symbol for those who felt

stifled by the West but were unable to find anything valuable in their own culture on which to rely. Islam, as represented by the 'ulama, was seen as something disconnected from the needs of the new world. Shariati therefore "redefined (Islam) in the light of modern consciousness,"¹⁴ and consequently sparked the re-emergence of a Muslim identity among Iranians, especially the enthusiastic university students who were suffering from cultural alienation.

It has been observed that "the style and the content of Shariati's lectures did not encourage literary or scientifically argued works."¹⁵ The point of this observation is not that Shariati's work was unscientific or devoid of any literary merit, but to recognize that he used his training in social sciences to reshape and reformulate an Islamic world view with practical implications, rather than engaging himself in a purely theoretical and academic endeavour. Keddie writes, "(Shariati) was devoted to giving an Islamic response to the modern world."¹⁶ One of the contributions that Shariati made in this connection was to develop a typology for the methodological study of religions, particularly Islam. Through the use of his methodology, Shariati offered to demonstrate that Islam is not only compatible with the modern world, progress, and science, but when properly understood it is the best possible ideology¹⁷ for any society at any given time.

Characteristics and Typological Categories

As a person trained and educated in the scientific disciplines of the West, Shariati was extremely aware of the importance of methodology in studying any subject, and argued that "arriving at a methodology in approaching a problem is a significant aspect of the scientific method."¹⁸ The aim of his seminars at Hussyniah-i Irshad and at Mashhad University was to change the traditional approach of the culam studying Islam. To this end he argued that nowadays "all scientific methods in all fields have changed. They have taken on a new look. Religious truth must of necessity do the same."¹⁹

To achieve his objective Shariati followed a two-fold approach. First he discouraged the subjective and faith-oriented methods which were typical of the 'ulama:

Our age is not an age to worship things we do not know. This is particularly true for those who are educated. Their responsibility is even heavier when confronted by the sacred.²⁰

He then encouraged the use of modern social sciences in the study of Islam. He argued that to come to know the truths of Islam "we must, most certainly, know the European scientific methods."²¹

However, being aware of the problems that modern scholars faced in the study of Islam, Shariati recognized the need for a new methodology. In reference to the European scientific methods, he argued that "we should not require ourselves to imitate them."²² Instead he advocated that "we must...initiate an approach."²³ In Shariati's view, the development of a relevant method for the study of Islam was so vital that he claimed it was one's duty to search for it:

It is not only an Islamic duty, but a scientific and humanitarian one as well to find a meaningful approach to the understanding of Islam.²⁴

Furthermore, as Mangol Bayat-Phillip has explained,

Shariati...proclaim(ed) that only qualified specialists (could) methodologically analyze religious concepts and scientifically reach the true historical, sociological and political implications inherent in the Qur'anic revelation.²⁵

Shariati likened religion to a great personality and claimed that the best way to know such a personality was through a two-fold approach: "(1) To know all his thoughts, writings, suggestions, speeches... (2) To review his life and discover his family background."²⁶ From this point Shariati proceeded to conclude that to know Islam one should study the Qur'an as "a collection of thoughts and the remains of the ideas and science of a personality named Islam," on one hand, and to study the history of Islam, on the other.²⁷

This idea was not entirely new. For centuries Muslims--and non-Muslims--had tried to learn about Islam by studying the Qur'an and the history of Islam. What was new, however, was Shariati's emphasis that the study of the Qur'an should be complemented by learning the history of Islam and that none of these fields alone could lead to a comprehensive understanding of Islam.

