

## Dialogue among the Abrahamic Faiths: Leonord Swidler and Ismail Raji al Faruqi on Interfaith Trialogue

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### Abstract

The trialogue of the Abrahamic faiths has emerged as a prominent idea in the interfaith dialogue movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Leonord Swidler, an American Catholic and Ismail Raji al Faruqi, a Palestinian American Muslim have a decades' long association with dialogue movement. Both have three common fields of study; philosophy, history and theology that brought them to rigorous engagement in interfaith dialogue. They both joined the Temple University of America in the 1960s to teach religion and played their role to flourish dialogue as an academic discipline. They after realizing the need for and importance of dialogue, have come up with their specific notions of Deep and Meta-religious dialogue by presenting distinct rules to make it effective in the contemporary pluralistic world. Additionally, their active participation in trialogue as the representatives of Christianity and Islam has highlighted the role of Abrahamic faiths in making the world a peaceful place to live in. The present study is an analytical comparison of their work on trialogue.

**Keywords:** Dialogue movement, Trialogue, Deep Dialogue, Meta-religious Dialogue, Interfaith dialogue

### Introduction

The concept of religious dialogue between people of different faiths has been initiated in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has been developed significantly afterwards. The need for and importance of interfaith dialogue have been felt greatly in the modern world and as a movement it has occupied a vital place at institutional, organizational and individual levels. Trialogue is a prominent dimension of this dialogue movement because its contribution comes from the adherents of world's three major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Leonard Swidler (1929-) a Catholic American and Ismail Raji al Faruqi (1921-1986) a Palestinian American Muslim two prominent scholars of the modern world have decades' long participation in the history of dialogue movement. Swidler has been working on dialogue since the 1950s with its various dimensions of intra-religious (between Protestants and Catholics), interreligious (Christians' dialogue with the followers of other religions), intercultural (dialogue among people of various cultural backgrounds with culture's influence on dialogue and vice versa) and inter-ideological (dialogue with people who believe in an ideology and that ideology acts like religion for them like universal humanism and Marxism) dialogue. Al Faruqi began his course of dialogue through deep study of Abrahamic faiths. Although he emphasized to conduct

dialogue among the adherents of all religions, his major area is the dialogue among Muslims and Christians.

Both Swidler and al Faruqi have three common fields of study; philosophy, history and theology that led them to dialogue. They both joined the Temple University of America in 1960s to teach religion and played their role to make dialogue as an academic discipline. Swidler and his wife Arlene founded the Journal of Ecumenical Studies in 1964 to publish scholarly articles on dialogue among different Christian traditions and very soon it became a journal of interreligious dialogue among the followers of different religions of the world. He taught the Catholic thought from 1966 to 2022 and initiated interreligious dialogue with the establishment of dialogue institute in the university in 1978. Al Faruqi joined the same university to teach Islam in 1968 and continued his job till his murder in 1986. Besides this basic forum they contributed to the development of dialogue internationally; they established various institutions, mentored a generation of scholars, taught at different universities of the world and guided many organizations to launch and organize a variety of programs for dialogue.

They have come up with their specific notions of Deep and Meta-religious dialogue by presenting distinct rules to make it more effective while on the other hand they turned to present Christianity and Islam to build dialogical collaboration with the Abrahamic faiths and with the other religions and ideologies. Dialogue; the dialogue among the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has occupied a specific place in their thoughts and works.

### **Literature Review**

We analysed the work of Swidler and al Faruqi on dialogue and found that many aspects in their works had been highlighted however their dialogue was less explored. The evaluation of their works and efforts included analytical assessments, book reviews and critical responses with the range of strong critical analysis to compassionate presentations.

Adams in her book highlighted various aspects of Swidler's life in the form of conversational interviews, his historical memories, the views of his colleagues, friends and students who got guidelines and help from him. This overall sketch of Swidler's life along with its focus on other aspects and tendencies of his thought illustrated that how the approach for interfaith dialogue developed in his thought. Sheetz with other authors analyzed Swidler's work on dialogue placing it in historical and theoretical context. They examined his work to see its effectiveness for the present changing scenario and future global interfaith activism pointing to some critiques and responses to them by reformulating Swidler's ten principles of dialogue and seven stages of transformation to derive guidelines and further principles for interreligious peace and tolerance in the changing global scenario. Zoofaghari in her article acknowledged Swidler's foundations like deep dialogue and religion's role for a global ethic but she held that this approach is not effectively expressed in the principles of Swidler's second declaration due to his focus on Universal Declaration of Human Rights that made his global ethics limited.

