

ABŪ AL-ḤASAN MUḤAMMAD BIN YŪSUF AL-‘ĀMIRĪ’S VIEW ON RELIGION

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Abstract: One of the thinkers on religion in Islamic philosophical discourse is Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-‘Āmirī (d. 381/933). His thoughts, written in *al-i‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām* as *magnum opus* for his intellectual carrier, have been identified as an ideal prototype of classical and rational religious studies. Before exploring the principles of religions, his first step was that he introduced the importance of knowledge of *milliyya* or religionsities’ perspective for reading phenomena of religion. Apologetical-reflective was the common method used by al-‘Āmirī to read Islam and other religions. This method does not intend to disrespect or wrong other religions but it is as a tool to identify identity as well as distinguish Islam from other religions. However, al-‘Āmirī realised that epistemological, historic, or praxis problems in religion facts, including Islam, become homework for the next generation.

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Introduction

UNTIL TODAY, the figure of Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī has not much known among schools, academia, or the community in Indonesia. Alienation can be due to some factors, one of which is the loss of al-ʿĀmirī's works so that his thoughts are not widely known.¹ This condition makes the scarcity of enthusiasts both in the internal among Muslim intellectuals and in Orientalists that are discussing the ideas of al-ʿĀmirī. Moreover, one of the modern Iraqi writers named Saīd al-Gānamī wrote that al-ʿĀmirī was a *maghūnun* Islamic philosopher until the advent of the book *al-ʿilām bi manāqib al-Islām* edited (*taḥqīq*) by al-Gurab in 1987. However, it does not mean that there is none that had discussed his works before.²

There are some intellectuals who have written the thoughts of al-ʿĀmirī, one of whom is Mohammed Arkoun as one of the Muslim writers and Everett K Rowson from Western academia. In the context of contemporary Islamic studies, both reviewers show no appreciable differences in their writings. Both try to review the thoughts of al-ʿĀmirī from the perspective they practiced. Contemporary Islamic studies, in general, tend to take specific focus of study or even very specific.

Therefore, this paper also follows the tradition of the contemporary Islamic studies to examine ideas or thoughts about a theme of a Muslim thinker, in this case, Abu al-Hasan al-ʿĀmirī. Thus, for the sake of reading context among the Indonesian intellectuals, this paper sought to introduce the figure of al-ʿĀmirī along with his thoughts and discourses among the contemporary observers. In addition, this paper also presents one part of the thoughts of al-ʿĀmirī's, as a philosopher, about religion. John Walbridge wrote that "his major interest was the relationship between religion and

¹W. Madelung, for example, wrote that "al-ʿamiri is still relatively little known Muslim Philosopher" W. Madelung, "Review books: A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate," *The Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1990): 156.

²For example in 1965, Mohammad Arkoun had written al-ʿĀmirī's thought on happiness. Mohammad Arkoun, "le conquête du bonheur selon Abu al-Hasan al-ʿĀmiri," *Studia Islamica*, no. 22 (1965): 55-90.

philosophy. He wrote on comparative religion and the philosophical analysis of questions of religion, such as the afterlife and free will”.³

Discussions on religion from both practical and theoretical point of view are always hit by the interests of theology and ideology respectively. This condition makes the discourse incomplete or half-over half, no openness and sincerity that come when religious followers present their religion in other religions. They assume that opening up is threatening the existence of their religion. Religious studies always present in a space to defend themselves (defensive) or attack others (offensive). Thus, such tradition seems to have been rooted deeply in the community both among commoners and among people who claim to be intellectuals. The tradition of discourse about religion seems to have always been this way from the past time. In fact, it is on the contrary.

This paper intends to open a path that has seemingly been disconnected, i.e. the path of thinking traditions about discussing religious performed by classical Muslim scholars or thinkers. The discussion needs to be shown in the present context to prove a hypothesis that the tradition of religious studies has long been rooted in the Muslim intellectual circles in the context of comparative, philosophy and historical studies. Among them is Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī. He managed to capture his thoughts about religion through his work *al-I‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām* openly and objectively without losing his characteristics as a Muslim intellectual who has the foundations, i.e. the Qur’an and al-Sunnah.

On comparative religion in Indonesia, especially, Karl A. Staenbrink said that discussion on religious studies or comparative religion in Indonesia with the results of Western science of religion is not held on the basis of the best results but it is very often on the basis of secondary literature and books as well which are not in use any more in the West. According to Steenbrink, study of comparative Religion in Indonesia is

³John Walbridge, “Review books: A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al-Amirī’s *Kitab al-Amal ‘ala al-‘Abad*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 3 (August 1990): 360.

“mostly concentrated on the study of religion outside Islam and is considered as a help and a tool to study religion of communities outside the Muslim community. The study usually has no relevance for the understanding of one's own religion”.⁴ Therefore, the discussion in this paper is not just in the context of content or material but also in the surrounded intellectual atmosphere. It is to show that religious studies are not merely monologue idea addressed in exclusive spaces but rather the ideas that come out through a process of dialogue and discourse in community.