Having described Shariati's overall views, we should now turn to his specific methodology, a methodology which is perhaps best described as a comparative typology. Although Shariati used this typology to "come to know Islam," he claimed that it could "be used for all religions."²⁸ According to Shariati, to study any religion one needs to know five

"distinguished modes or aspects" of the religion in question.²⁹ One could also compare these modes with their similar modes in other religions. The five modes are as follows: God or Gods, scripture, prophet, those addressed by the religion, and the handpicked followers of a given religion who are "the examples and representatives of those trained in that religion."³⁰

According to this method, in order to know a religion's God one should ask what kind of God He is and what is His relationship to the world. To know Islam's God one should refer to the Qur'an and "the words of the Prophet and his followers where they compare Allah with other gods." Similarly, to know a religion's scripture, one should ask what kind of book it is, what kind of problems it considers, and whether it speaks more about the here-and-now or the hereafter. Another question that one should consider, Shariati argued, is whether the scripture addresses itself more to the individual and his moral and ethical matters, or to the social aspects of life.

The basic question that one should ask about the Prophet, in Shariati's scheme, is "how he oriented himself towards humanity," and how and what was his relationship with God.³² Further on, in answering this question, one needs to find out what social and intellectual movements were present at the time of that prophet's appearance and whether or not someone or some social segment was waiting for that prophet's appearance.

The next issue to consider in Shariati's typological framework is the audience which the religion addresses. In this regard one must look at the life of each religion's prophet and find out:

What [social] movement was present when he made his appearance?
 What class did he tend towards more? What class did he rise to combat?³³

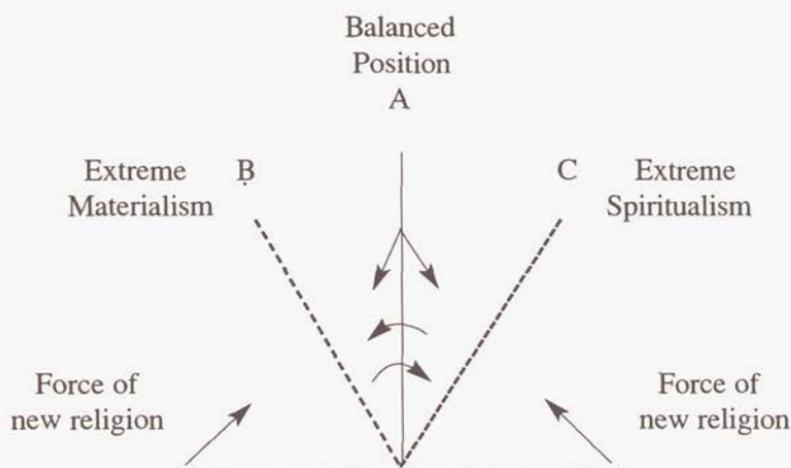
Shariati divided prophets into two distinct groups according to their relation to the power structure of their time: first those who "achieve their mission with the help of that power," second, Abrahamic or Semitic prophets who "appeared in a form which rebelled against the existing power."³⁴

The last category or type in Shariati's typology for the study of a religion is that of "individuals who form the components that build distinct and distinguished individual human beings." Among such individuals he mentions Aaron, St. Paul, and 'Ali and Husayn from Judaism, Christianity and Islam respectively.

Religions, according to Shariati, appear when a society has deviated

from its normal balance.³⁵ Whatever the cause of this deviation, the new religion necessarily tends to force the society towards the opposite direction. Thus the deviated society returns to its balance after a period of time. Naturally at this stage the mission of the new religion has ended, but historically the followers of any particular religion have refused to accept the end of their religious mission. Consequently the specific religion continues to force society further in the same direction. Thus comes a time when this latest religion "becomes a negative and deviated force causing the deviation toward another direction, until the time when the society is so violently deviated in that direction that it approaches destruction.³⁶ At that time a new prophet appears and attempts to force the society towards the opposite direction until it reaches the balance again. However this new religious force continues to exert itself and push the society towards the said direction even after it reaches its balance. Thus, inevitably a new deviation results with the consequent need for a new prophet to address that deviation and so the cycle goes on and on.

(This concept is illustrated by Shariati in the following diagram³⁷)



In Shariati's view each religion has one specific dimension according to which it alters or moves society. Within this functional view of religion there is, of necessity, a continuous emergence of new religions. However, Shariati argued that Islam is an everlasting religion which needs no new,

correcting emergent religion since it has been endowed with a special two-dimensional character which enables it to break the previous vicious cycle and function as the permanent religion of man.