Fletcher examined al Faruqi's approach for the study of religion in its theoretical and practical context by evaluating the efforts and contribution made by al Faruqi for the establishment of understanding and interaction of Islam with other faiths especially Judaism and Christianity. Overall it is a critical analysis of al Faruqi's work and thoughts by viewing

both positive and negative aspects in it. Tayob presented a critical evaluation of al Faruqi's approach to the study and evaluation of religions. He elaborated that al Faruqi was successful to provide a distinctive approach for the study of religion as it was free from the general shortcomings the approaches he and others criticized had, yet his approach could not avoid being apologetic for Islamic Theology. Shehu acknowledged and elaborated his principles of Comparative and Meta-religion of al Faruqi in his article of al-Faruqi's methodology for the study of Christianity.

### **Research Questions**

The present research work is different from the previous evaluation of Swidler and al Faruqi's work as it is the comparison of their efforts for trialogue with its distinct features. Their long-term association with dialogue and work for its development in same scenario yet with different religious backgrounds along with the theological, rational, ethical, pluralistic and to some extent apologetic glimpses appealed the researchers to compare the efforts of these two scholars. Both had been experiencing the emergence of dialogue as a need of time by various intellectuals and institutions since the second half of twentieth century. The present study aspired to analyze and compare the stances of Swidler and al Faruqi for trialogue by focusing on the following questions:

1. What are the views of Swidler and al Faruqi to make trialogue among the followers of Abrahamic faiths effective?
2. How did Swidler and al Faruqi contribute in the field of trialogue through their specific approaches?

### **Research Methodology**

Swidler and al Faruqi not only presented trialogue in their unique styles but also shared many similar yet different aspects of it. In this qualitative study, the comparative method has been followed. Through content analysis it was tried to find out the similar, different, theoretical and practical aspects of their work on trialogue to view its validity, importance, contribution and limitations. Both of the intellectuals coined their specific terms to make the dialogue acceptable and applicable on a wide scale for the betterment of humanity.

### **Swidler and al Faruqi on Trialogue**

The efforts of Swidler and al Faruqi for developing the ways of cooperation and understanding among the followers of the Abrahamic faiths can be seen on two levels; in the first they presented their views and suggestions to make it effective and secondly their participation to bring the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam close to each other to conduct the fruitful dialogue to make the world a peaceful place to live in.

### **Swidler's Stance for the Need for and Importance of Trialogue**

#### **Need for Trialogue According to Swidler**

Swidler acknowledges that in the modern world with the deabsolutised meaning of truth the need of dialogue has been increased and its purpose has been changed from overcoming the opponent to learning from him/her. He holds that Islam's need of dialogue with other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism has been increasing day by day but its need of dialogue with Christianity and Judaism has brought Islam to participate in it. (Swidler, 1993).

He emphasizes on the dialogue among the followers of Abrahamic faiths on the bases of many aspects shared among them; they are monotheistic religions as they believe in One, Just, Loving and Creator God who communicates through Prophets and historical events. Moreover, they regard Prophet Abraham (A.S) to be their originating ancestor. He proclaims that the need of dialogue arises among these three revealed religions to answer the question that if they share such a vast common heritage and if their purpose is to follow will of God, then why they are the three different ways; if God communicates through historical events and persons, then why those events and persons are bound to their own histories et cetera. All the three should enter the dialogue not only because of this commonality among them (which is an inner aspect) but also because of external reasons like earth's becoming a global village where industrial Judo-Christian west cannot be separated from oil-rich Islamic world (Swidler, 2007).

Swidler emphasizes that the three monotheistic religions should unite through dialogue as they make more than half of the population of the world, they should also eagerly conduct dialogue with the followers of other religions and even the people with no religion and hence in this way all the population of the world in fact the members of whole humanity can learn from one another (Abul. Majd, n.d.) His grave concern is evidently mentioned "Knowingly to refuse dialogue today would be an act of fundamental human irresponsibility-in Judeo-Christian-Muslim terms, a sin." (Swidler, 1996 p. 16)

### **Christians and Jews**

Swidler has mentioned that before moving to dialogue with any other religion it is important for Christians to recognize the original source of Christianity is Jesus and Christians are in need of dialogue with Jews, the adherents of the religion of Jesus to better understand Christianity (Swidler, 2007).