The Life of al-‘Āmirī and Discourse About Him

Abū al-Hasan al-‘Āmirī’s full name is Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad bin Abī Dharr Yūsuf al-‘Āmirī al-Naysabūrī. Among his admers, he is often referred to Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī or simply al-‘Āmirī. He is Muslim intellectual who lived in the 4th After Hijrah (AH) or 10th AD. His birth is not known with certainty. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ḥāmid Garab, the writer of *Muqaddimah* as well as the investigator (*taḥqīq*) of the work of al-‘Āmirī, i.e. *al-I‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām*, also did not mention the date of his birth. However, biographical notes, although need to be researched again, show that he was born in 912 AD in Naisabura.

Since childhood, al-‘Āmirī pursued religious studies under the guidance of his family and local religious leaders. His diligence in understanding the religion had continued as al-‘Āmirī studied in madrassa al-Kindi, a madrassa which was pioneered by the philosopher al-Kindi that was then followed by his student Aḥmad bin Sahl Abū Ma’shar al-Balkhi.⁵ Al-Balkhi was the main teacher who inspired thinking paradigm of al-‘Āmirī. The paradigm could be referred to as integrative

⁴Karl A. Steenbrink, “A Study of Comparative Religion By Indonesia Muslim: A Survey,” *Numen* 37, no. 2 (December 1990): 163.

⁵According to the notes by Gerhard Endress, Abū Ma’shar al-Balkhi is an astrologer. One of his works is *al-madkhal al-kabīr fī ilm aḥkām al-nujūm*. Gerhard Endress, “The Language of Demonstration: Translating Science and the Formation of Terminology in Arabic Philosophy and Science,” *Early Science and Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2002): 243.

paradigm between Islamic tradition reasoning on the one hand and Greek tradition reasoning on the other side. In fact, the paradigm had been built by al-Kindi as the founding father of Islamic philosophy, madrasa al-Kindi, and the tradition of scientific paradigms. It was written by Garab as follows: ⁶

ومن أهم ما يتميز به الكندي وتلاميذ مدرسته - ولاسيما البلخي والعامري - أنهم جمعوا إلى جانب الثقافة العربية الإسلامية ثقافات أخرى عديدة، ولاسيما الثقافة اليونانية وثقافات الأمم ذات الحضارات القديمة، وقوموا هذه الثقافات من جهة نظر إسلامية فاستفادوا بما فيها من علوم وحكمة، وفندوا ما بها من أخطاء وجهالات.

Such a paradigm was needed to quell internal unrest among Muslims who brought new ideas about religion in community that had existed and/or established in the case of religious understanding. The paradigm was then conveyed to the Muslim community and shown them that actually the perspectives of thought from the outside, especially Greece, did not conflict with religious ideas within Islam. ⁷

In addition to al-Balkhi, other figure who shaped al-‘Āmirī’s personality and intellectual was Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Sīnā accommodated the issues promoted by al-‘Āmirī while al-‘Āmirī himself managed to shed his controversial ideas for then being given to Ibn Sīnā to be answered and documented into a work under the name *al-ajwibāt*. In a biographical note, in addition to being as a philosopher, al-Tawhīdī also identified al-‘Āmirī as a Sufi. ⁸ Al-Tawhīdī further wrote that al-‘Āmirī is the figure of sufi who move from one city to another. However, he likes a debate or scientific and intellectual debate (*al-jadal*). He argued with al-Sirafi on the meaning of *bismillāh* and so on. ⁹

⁶Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ḥāmid Garab, “Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī: Ma’ālimu Ḥayātihī,” in *al-I’lām bi manāqib al-Islām*, ed. Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (Riyadh: Dār al-Ashalah, 1988), 8.

⁷Madelung, “Review books,” 156.

⁸Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī, *al-Imta’ wa al-Mu’anasab* (al-Qāhirah: Lajnah al-Ta’lif wa al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1939), 94.

⁹al-Tawhīdī, *al-Imta’ wa al-Mu’anasab*, 193-194.

Apart from the negative or positive views toward al-‘Āmirī, al-Tawhīdī and Ibn Miskawaih were the two figures who mostly quoted the thoughts or responses to the views of al-‘Āmirī. In two of his works, *al-Imta’* and *al-muqābasāt*, al-Tawhīdī described al-‘Āmirī in various faces. In *al-muqābasāt*, for example, al-Tawhīdī wrote that al-‘Āmirī was a pious on the era, a figure of a very deep knowledge in the field of Greek philosophy, and even called that al-‘Āmirī had written the book *sharḥ* (explanation) on the works of Aristotle.¹⁰ But, al-‘Āmirī’s life and work made the tensions in the interplay between religion and philosophy or between revelation and human reason or between classical Greek learning and Qur’anic teachings in context of Buyid Bagdhad.