Shariati's Methodology as Applied to Islam

We have already mentioned that Shariati claimed to have reached his understanding of Islam as a result of his methodological study. Now we should consider Shariati's understanding and interpretation of Islam according to the typological categories of his methodology: God, scripture, prophet, people addressed, and representatives believers.³⁸

GOD: Shariati likened God in Islam to Janus (The Roman God of gates and doors, and of beginnings and endings, who is represented with two faces, one looking forward and the other looking backward). Islam's God (Allah) has the face of Jehovah (the God of Judaism) and of Theos³⁹ (the God of Christianity). Thus Allah is both the Omnipotent and the Merciful. On one hand, Allah is the Almighty, the proud God who punishes severely those who sin. On the other hand, Allah, is the Merciful, the Affectionate and Forgiving God who "comes down to earth and associates with human beings"⁴⁰ who are His kinsmen and representatives on earth. In this aspect, Allah "reflects man in His own face"⁴¹ and enables man to make himself like Him if man chooses to do so. Moreover, this Merciful, all-Forgiving and Beneficent God is so close to man that in the Qur'an's words, "He is nearer to man than his jugular vein."⁴²

SCRIPTURE: Islam's scripture (the Qur'an) is "the collection of the essence of Torah and Bible,..."⁴³ By carefully studying and analyzing it one realizes that practically all aspects of man's life, whether personal or social, are addressed by it.⁴⁴ The Qur'an has a vast range of themes:

(A)ll the way from the philosophy of creation and the wisdom of the creator, down to the regulations concerning hygiene and customs of social interaction and life, and from the purification of the soul and individual training to rules about wars and the struggle for betterment of material life and contacts with society, civilization, science, and political rehabilitation.⁴⁵

Thus the Qur'an not only calls for humility, piety and a sincere, committed and zealous worship of God, but it gives warnings such as "be ever ready," "get power, war horses and military mobilization."⁴⁶

PROPHET: Islam's prophet is a messenger with two personalities, that

of Moses and that of Jesus. At the time of war and fighting for God, " he becomes the image of Moses, and Allah also takes the visage of Jehovah."⁴⁷ Yet when a Jewish woman who daily used to pour filth on Muhammad (pbuh) from the roof of her house one day does not appear, Muhammad (pbuh) inquires where his "friend" is that day. When he learns that she is sick, he pays her a visit. The same Muhammad (pbuh), however, orders seven hundred Jews of Ban Qurayah (Jews exposed as traitors) killed and thrown into a pit, and while this incident is taking place he watches with cold, dry, and peaceful eyes.

When Muhammad (pbuh) conquers Makkah, the place where for twenty years he and his followers had been persecuted, tortured and finally forced to flee, he is in control of Caesar-like power. His army is waiting for revenge and his worst enemies such as Abi Sufyan⁴⁸ and his wife Hind, 'Akramah the son of Abi Jahl, Safwan, and others are all present. As it was the custom of Arabs at that time, a massacre by the victorious side was inevitable. Yet Muhammad (pbuh) surprises everyone and tells his enemies that they are all set free.

The two-dimensional visage of Muhammad (pbuh) becomes more apparent when one considers that while during the ten years of his life in Madinah he led sixty military expeditions and declared war and struggle to be the monasticism of his religion, he also used to say:

If I were not appointed to associate with people and to live amongst them, I would have fixed my eyes on the sky [in contemplation] and would have continued to do so till God took away my life.⁴⁹

Thus we see in Muhammad (pbuh) a two-dimensional visage, that of the merciful Jesus, and the wrathful Moses, a double visage which corresponds to God's manifestations on earth.