### **Anti-Semitism**

Swidler accentuates Christians' anti-Semitic propensity toward Jews prevailing for a long time due to misunderstandings and stresses to diminish it. In this regard he refers to some saints like John Chrysostom and Agobard who in their speeches clearly expressed their negative views about the Jews. He appreciates the efforts of Christians to give respect to Judaism and to be gentle with Jews but considering those efforts insufficient emphasizes on the need of Christians to acknowledge the Jews by doing their best to recompense the past hostilities through their theoretical and practical efforts to conduct the productive dialogue with Jews.

### **Jewish "No" to Christianity**

Moreover Swidler emphasizes the Christians to understand the nature of Jewish objection or rejection of Christianity which is not toward the Yeshua rather it is toward Christianity; the claims of some of the followers of Yeshua about him and their dealing of those claims. In this regard he suggests that Christians are in need to understand the embedded message in this Jewish "no" to Christianity or Christ (not Yeshua).He stresses that only through the authentic dialogue with Jews the Christians can prove their religion to be authentic by returning to its Jewish founder and foundation.

### **Dialogue with Christians; A need for Jews**

He declares that not only the Christians are in need of their dialogue with Jews but it is also essential for Jews to have dialogue with Christians. He illustrates the following examples in this regard:

- i) Many Jewish scholars (like Martin Buber) because of Jewishness of Jesus consider Christianity very near to Judaism.
- ii) Both Judaism and Christianity deliver the same message as historically the ancient and new covenants without any contradiction and this way they are close to each other.
- iii) Some of Judaism's forgotten Hellenistic phases are preserved by Christianity and to know those phases Jews need dialogue with Christians.
- iv) To have dialogue with Christianity is a way for Judaism to know about one of its own portions because gospel is also a Jewish spiritual scripture.

### **Muslims in Trialogue**

First of all Swidler sets some prerequisites for both Jews and Christians before conducting their dialogue with Muslims.

#### **Prerequisites of the Dialogue with Muslims**

It is evident from previously mentioned points that Swidler sees Judaism and Christianity closer to each other and before conducting the trialogue he stresses on the removal of the following hurdles to make it effective and fruitful (Swidler, 2007):

#### **Impact of Colonialism**

He reminds Jews and especially Christians about the impact of colonialism, which is bitterly associated to their relationship with Muslims. He stresses on Christian and Jew dialogue partners with Muslims to eliminate this impact.

#### **Ignorance about Islam**

He stresses on Christians and Jews to improve their knowledge about Islam as they know a little about it because of misinformation and ignorance. They need much effort to know about Islam as compared to their efforts of learning each other.

#### **Distorted image of Muslim**

Swidler declares that ignorance not only prevails about Islam, but also of its followers. He holds that because of the violence of a few people proclaimed to be the members of a specific religion, all the followers of that religion cannot be labeled as terrorists. Such examples are found everywhere for other religions as well besides Islam.

#### **Cultural Gap**

He identifies a cultural gap between majority of Muslims and their Jewish and Christian partners by declaring that only a minority of Muslims is capable of entering a true authentic dialogue with Christians and Jews. He feels that for most Muslims a great effort is required as most of them have not yet experienced the enlightenment in the sense of deabsolutizing the truth. He considers such an effort to be a prolegomena for the dialogue in its true sense and same is the case with orthodox Jews, evangelical Christians and even Roman Catholics before

Vatican-II. So he emphasizes that Christians and Jews first need to do hard efforts for the dialogue among themselves, then with one another and then with their Muslim brothers.