However, it was well known that the figure of al-‘Āmirī was a stranger among students of contemporary Islamic philosophy. In fact, Sa‘īd al-Gānamī, the editor (*muḥaqqiq*) and the writer of *muqaddimah Arba’u Rasā’il al-‘Āmirī*, gave a title to al-‘Āmirī as an Islamic philosopher who was thought as a stranger (*magbūnun*). His strangeness could be caused by many things, one of which was the buried works of al-‘Āmirī in a collection of manuscripts in various libraries in the world. On Islamic internal circles, a new figure of al-‘Āmirī became interesting conversations when ‘Abd al-Ḥāmid Garab edited, investigated (*taḥqīq*) and gave a *Muqaddimah* to a famous work of al-‘Āmirī, *al-‘ilām bi manāqib al-Islām* in the 1970s. In fact, in Western intellectual circles, the works of al-‘Āmirī began to be read in the 1930s. Hans P. Kraus (1907-1988)¹¹, for example, analysed and edited one of the texts claimed to be the work of al-‘Āmirī, i.e. *Ibshar wa al-mubshir* published in the *Journal of Orientalia* in 1937. In addition to Kraus, Mojtaba Minovi was also one of the important leaders

¹⁰Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī, *al-muqābasāt* (Bagdād: Maṭba‘ah al-Irshād, 1988), 125.

¹¹Hans Peter Kraus was one of the scholars as well as a practitioner in *Library Yale University* that put interest in rare manuscripts. He even led *Yale Library Associate* in a long term. Herman W Leibert, “Hans P. Kraus,” *The Yale University Library Gazette* 63, no. 3/4 (1989): 98. Even, P Kraus was one of the collectors of Islamic paintings from 11th century. See: Ernst J Grube, *Islamic Painting form the 11th to the 18th Century in Collection of Hans P Kraus*, (New York: 1972).

that brought back the figure and thought of al-‘Āmirī through his *taḥqīq* process and *Muqaddimah* to one of al-‘Āmirī’s works, i.e., *al-Sa‘ādah wa al-Is‘ād* published in a book form printed in the 1950s in Wisbaden.

From Kraus and Minovi, papers were then published in the Journal, some of which were those written by Mohammed Arkoun. He wrote a paper on al-‘Āmirī in 1965.¹² Many articles by Arkoun used Arabic text references that had not been widely read in the academic world of Islam. Arkoun read al-‘Āmirī in the context of the interaction of three figures whom were associated with al-‘Āmirī, i.e. Ibn Miskawaih and Abū Hayyān al-Tawḥīdī. Arkoun read *al-Sa‘ādah wa al-Is‘ād* and *al-i‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām* by al-‘Āmirī using techniques on the basic concepts promoted by al-‘Āmirī for then being reconstructed to be able to emerge relatively fresh and contextual ideas in the present context. Al-‘Āmirī, as written by Joel Kraemer, quoting Aristotle, distinguishes between natural and unnatural affection, citing as examples of the natural variety of affection of a ruler for his subjects, parents for their children, a man and his wife, a man for his fellow citizens, and likewise love for all mankind and for animals.¹³

After Arkoun, a writing by Michel Allard came up, entitled *Un philosophie theologien* published in *Revue de l’histoire des religions* vol. 187 no. 1 in 1975. Referring to *al-i‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām*, Allard concluded that al-‘Āmirī had successfully reflected religion and religious concepts rationally although sometimes admittedly he still brought apologetic visions. Allard wrote:¹⁴

¹²The paper by Arkoun was “le conquete de Bonheur selon Abu al-Hasan al-‘Āmirī,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 22 (1965), and “logocentrisme et vérité religieuse dans la pensée islamique d’après *al-I‘lām bi manāqib al-Islām d’ al-Āmirī*,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 35 (1972). The brief explanation can be read in H. Zuhri, “Sejarah dan Nalar Humanisme Islam: Perpektif Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010),” *Refleksi* 15, no. 1 (January 2015): 45-56.

¹³Joel Kraemer, “Humanism in Renaissance of Islam: A Preliminary Studies,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (January-March 1984): 162.

¹⁴Michel Allard, “Un philosophie theologien,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 187, no. 1 (1975): 67. It means that if this conclusion is the only way to give meaning to the assertions of ‘Āmirī, at the same time it raises a problem

Mais si cette conclusion est la seule qui permette de donner un sens aux affirmations de 'Āmirī, elle soulève en même temps un problème qui concerne non plus le contenu de l'ouvrage mais son caractère visiblement apologétique. Nous nous trouvons en effet devant une contradiction apparente. D'une part 'Āmirī affirme clairement que le domaine de la raison est celui qui est délimité par la religion musulmane, et d'autre āpart il prend en considération des arguments qui viennent des non-musulmans, c'est-à-dire d'un domaine qui, pour lui, est extérieur et à l'Islam et à la raison.