THE PEOPLE ADDRESSED BY RELIGION: In order to discuss this category Shariati focused on Madinah as a society formed by Islam and on the mosque of Madinah where Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers lived. Madinah was a two-dimensional city. It was a city with the combined characteristics of Athens, Heliopolis, Alexandria and Benares on one hand, and Rome, Hagmatane and Sparta on the other. From the gates of the former group, history brings forth persons deeply engrossed in contemplation, disinterested in the affairs of the world, and entirely absorbed in a life of solitude and meditation: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Buddha. From the gates of the second group, however, come persons with strong physiques, crude faces, loaded with weapons and accompanied by horses.

The shouts of their champions and fighters resound in the ears of history. Madinah's gates, at the time of Muhammad (pbuh), witnessed these two kinds of people. First was a frightening army whose soldiers seemed not to care about anything except war, blood-shed and plunder (like the armies of Rome). The second group which departed from Madinah's gates were people with peaceful and merciful faces, faces radiant with the love of God. Their eyes were fixed on the ground and their hearts were fixed on the heavens, as if they were the disciples of Jesus. They crossed the frightening and burning deserts of Arabia in order to carry the message of peace and friendship to the wild tribes in the desert.

The mosque of Madinah was also a unique place with two-dimensional inhabitants. Ahl al-uffah⁵⁰ (the inhabitants of the platform) were the people who destroyed the great military empires of Persia and Rome, yet in the mosque they were similar to the monks of India and the disciples of Buddha. They had chosen from among all the places the platforms of the mosque for living space, and were at nights absorbed in the ecstatic rapture of their glowing spirits. During the day, however, they appeared with a completely different visage. Their hands were on their swords, ready and eager at all times to fight in the holy war and were, like the warriors of Caesar, constantly ready to obey their master's commands.

REPRESENTATIVE BELIEVER: From among the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) Shariati selected 'Ali and Abū Dharr to demonstrate the two-dimensionality of their characters. 'Ali is the symbol and archetype of a Muslim. In Ali's personality one can recognize the two-dimensionality which is particular to Islam. During the day in the bloody fields of battle, 'Ali was the best soldier of the army of Islam. Yet during the peaceful nights of Madinah, 'Ali, like an afflicted and lonely soul, would leave his bed and go outside of the town and cry aloud on account of his loneliness. 'Ali was simultaneously "a champion of sword, eloquence, wisdom, faithfulness, self sacrifice, belief, truthfulness, generosity, patience, piety, simplicity, justice and worship."⁵¹

Shariati's Methodological Conclusions

According to Shariati's methodological interpretation, Islam is unique in that it is the only religion that is multidimensional.⁵² As such "(t)he force which it applies on the society is not in a single direction. Not only in regard to its numerous directions which are opposite to each other, but in various and even contrary directions."⁵³ This force, in Shariati's view, is

simultaneously applied to both "sensations" and "thoughts" of both the individual and society. Consequently both the individual and society have the possibility of a balanced life, and their interaction and interrelationship provides for a lesser degree of deviation.

Shariati viewed Islam as a synthesis of the extreme worldliness of Judaism and the extreme spirituality of Christianity. As we have seen in Shariati's typological descriptions, he depicted this synthesis in all aspects of Islam. Thus he showed Islam to be a middle path wherein this life and the life after death have equal importance, and the opposing poles of worldliness and spirituality are held in balance. He wrote:

Such is the religious visage which forever has taken [on] the responsibility of the prophetic mission of guiding mankind. This is the reason why the everlasting, graceful dress could be worn only by such a religion whose God has the visage of Jehovah as well as of Theos; whose book includes the wisdom of the Torah as well as the preaching of the Gospels, and whose prophet has the mind of Moses and the heart of Jesus, and whose disciples have the visage of fighters who do not consider life except for the sake of freedom, humanity and real living, and they call it only "Belief and Struggle" and they also have the visage of Socrates and Buddha. Mohammed himself has drawn them [their image] in two beautiful and clear lines, "the devotees of the night and lions of the day;" the fearless warriors in love with battlefields and burning lovers in solitary worship. So it is only Mohammed and his several-dimensional and two-sided prophetic mission which can give reality to the great human ideals of today.⁵⁴

This observation enabled Shariati to conclude that Islam is the most comprehensive and best-suited religion available to mankind due to its well-integrated vision of life and man's place in it; a vision which balances man and society on one hand, and this world and the next on the other. Thus by using modern social sciences rather than purely philosophical or theological arguments, Shariati reaffirmed the truth of Qur'anic assertion about the perfection of Islam, and clarified why Islam has been declared by Allah to be the only acceptable religion for man.