### **Role of Muslims**

Swidler has been asked about his view of western media's negative depiction of Islam's image. He declares that media is mostly playing its role by reporting what is happening in the world by some terrorists in the name of Islam. He suggests that although non-Muslims should also try to know more about Islam but basically Muslims should play their role in three ways:

- i- They should denounce the activities of such terrorists on a large scale and this should also be done by majority of Muslims continuously. Only the effort of a few on a small scale is not enough.
- ii- They should find and communicate through various means to present the true image of Islam. He appreciates that some Muslims are playing their role in this regard and suggests that "other Muslims need to become equally creative and energetic and make the positive, peace-loving dimensions of Islam widely known through new, creative means of communication: e.g., blogs, listservs, Facebook, Twitter..."(Abul- Majd, p.5)
- iii- "Most important, Muslims need to transform and modernize the teaching of Islam to the masses of Muslims, stressing their shared humanity with non-Muslims. See the excellent writings on the history of Islamic education by my friend Prof. Fazlur Rahman (unfortunately now dead). With such education such anti-Islam ideas as suicide bombers could gain no support among the masses of Muslims, but young Muslims—in contact with young Jews, Christians, and others—would become builders of Bridges of Peace!"(Abul-Majd, n.d. p. 4-5)

Swidler acknowledges that Islam has been entering in global dialogue. For this he mentions two events in this regard; first one is 'A Common Word between Us and You' of 2007 and the other one is king Abdullah of Saudi's contribution to interreligious dialogue. He holds that ISAT (International Scholars Abrahamic Trialogue) has its prominent role in this regard.

### **Modern Scenario for Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Swidler declares that prior to the one and a half century the dialogue was not as effective as it is now. In response to a question about negative thinking of Catholics about al-Quran and the prophet Muhammad S.A.W he refers to the historical conquests of Muslim warriors conquering the vast Christendom and then the crusades to take those lands back. However he is optimistic that with the second half of the twentieth century, Christians now bear much balanced dialogical views of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). He himself acknowledges the stances taken by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as portrayed in the history especially with Jews and Christians and declares that in the time of the Prophet the circumstances were not of the kind they are now for the urge of dialogue. He declares that if the prophet were alive today, he would lead the dialogue very effectively according to the need of the time. (Abul-Majd, n.d)

### **Role of Abrahamic Faiths in Separation of Religion and State**

Swidler emphasizes that freedom of humanity and development of any civilization is only possible when religion and state separately work in their own spheres with positive collaboration with each other without the dominance of the one on the other.

He declares that in the past every great civilization of the world experienced rise and then fall. In this regard he declares that whenever the Abrahamic Faiths as well as the other religions or ideologies tried to reunite the religion/ideology and state they experienced failure. Unlike the other civilizations the Western civilization experienced only the rise and flourishment and the reason behind its glory, is its successful separation of the religion and state which other civilizations failed to implement. He admits that even the western civilization cannot escape the ills of modern crises and for this there is an urge to develop an ethical system for the world (Swidler, 2018).

He declares that Christianity and Islam as the world's two major and powerful religions along with Judaism can play a vital role in building a constructive relationship among the three separate entities; religion, state and ethics. He considers that there is a need for every society to develop a global ethic in modern context by focusing on human rights, cultural pluralism, freedom and separation of religion and state which can be done by focusing on human responsibilities, giving mutual respect, fulfilling obligation and conducting dialogue and in this regard it is a great responsibility of the followers of the Abrahamic Faiths to play a leading role (Swidler, 2018).

**Al Faruqi's Stance on the Need of Trialogue can be summed up as follows:**

#### **Status of Judaism and Christianity**

Ismail Raji al Faruqi declares that Islam gives honour and respectable status to Judaism and Christianity. It acknowledges their prophets and scriptures to be truly sent by God and declares their God to be the One and Same God of Islam. In such relationship of Islam with both religions the differences among them are merely the minor disagreements which can be surmounted through wisdom and good will, "Islam treats them as domestic disputes within one and the same religious family." (Al Faruqi, 1998, p. 77)

He illustrates the example from al-Quran (5: 82) where the Christians are praised for their humility and asceticism that they are closer to Muslims in their friendship and love (Al Faruqi, 1998).

#### **Development of Trialogue**

Al Faruqi examines the relationship of Islam with Judaism and Christianity from Quranic and historical perspective. He illustrates that the Prophet S.A.W and his companions built good relations with Christians and Jews. After that Muslim dynasties followed the same example with the exception of a few cases.