Thus, it can be said that *magnum opus* by al-‘Āmirī was the book of *al-I‘lām*. Commonly, this book expresses to establish the superiority of Islam over other religion.¹⁵ This book inspired many modern Muslim intellectuals to study further about the basic concepts of religion and religiosity. Arkoun discussed it in terms of religious logos that al-‘Āmirī tried to carry out, while Allard preferred construction of social argument in which al-‘Āmirī built his religiosity reasoning. Regardless to all, through some of his works and especially of the book of *al-I‘lām*, al-‘Āmirī was then not positioned everywhere. Was Al-‘Āmirī the al-Ash‘ari or Mu‘tazili theologian? The analysts tended to reposition al-‘Āmirī independently; he sometimes followed the line of Ash‘ari thoughts but in another dimension al-‘Āmirī preferred Mu‘tazilah. What is clear that, through *al-I‘lām*, Al-‘Āmirī had successfully built new paradigm about religion and philosophy. By citing the views ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, Gerhard Endress wrote that:¹⁶

Abū al-Hasan al-‘Āmirī (d. 992), spreading the spirit of Kindi's school in the East after taking the measure of al-Sirafi (and giving him a hard time), wrote the most detailed attempt to determine the relation of the religious and the philosophic disciplines in a harmonious symmetry, a

that concerns not the content of the book but it is obviously apologetic. We are indeed at an apparent contradiction. On the one hand 'Āmirī clearly states that the domain of reason is that which is defined by Islam, and secondly it considers the arguments that come from non-Muslims, that is to say an area that, for him, is outside and Islam and reason.

¹⁵As written by Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 88.

¹⁶Gerhard Endress, "The Language of Demonstration: Translating Science and the Formation of Terminology in Arabic Philosophy and Science," *Early Science and Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2002): 248.

"Proclamation of the Virtues of Islam" (*al-lām bi-manāqib al-Islām*). The very title is an apologetic programme: the rational sciences (*al-'ulūm al-hikmiyya*) are put into the service of Islam, the absolute religion, and of the religious sciences (*al-'ulūm al-millīyya*). Both spheres "are based on tenets which agree with pure reason (*al-'aql al-shāriḥ*) and are supported by valid demonstration (*al-burhān al-shāriḥ*).

Another work of al-‘Āmirī which widely discussed was *al-amad ‘alā al-abad* (الأمد على الأبد). This book was specifically addressed in a doctoral research conducted by Evereet K Rowson with a title *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al-‘Āmirī’s Kitāb al-amad ‘alā al-abad* (1988). The work written in Bukhara was relatively intact from the beginning so that the editing process was much easier, as written by Madelung:¹⁷

al-amad ‘alā al-abad deals with the afterlife of man according to the doctrine of the philosophers. al-‘Āmirī seeks to show that the majority of the Greek philosophers believed in the immortality of the soul and its reward and punishment in the hereafter. While admitting that they denied the bodily resurrection taught by Islam, he argues in the final section of his book that this shortcoming of the philosophers did not result from any defect of their basic principles of thought and that these principles can in fact be shown to support the Islamic belief. In his meticulous analysis and commentary on the text, Rowson identifies Plato's *Phaedo* as al-‘Āmirī's ultimate main source and suggests that he drew on a text based on the lost *Phaedo* commentary of John Philoponus and perhaps on that of Proclus. Rowson's through examination of the history of the ideas expressed by al-‘Āmirī in the Greek and Arabic sources is impressive.

In addition to serious ideas promoted by al-‘Āmirī, this book could also be regarded as semi autobiography because it explained some of his teachers, especially al-Balkhi, and exposed theological ideas which were not rigid. At one dimension he tended to follow the views constructed by Ash‘ari while in other cases he tended to agree with Mu‘tazilah. This means that *al-amad* was not merely a discourse on immortality of the soul but also a discourse of al-‘Āmirī himself.

Another work was *al-Sa‘ādah wa al-Is‘ād* (السعادة والإسعاد), the book which was originally still a manuscript then investigated (*taḥqīq*) by M. Minovi and published in Wiesbaden in 1957. This

¹⁷Madelung, "Review books," 157.

book was reviewed by Mohammad Arkoun and then published in the journal of *Studia Islamica*. What was discussed by Arkoun against the book could be a book edited by Minovi. Arkoun concluded from the perspective of semiotics that he used to read the book, the book of *al-Sa'ādah wa al-Is'ād*.

The last work newly appeared in public was *arba'u rasā'il falsafīyyah li al-Āmirī*. Until the completion of this writing, the book is not yet available. What was clear from some of the information written on the several online references mentioned that the one who investigated (*tahqīq*) the book was Sa'id al-Gānamī.¹⁸

In addition to those five works, the other works of al-Āmirī were still unpublished manuscripts. One of the al-Āmirī's unpublished works was *fusūl fī ma'ālim al-ilāhiyyah* assumed to be a translation or summary of Aristotelian theology notions that the other translations into Arabic was known as *Mahd al-Khayr* which had been translated into Latin *Liber de causis*. Two texts (*al-fusūl* and *mahd al-khayr*) which were claimed as the work of al-Kindi and al-Āmirī until today have not been published.¹⁹ About *al-Fusūl*, Rowson described it as follows:²⁰

The *Fusūl* is a brief work of eleven folios, divided into twenty chapters (*fāṣṣ*). It sets forth a standard Neo-platonic hierarchy, examines various features of it, and concludes with a proof for the immortality of the soul. Most of this material is directly dependent on the *Mahd al-khayr*, although in the form of extreme paraphrases. There are few direct quotations, and the intention of the original is frequently distorted, sometimes severely, but the correspondences between the two texts are nevertheless quite clear.