Other Methodological Influences

As a student of "religious history and sociology"⁵⁵ Shariati was influenced by different trends of thought coming from these disciplines. The following is a brief discussion of some of these influences as reflected in his methodology:

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: The premise of sociology of religion is the notion that religion plays a definite role in the life of a society. Although some sociologists view this role as negative (Marxian school) and some believe it to be positive (Durkheimian school), all sociologists share the understanding that religion has a social function.

Shariati's understanding of religion was a functional one. As we have seen earlier, he believed that religion appears at a time when society has deviated from its balanced position. The power exerted by the new religion, consequently, forces the deviated society back to its normal position and balance.

Furthermore, despite the inclusion of the concept of God within his typological categories, Shariati did not define religion strictly in terms of its divine origin, and rather emphasized the relationship between religion and society.

PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION: In one of his lectures, Shariati defined religion as "an innate aspect of human nature, the innate dimension that is intended to propel man towards freedom, consciousness, and activity."⁵⁶ Here again Shariati avoided a strictly theocentric definition of religion, this time by focusing on an innate aspect, a psychological force within human nature.

One expects Shariati, as a Muslim thinker, to have included the idea of salvation in his understanding of the function of religion. Yet instead of salvation he used the concepts of "freedom, consciousness, and activity." Whereas the concept of salvation emphasizes a believer's right relation to God, the terms "freedom, consciousness, and activity" move away from a theocentric understanding of religion and emphasize a more worldly and social dimension, an emphasis which is the guiding principle in the field of social psychology.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION: Phenomenology of religion is "first of all, an effort at devising a taxonomic (classifactory) scheme that will permit the comprehensive cataloguing and classifying of religious phenomena across the lines of religious communities ..."⁵⁷ This principle of

phenomenology is clearly reflected in Shariati's use of typological categories both for study within one tradition and also for comparisons between different traditions.

Conclusion: Assessment of Shariati's Methodology

Having considered Shariati's methodology in detail we now return to our discussion of the current problems in the study of Islam, and assess his methodology vis-a-vis these problems. We recall the problems of reductionism, of religious and intellectual prejudice, the lack of scientific method, and the lack of a generally accepted definition for "Islam" and "Islamic."

In order to assess Shariati's contribution, we should consider the two tasks involved in the development of a methodology applicable to Islam. The first is the need for the method to be unprejudiced, if not fully objective according to the demands of scientific investigation. The second is that the methodology should be linked to an accepted definition of Islam so that its focus and the conclusions which it draws remain within the bounds of what is properly understood to be Islamic. Shariati's works demonstrate that he was aware of the historical problems that have afflicted the methodological study of Islam and therefore made a conscious effort to avoid them in developing his methodology. For example, he attempted to avoid the problem of reductionism by drawing his concepts from many of the different social, religious and historical sciences. Furthermore, by erecting his methodological edifice on scientific concepts he provided safeguards against the problem of lack of scientific method. In regard to the problem of religious and intellectual prejudice it is obvious that Shariati was not effected by Christian and western intellectual biases. Instead, however, one can observe that he had an Islamic (particularly Shia) bias not just on account of his conclusions but also on account of his choice of typological categories and his view of social and religious history.⁵⁸ Thus it should be admitted that Shariati has not offered a thoroughly objective and un-biased methodology as is understood within the field of scientific investigation. Yet we would maintain that his methodology is sound and objective enough to deserve serious consideration and a general acceptance. The relative legitimacy of Shariati's methodology, despite its lack of complete objectivity, is underlined by the implications of Fazlur Rahman's argument and Shariati's own thought, that even the "objective" methodologies developed by western scholarship carry an inherent western bias and therefore do not allow for an adequate understanding of Islam.