He holds that Comparative religion as a discipline flourished under the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cordova where interfaith debates occurred to value and respect the Abrahamic faiths. The work of comparative religion scholars; Shahristani, Ibn Hazm and Bairuni et cetera is good example but it is not enough for the development and proceeding success for the positive interfaith relations as there are no such efforts seen since the Middle Ages. Although

the relationships of Christians and Jews have become much better because of dialogue after the World War II but the dialogue between Muslims and Jews does not exist due to certain issues like creation of Israel and the dialogue between Muslims and Christians is still in its infancy. He further explains that from Muslims' side an effort to establish good relations with Christians was made at Tripoli Libya in 1974. In that meeting the huge Christian bodies like world Council of Churches, Protestant Churches, Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches did not participated rather they only sent their observers. Moreover the points on agreement were abstained at the airport by the Christian delegation. He declares that from Christians' side whenever such initiative has been taken, the Muslim participants are only the chosen guests of the Christian hosts to only listen and agree with them. So the dialogue between Muslims and Christians could not succeed in the past and it cannot succeed in present and future as well unless participants from both sides come as hosts, both of sides have upper hands. He holds that since the Middle Ages the creation of Muslim Jewish Christian Council is the only endeavor to bring the followers of all the three religions to communicate about their own faiths. It presented the ecumenical work through its two international conferences held in 1975 in Italy and 1977 in Portugal with later on the published result (Al Faruqi, 1991).

Al Faruqi declares that Christian Mission and colonialization are bitter examples to affect the dialogue. He criticizes the mission to be a failure and missionaries unconsciously followed it. He emphasizes that instead of mission the Christian scholars should focus on dialogue. Because the cooperation and respect is needed that can only be achieved through dialogue. Vatican- II's efforts are too little and Protestants' view of Christian figurisation of God in Jesus is the hurdle in the way to conduct a successful dialogue with Muslims.

#### **Al Faruqi on Christian Mission**

He severely disagrees with the understanding of Christian Mission and the role of missionary declaring that instead of preaching the message of Jesus the mission is trying to spread the Western figurization of that message. Its absurdity is of two fold according to him; first both the West and the missionary do not try to find out the meaning in that figurization with consciousness. Secondly the missionary when approaches the Muslims of Near East and North Africa for his task he is unaware of the fact that they are already Christians in three ways; first they belong to Semitic history and were spiritually ready for the advent of Jesus and the first ones to acknowledge him. Secondly they became Christians in the sense of Western figurization of Christianity by adopting its doctrinal rudiments under Byzantium influence. Thirdly even after leaving this figurization and embracing Islam they are Christians through the realization of the ethics of Jesus in their lives (al Faruqi, 1998).

Moreover he emphasizes that the "Western missionary" is never welcomed in the Muslim World by Muslims and Christians alike due to his farness from the mission of Jesus and this western figurizational Christian mission has been hardly exemplified in deeds rather it mostly remained asserted in words while a few examples (like Albert Schweitzer) are the exceptions. Besides this the bitter history of crusades and colonialization added more fuel to high flames of hatred for the western figurization in the hearts of Muslims. He for all this suggests that "the mission chapter of Christian history" (Al Faruqi, 1998, 246) should be closed.



Al Faruqi declares that many western scholars mostly Christians when work on non-Christian religions especially on Islam they have shown either a missionary mindset or of a religious scientist who takes religious truths as observable external dimensions of those religions. In this regard he highlights the views of some Christian scholars as follows:

He raises objection on Neill's terms "self-exposure" and "personal involvement" to study a religion and suggests their analysis. He declares his three principles to be non-rational and dogmatic. Moreover he holds that if Neill would not proceed further in his approach, his work would lead to a "genuine dialogue" but his declaring Christian interpretation the only possible one for the being of God and his proselytizing call for the Muslims who in his view have not recognized Jesus prove his work an attempt of evangelization rather than a "Christian dialogue with other Religions." (Al Faruqi, 1967, p. 38).

He criticizes Hendrik Kraemer's view for whom comparative religion is merely a branch of missiology. Kraemer denies any kind of presuppositions and *epoché* to understand a religion holding that it can only be understood in the light of theology. To overcome this problem he suggests that instead of changing the philosophy of comparative religion there is a need to have a "new understanding of the Christian faith." (Al Faruqi, 1967, p. 37).