Meanwhile, Abdollatif Ahmadi put al-Āmirī's reasoning about religion in space of the Comparative Religion. This view seems to be a general view among scholars who look at al-Āmirī

¹⁸Abū al-Hasan al-Āmirī, *arba'u rasā'il falsafīyyah* (Najaf: Jami'ah al-Kuffah, 2015). Also see in Shafa Diyab, "al-faylasuf al-mugibbūn fī rasā'ilihī al-falsafīyyah," *al-Quds al-'Arabī*, accessed May 25, 2015. http://www.alquds.co.uk/?page_id=521704

¹⁹Everet K Rowson, "An Unpublished Work by al-Āmirī and the Date of Arabic De Causis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (January-March 1984): 193-199.

²⁰Rowson, "An Unpublished Work," 195.

and the researcher of comparative religion in general. In fact, the concept of comparative religion in the tenth century was not yet familiar among Muslim intellectuals. They studied a particular religion is not to be compared but to pair it with other. Therefore, it seems more accurate to say as understood by Nuḥa al-Sha’r that al-‘Āmirī used philosophy and logic to explain religious matters and theological topics in order to advance a religious vision more in sync with society. He also try to harmonise religion and philosophy²¹.

Discourse of Religion

Religious discourse in Islam at the 10th century can be divided into three parts. It does correlate with the paradigm that Islam is revealed religion based on the Qur’an and Prophetic tradition. The dynamics of those parts are the dialectic between revelation on the one hand and social reality in the other side. However, the explanation is important in this paper to determine the position of al-‘Āmirī in the discourse about religion in internal Islam circles. *Firstly*, Islam as a religion, the first case brought by the Prophet and then discussed and developed further by the companions and successors are the principal teachings of Islam related to beliefs, laws and worship. These principles are managed well by the first and second generations of Islam that gave rise to figures such as al-Shāfi‘ī, Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, and others.

Secondly, in Islamic intellectual discourse, religion is always discussed with power. This then gave birth to the concept of *al-dīn wa al-dawla*. At the time, the common question arose concerning the relationship between religion and state or the power that is experiencing and outstanding growth in the world. al-Mawardī (d. 1058) was one of the Sunni leaders who succeeded in formulating the relation between religion and state in a way that is very moderate. His views inspire the next generation to put religion in the context of the state and vice

²¹Nuḥa al-Sha’r, “An Analytical Reading in al-Tawḥīdī’s Epistle on the Classification of Knowledge (Risalah fī al-Ulūm),” in *Reflection on Knowledge and Language in Middle Eastern Societies*, ed. Bruno de Nicola (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 161.

versa. In addition to al-Mawardī, there are many other scientists who speak the same topic with different perspectives and different conclusions from both Sunni and Shia.

Thirdly, it is those who understand religion in the context of a more critical and independent. As a genuine Islamic philosopher, al-Kindī (d. 873) said that the acquisition of wisdom would combine with its actualization. Thus, philosophy and religion are supported to have the same goal to achieve. Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030) is one of the most important thinkers who emphasized the reconciliation between religion and philosophy, and the late Islamic Philosopher's Ibn Rushd voiced the same thing with ibn Miskawayh. One of them is Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1047). As quoted by Hilman Latief, Arthur Jeffery stated that al-Bīrūnī's contribution to the study of religion by establishing such scrupulous scientific principles as completeness, accuracy, and unbiased treatment is rare in his era and unique in the history of his own faith.²² He concerns on comparability of the religious beliefs and practices of the Greeks and the Indians, the distinction between popular beliefs and the beliefs of the choosen, and also by al-Bīrūnī, polytheism to be explained historically and rationally.²³ As al-Bīrūnī, Ibn Hazm's study on Christianity is far from racial, cultural or religious prejudices. His methodology seems to be different from the case of a large number of modern Western scholars. His study is objectives, academic in approaches, critical in argumentation and debatable.²⁴

From three patterns above, it is clear that both religions, in particular in the context of Islam and in general in the context of divine religions, have a very interesting debate among followers of the religion itself internally. The same was done by al-ʿĀmirī.

²²Hilman Latief, "Comparative Religion in Medieval Muslim Literature," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science* 23, no. 4 (2006): 29.

²³John Walbridge, "Explaining Away The Greeks Gods in Islam," *Journals of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 3 (1998): 393-395.

²⁴Mahmud Ahmad et al., "Ibn Hazm on Christianity: An Analysis for Religious Approaches," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no. 4, (2011): 246.

However, what has been done by al-‘Āmirī is different from what has been done by these Muslim intellectuals.