Our second task, to consider whether or not Shariati's methodology can be called Islamic, requires us first to determine what is an acceptable definition of Islam and Islamic. Earlier in this paper, we mentioned two main attempts to establish criteria for determining what is Islamic: (1) judging the validity of research in accordance to the views of Muslim believers, and (2) referring it to the tenets of Islam itself, to the Qur'an and to the Sunnah. At this point we should consider other attempts at establishing such criteria. Marshal Hodgson, in his famous work *The Venture of Islam*, has used the terms "Islamic" and "Islamicate" to differentiate between what relates to Islam as a religion and what relates to Islam as a culture. In his own words:

The adjective "Islamic,"... must be restricted to "of or pertaining to" Islam in the proper, the religious, sense ..."Islamicate" would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.⁵⁹

According to these definitions, Shariati's methodology cannot be judged as Islamic. Rather it would be called an Islamicate methodology because it does not come directly from the religion itself but is instead an application of the social sciences to Islam.

Fazlur Rahman, however, has presented a more traditional criterion for judging whether or not something is Islamic. He has referred to the Qur'an and the Prophet's "definitive conduct"⁶⁰ as yard-sticks by which one should measure whether or to what extent a phenomenon is Islamic. Both the Qur'an and the Prophet's conduct were mentioned and taken into account by Shariati when he applied his methodology to Islam. In fact the very way in which he selected his categories such as God, prophet and scripture shows the influence of a Semitic understanding of religion, an understanding which is strongly emphasized in the Qur'an. Also in the application of his methodology to Islam, Shariati has compared Islam to two religions that the Qur'an has acknowledged as partly true, i.e., Judaism and Christianity, thus advocating the Qur'anic notion of the gradual evolution and perfection of Semitic religions culminating in the advent of Islam. Furthermore, the Qur'anic idea that all religions prior to Islam have been corrupted by their followers, that these religions have thus required the emergence of a new religion and that Islam is unique as a complete, incorruptible and therefore,

Fourth, I would also like to suggest that medals and prizes be instituted by this organization for the work of social scientists, particularly the young. This will bring them recognition and encouragement. We can identify some young social scientists who have done excellent work like Faizan Haq, Ejaz Akram, and Deonna Kelli Swaine. An Ibn Khaldun or a Faruqi medal could be a start.

Let me conclude: In the short term, the prospects for a harmonious relationship between Islam and the West look uncertain, even pessimistic. In the longer term, a great deal depends on whether those who encourage dialogue and understanding will succeed or not. The academic studying Islam thus has a global role in and challenge for the 21st century. Your own role as scholars in the West therefore becomes crucial. You have a duty to bring understanding between Muslims and the West. To the immigrants it is a double duty: to your old societies and to your new one.

The common problems in our shrinking world need to be identified: drug and alcohol abuse; divorce; teenage violence; racial and ethnic prejudice; problems of the aged and the poor; a growing sense of anarchy in cities; rampant materialism; sexual debasement of women and children; the depletion of natural resources; and universal ecological concerns. On all these issues Islam takes a strong and enlightened position. This is real Islamic jihad, and if it is properly harnessed and understood it can provide fresh impetus to tackle these universal problems.

Muslims also face a central challenge which is internal. They need to rebuild an idea of Islam which includes justice, integrity, tolerance, coupled with the quest for knowledge—the classic Islamic civilization, not just the insistence on the rituals; not just the five pillars of Islam, but the entire building and architecture of Islam. I leave you with this architectural metaphor which contains the challenge of Islam in the 21st century.

Notes

1. Charles J. Adams, "Religions, Classification of," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1974 ed., p. 628.
2. Ibid.
3. This was one of the phases in the *Development of the science of History of Religions*. See Eric J. Sharp, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1975).
4. Charles J. Adams, Foreword, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), p.ix.
5. Ibid. p. vii
6. Ibid. p. viii
7. Ibid.
8. Richard C. Martin, "Islam and Religious Studies: An Introductory Essay," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, p. 1.
9. Fazlur Rahman, "Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, p. 193. The same point is discussed by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
10. Ibid.
11. William R. Roff, "Pilgrimage and the History of Religions: Theoretical Approaches to the Hajj," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, p. 78.
12. Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 222.
13. Ibid.
14. Suroosh Irfani, *Revolutionary Islam in Iran, Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1983), p. 120.
15. Nikkie Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 216.
16. Ibid. p. 204.
17. It should be noted that Shariati uses the terms ideology and religion interchangeably.
18. Ali Shariati, *An Approach to the Understanding of Islam*, Trans. Venus Kaivantash, (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures Inc., 1969), p. 2.
19. Ibid., p. 4.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Mangol Bayat-Philipp, "Tradition and Change in Iranian Socio-Religious Thought," in *Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change*, ed. Michael E. Bonnie and Nikki Keddie, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 55.

- 26 Ali Shariati, *An Approach to the Understanding of Islam*, p. 6.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., p. 7.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., p. 8.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid. p. 9.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid. p. 10.
- 35 Ali Shariati, *The Visage of Muhammad*, Trans. Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures Inc., 1971), p. 15.
- 36 Ibid, p. 16.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 The following presentation is a summary of Shariati's discussion. See Shariati, *The Visage*, pp.13-25.
- 39 Ibid., p. 19. It is not clear where Shariati has found this name to denote God in Christianity. One can only speculate that his source might have been the Greek New Testament.
- 40 Ibid. p. 20.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid. p. 22.
- 48 Abi Sufyan was the economic and military leader of the Makkans from the period after the Battle of Badr. He became Muslim the night before the opening of Makkah.
- 49 Shariati, *The Visage*, p. 22.
- 50 These were converts to Islam who had immigrated to Madinah and had no means of support, living and studying in the mosque by the charity of the community. Also called "People of the Bench".
- 51 Shariati, *The Visage*, p. 23.
- 52 Ibid. p. 19.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid. p. 24-25.
- 55 Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 215. This point has been disputed by several scholars, beginning with Yann Richard, who have correctly pointed out that Shariati's

formal area of study was not Sociology or History of Religions. In fact, Ali Rahnema has explained that Shariati's formal discipline was the history of medieval Islam, and his doctoral dissertation was entitled "The merits of Balkh" (a translation into French of a chapter of a thirteenth century Persian text). Shariati did, however, take many courses and attended many lectures in Sociology, History of Religions, and Philosophy at the Sorbonne. [See Ali Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (Zed Books Ltd: London and New Jersey, 1994), pp. 224-5.] Like most Iranian political activists and revolutionaries of his time, Shariati pursued his formal education in a way that would provide him time to pursue his interest in other fields informally.

- 56 Ali Shariati, *Niyaz-ye Insan-e Imroz (The Needs of the Contemporary Man)*, (Tehran: *Hussayniah-i Irshad*, 1978), p. 69.
- 57 Adams, "Religions, Classification of," *Encyclopaedia Britania*, p. 633.
- 58 This bias will prove unacceptable for western secular scholars who would argue that Shariati's methodology is prejudiced against non-semitic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc., since its topological design does not take into account their particular characteristics. For Muslim scholars, however, Shariati's bias will not cause any significant drawbacks except where the analysis and presentation of Islam have been influenced either by his Shia perspective, or his social activist approach to religion.
- 59 Marshal G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), Vol. I, p. 59.
- 60 Rahman, *Approaches to Islam*, p. 196.
- 61 Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Farid Ahmad, *Islamic Sociology: An introduction*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Academy, 1985), p. 37.
- 62 Ibid. p. xiii.
- 63 Ibid. p. xiv.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid. p. ix.
- 67 The fact that Marshal Hodgson's explanation gives a slightly different title to Shariati's method does not refute this conclusion but rather is due to Hodgson's attempt to draw a finer distinction within a category that is usually accepted as Islamic.