Religion and Religious Study in the Framework of al-‘Āmirī

There were some things that needed to be underlined. The first thing was the impression of Orientalists to assess construction of apologetic argument of al-‘Āmirī, as written by Endress and Allard, while among Muslim intellectuals such as Arkoun, he read al-‘Āmirī more liberal, thus tending to go out of the traditional meanings required by Muslims at that time and even now.

The issue of the understanding of an important belief studied was not merely as a religion but precisely because of its position in the middle of a plural society in terms of diversity. This condition was not sufficient to only establish a solid theological-apologetic framework but also required a paradigm of thinking about religion as a sociological-anthropological function to give a complete understanding of the reality of other religions. It was important to be done because, according to Paul L. Heck, al-‘Āmirī felt there was a drought or a crisis of understanding of religion in society at that time so that there was a need for solutions that he offered.²⁵ The offer, according to al-Tawḥīdī, was submitted to the Caliph al-Ma’mun at that time.

Such assertion needed to be underlined that the key messages of al-‘Āmirī through his works, especially the book of *al-I’lām*, were not buried by the new things that were less relevant to the sparkling methodology he carried. For that, the first thing that needed to be done was to look at the structure of al-‘Āmirī’s ideas through *al-I’lām* as written in the book.

The structure of al-‘Āmirī’s ideas began with the classification, urgency and characteristics of the reason (*al-‘aql*) in human existence as beings with reason (*al-ḥayawān al-nāfiq*). The concept of al-‘Āmirī’s reasoning was then positioned as a foundation for the design of building an understanding of the religiosity that he offered. Thus, the pattern actually had become

²⁵Paul L. Heck, “The Crisis of Knowledge in Islam: Case al-‘Amiri,” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 1 (January 2006): 107.

a tradition in the structure of ideas promoted by a writer or a scientist in that era. Al-‘Āmirī argued that, prior to discussing a specific theme, we should be able to build an understanding of the concepts that would be built in order to avoid chaos between one reader and other readers. Al-‘Āmirī’s main message was that we need to keep the mind in order what we wanted to understand departed from one perspective and the same framework for understanding. The framework built by al-‘Āmirī was not solely building an understanding of the religious theoretical but also concerned with praxis things. The discourse about religion was not just a mere theoretical region, but it had to also prioritize praxis dimensions.

Vision built by al-‘Āmirī became a paradigmatic vision of the concept of science in general and religious science in particular, scientific vision that was not only wrestling on theoretical-metaphysical dimensions but also giving ample scope to the praxis dimensions. Because by siding on issues in the field, theoretical dimension would by itself be stronger.²⁶ Departing from the above understanding, al-‘Āmirī insisted that we must distinguish between the philosophical sciences (*al-ulūm al-ḥikmiyyah*) and religious-based sciences (*al-ulūm al-millīyyah*). For al-‘Āmirī, religion was not merely present in the frame of confidence but what should also be underlined from the outset is that a scientific concept is born together with the birth of the religion. However, it did not mean that al-‘Āmirī dichotomized philosophy from religion; al-‘Āmirī kept using philosophical assumptions in understanding religion. It was as carried out by al-‘Āmirī in understanding the concept of faith (*al-īmān*). According to al-‘Āmirī, faith was a strong belief and had truth that had been tested. For al-‘Āmirī, there was no faith without truth. Therefore, strong faith has to be accompanied by the construction of truth or in, the language of al-‘Āmirī, it was termed *al-qumwāh al-‘āqilah* (rational potentiality) and not just *al-qumwāh al-mutakbayyilah* (hypothesis-imagine potentiality).

²⁶ al-‘Āmirī wrote أن كل من أثر لنفسه هذه العقيدة فقد ارتكب خطأ فاحشاً. فإن العلم مبدأ للعمل، والعمل تمام للعلم، ولا يرغب في العلوم الفاضلة إلا لأجل الأعمال الصالحة. Abū al-Hasan al-‘Āmirī, *al-‘ilām bi manāqib*, 75.

Departing from the background in mind, al-‘Āmirī formulated the basic conception of religion. For al-‘Āmirī, in addition to being a doctrine, religion was an idea as well. If the doctrine rests on the carrier of its treatise, the idea relies on the potential of truth to which it aspires. Therefore, al-‘Āmirī in general explained that religion has always four elements: (1) faith (*al-‘itiqādāt*), (2) ritual (*al-‘ibādāt*), (3) public affairs (*al-mu‘āmalāt*), and (4) sanctions (*al-maẓājir*). Those elements were present in some religious concepts as mentioned in the Qur’an, i.e., QS.22:17, 2:63, and QS. 5:69. Based on the above verses of the Qur’an above, according to al-‘Āmirī, religion was divided into six types: (1) Islam, (2) the Jews, (3) Shabi’in, (4) Christian, (5) Zoroastrianism, and (6) Polytheism.

Al-‘Āmirī found that the sixth religions had the concept and dimensions of the same conviction that was faith in Allah, angels, books, messengers, and the Last Day, as referred to in QS. 4:136. While in the practice of worship, six religions also had the concept and practice of the same ritual worship, i.e., self-worship such as prayer, physical worship such as fasting, possession worship such as alms, ownership worship such as *jihad*, and collaborative worship like Hajj. Al-‘Āmirī used QS. 22:34 as the reference. While in the context of family or public affairs, all religions also held five main points or principles, namely the principle of conventionalism such as buying, selling and renting, marriage principles, principles of evidence and conjecture, principles of trust, and principles of property or inheritance. The last was the principle of criminal law in religion that included taking lives, theft, acts that harm others, and out of his religious beliefs. Of the four elements in religion above and in every element there were six basic principles, every religion had then 20 basic principles.²⁷

Subject matter above became a meeting point as well as a starting point in understanding religions in the context of a belief or a fact or reality on the ground. Nevertheless, al-‘Āmirī also then reminded that, in every religion, principle of the belief was above the other principles. Only after that, the principle of

²⁷al-‘Āmirī, *al-‘ilām bi manāqib*, 123.

worship was then done, followed by the principle of *mu'āmalah*, and the last was the principle of sanctions or penalties. The sequence became a pressing point in every issue in a religion. Theological affairs were sometimes blasted with public affairs. In fact, both had a viewing angle and a different position in religion. Al-ʿĀmirī put the principles of faith in religion as an episteme that characterized the patterns of action reflected in spiritual behaviour in both individual and social contexts.²⁸

Apart from the elements and principles of the religion, as described above, al-ʿĀmirī claimed about the advantages of Islam in some aspects over other religions. It should be recognized that the claim of al-ʿĀmirī's apologetics came when he explained the concept of *faḍīlah al-Islām* understood as the excess or the primacy of Islam compared with other religions. Nevertheless, apologetic argument is not to blame others but seems to be an attempt to compare by highlighting the primacy dimensions of a religion or a particular thing compared to religion or other things. This was done to provide and strengthen readers or followers. Such apologetic vision is actually happening in all of the arguments built by a religion. The thing can give enlightenment to the readers, and this was carried out by al-ʿĀmirī, i.e., when the arguments built were formulated in a philosophical perspective and not in a dogmatism-theological perspective.

Among the aspects of religion that tried to be compared or more precisely described by al-ʿĀmirī were the theological aspects of Islam. According to al-ʿĀmirī, dimensional *ʿitiqādi* in Islam was built with the construction of solid logic and argumentation because coupled with the openness of thought even with the tradition of philosophical reasoning. This is in contrast to the beliefs of others, things that also occur in the context of understanding the concept of the treatise or *nubumwah*. Compared with other religions, Islam tends to

²⁸Ibid., 123. al-ʿĀmirī wrote:

وإذ عرف هذا فمن الواجب أن نعلم أن أفضل أصناف الأركان الدينية هي الخمسة الواقعة تحت الإعتقادات، فإنها معدودة من حيز العلم، والأصناف الأخر هي معدودة من حيز العمل، وليس يشك أن نسبة العلم إلى العمل مضاهية لنسبة العلة إلى المعلول، أو لنسبة البدء إلى التمام.

moderate in understanding the concept of prophethood. The same is also being put in to place and understand the concept of angels. Islam tries placing it in proportion as the venerable servant of Allah. As for *Kalam Allah* as *khitāb* or discourse, the comparative context lies in dimensions.

Ritual Aspects in Islam became a portrait for al-‘Āmirī how a religion moved from the direction or dimension very burdensome for the believer (*al-shiddah*), leading to an attitude that made the existence of religion seem to be equal to its absence. It was caused by the concepts of *Ubudiyyah* or ritual in religion which was very light (*al-layyin*). The pattern sometimes ran in contrast. Al-‘Āmirī declared that the principle of worship or spirituality in Islam was always flexible and moderate in points (*al-mutawassīṭah*). Dialectic process in the practice of worship in the dimensions of space, time and identity of man always walked harmoniously. Thus, such process became dialectic-spiritualistic of relationship between human and God as mentioned in QS. 35:62. Such ideals, according to al-‘Āmirī, were practically not found in any other religion for other religions were more damning in their spiritual dimension and even had more emphasis on the dimensions of the physical-materialistic.²⁹

Another thing that was not less interesting, according to al-‘Āmirī, was a political construction that was built by Islam far relatively more ideal than a political system existing before. Although the idea of al-‘Āmirī was formulated in the context of its ideals and not in the reading of the reality, the view of al-‘Āmirī was worth appreciating because an understanding of the positive politics and even prophetic always present as voices of the sky that sensitized the public readers. Specifically, al-‘Āmirī underlined the difference between the system of *al-imāmah* and *al-khilāfah*. According to him, *al-imāmah* was always oriented to *al-fadīlah* (virtue) while *al-khilāfah* had to always be oriented to the victory (*al-tagallub*). Nevertheless, al-‘Āmirī still underlined that the best leadership system was prophetic leadership system that always upheld the values of truth, had a vision of virtue, and

²⁹al-‘Āmirī, *al-I‘lām bi Manāqib*, 137-149.

always adhered to the principles of balance between hereafter and temporal dimensions.³⁰

For al-‘Āmirī, religious or political attention to the people was not merely as objects to be managed well; al-‘Āmirī in fact precisely promoted the concept of people or society as a subject that had a strong existence in the eyes of the religion and the power to sustain it. Therefore, al-‘Āmirī could be regarded as a figure who promoted Islamic populism concept, a concept in which people become the main force of dignity (*al-sharīf*), strong (*al-Qawī*) and nurturing (*al-walī*), not disgraced people (*al-waḍī’*), weak (*al-ḍa’if*), and hostile (*al-‘adūm*). Those potentials were thus very possible to be realized in a society because each person, al-‘Āmirī said, had the authority to act freely in them.³¹

In the next part, al-‘Āmirī identified some of the problems and at the same time prospected in looking at the ideals and the reality of religion. *Firstly*, al-‘Āmirī discussed the relation between religion and power. Clearly with poetic sentences, al-‘Āmirī wrote:

With religion, kings will be solid
With kings, religion will be strong
Problems come and go in turn, the source must stab faith
When the Sultan is weak, evils become strong

Historically, the dimensions of power is always present in religion, even religion always stays in power. However, al-‘Āmirī read different things when Islam was being spread by Muhammad. The prophetic concept by Muhammad actually left something typical in the relation of power and religion.

Secondly, al-‘Āmirī also reminded of a principle in the context of religion and religiosity that the concept of truth would not be an evil deed because of society disagreement on the concept of that truth. Instead, the evil deeds would not be the truth because a society agreement on those evil deeds. Al-‘Āmirī wanted to show that the concept of truth was not merely sociological-anthropological but also metaphysical-theological. However, al-‘Āmirī realized that differences on truth would continue to occur. Therefore, what to be developed is awareness of the

³⁰Ibid., 151-160.

³¹Ibid., 162-168.

effect of the differences that will bear hostility and the hostility can be a ladder for the birth of fanaticism, whether based on class or social. In fact, fanaticism is a social disease that will bury the common sense of society.³²

Thirdly, the analysis of al-‘Āmirī to the discrepancy problems or rather potential religious conflicts in society was caused more by an external factor, i.e., religion that included religious and social conditions of the followers. The problems of building an understanding of religion that grows in every religion are not matched with a full understanding of the religion. Therefore, the important thing in establishing a religion is to build human, *ulū al-albāb* beings that have quality and intelligence in creativity to think, speak, and act.³³

Fourthly, wisdom in understanding the journey and the teachings of religions becomes absolutely necessary because wisdom will continue to rise and fall in the trajectory of their time. Including in it was the designations written and implied in the holy books before Islam. Al-‘Āmirī confirmed it to prove historical arguments about the truth of Muhammad as an apostle and Islam as the last religion.³⁴

Conclusion

What was written by al-‘Āmirī is a form of philosophical reflections on the existence of Islam in the religious reality in general. The ideas of al-‘Āmirī were promoted in very beautifully literary languages combined with the construction of the ideas and language of the Qur’an. Therefore, what was done by al-‘Āmirī can be positioned as ideal prototype of classical and rational religious studies. The argument methods built by al-‘Āmirī were apologetic-reflective methods, but he did not intend to disrespect any other religions but wanting to see Islam by all dimensions in it in terms of its reality existence among other religions. Therefore, before an assessment of the religions, al-‘Āmirī confirmed the importance of knowledge, especially knowledge in the field or in a context of religion, to read the

³²Ibid., 192.

³³Ibid., 197.

³⁴Ibid., 201.

reality of religion (*al-ulūm al-milliyah*). In the end, al-‘Āmirī also realized that the Islamic faith professed by him and the public does not necessarily negate the common sense that it becomes self-consciousness in al-‘Āmirī that in reality of a religion, Islam is no exception, there are many problems undefined (*al-shubḥat*) that will never be lost either in the realm of episteme, historical, or praxis of Islam or religion in general. This issue is a challenge all of us to contribute because religion will never end to actualize identity in a society that is constantly changing.

In the other side, al-‘Āmirī’s thought on religion can be used as primary resources to understand a concept of comparative religion or religious studies. Islam has many intellectuals and references about religious discourses both classic and modern era. Therefore, comparative religion in Islamic perspective should reference to classical discourse on religion before use modern reference which written by Western scholars who look at religion from outsider perspectives only and do not use insider perspectives. What is thought and written by al-‘Āmirī about religion has specific characteristics when juxtaposed with other thinkers such as al-Kindī, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Mawardī, and others. al-‘Āmirī combine philosophy and social perspectives on religion. it reflects the faith by making the distance between what he believes in one hand and what he discourses on the other side. This distance gave rise to thoughts that the objective facts of religion. Therefore, he does not become a spokesman for the religion. At the same time, his own experience in the community showed that religion is still has problems or what he said as *al-mustabihāt* or undefined concept in religion.

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