Al Faruqi emphasizes the mutual understanding between Christianity and Islam and he considers the dialogue to be the only source to achieve it. He declares that although there are sources which provide understanding of both the religions like knowledge of Islamic contents and Christian tradition by orientalist and Muslim scholars respectively but it is conceptual, descriptive or listed knowledge.

After explaining the nature and highlighting the significance of history of religions, he relates it to Christianity declaring that it is only one among many of the religio-cultures of humanity that are the subject matter of history of religions. So he suggests that instead of a standard or criteria to evaluate the other religions, Christianity should be examined under the principles of history of religions just like other religions; Islam and Judaism et cetera (Al Faruqi, 1998).

### **Role and efforts of Swidler and al Faruqi to develop collaboration among the followers of the three Faiths**

Swidler and al Faruqi have their role in the development of trialogue. A few examples are illustrated to have a view of their efforts in this regard.

Swidler's role can be seen through the following points:

#### **Swidler's Trialogue**

He has been actively working on trialogue since 1978 (Adams, 2014) as he explains that "semi annual national scholars Trialogue" (Swidler, 2007, p. 43) meetings were held from 1978-1984 at Kenedy Institute of Ethics as a result of which International Scholars Annual Trialogue (ISAT) has been launched in 1989 and since then its meetings have been held in different countries like United States, Jerusalem, Macedonia, Indonesia and Jordan. ISAT is a series of conferences among the other conferences of the Institute for Interreligious Intercultural Dialogue (IIID) established by Swidler in 1978 as a companion arm of Journal of Ecumenical Studies. The purpose of ISAT's meetings like other conferences of the Institute (It began as IIID in 1978 then

modified to *Global Dialogue Institute* and since 2008 it has been known as *Dialogue Institute*.) is to bring published research of the Journal into various world partnerships and practical activities (Swidler, 2007).

He explains the origin of trialogue, “As far as I know, the first serious Trialogue among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars started in 1978 when Sargent Shriver, brother-in-law of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and the Founder of the United States Peace Corps, asked me and my friend Eugene Fisher to bring together ten Jewish, ten Christian, and ten Muslim scholars to launch a scholars Trialogue. For the next years we met semi-annually under aegis of the Kennedy Institute for Ethics in Washington, D.C., and since the latter 1990s annually under the sponsorship of the Dialogue Institute, and known as the International Scholars Abrahamic Trialogue (ISAT)” (Abul- Majd, n.d. p. 5).

Swidler emphasizes that “fundamental research and dialogue” approach has been proved very successful between Protestants and Catholics in Germany. The same approach has been applied for the trialogue but he insists that unless the absolutes (the beliefs or views of the adherents of one religion contradicted to the beliefs or views of the other) of the three religions are not discussed critically the results of this long term approach cannot be achieved. For this purpose the ISAT’s members wrote nine papers on the absolutes; “The Chosen People/Promised Land, The Christ and The Al-Qur’an.” (Swidler, 2007, p. 43).

Swidler explains that dialogue conducted in 1992 on the base of these papers has shown the radiant results as the participants have expressed their “self-critical” view by developing “deep trust” and accepting “constructive critiques”. (Swidler. 2007, p.44)

He explains that in modern times many committed adherents of these religions readily reinterpret these once un-negotiable absolutes making them relative absolutes and this is what has happened in these trialogical discussions and in this way these absolutes are no more a hurdle in the way of dialogue (Swidler, 2007).

#### **Dialogue between Christian and Jews**

His efforts to develop collaboration between Christians and Jews can be viewed by the following points:

##### **Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi**

He sees Christianity very close to Judaism and the very basic point in this regard for him is Jesus. He declares that Yeshua instead of Jesus was used till the 1<sup>st</sup> century which is the Latin and Greek form of Hebrew name Yehoshua and there are three meanings of this word Yeshua; YAWAH (Hebrew name for God) salvation, wholeness and one and only God. Moreover he explains that Yeshua of Nazareth was a prophet, a teacher and a rabbi to whom many non-Jews came for salvation, wholeness and the Jewish insight of ethical monotheism. He affirms that Yeshua was a Jew till his last breath while the titles of Messiah and Christ were given to him by some of his followers and since the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century his followers have been known as Christians. He holds that Yeshua as a focal figure of Christianity is not the Messiah expected by the Jews instead he becomes Christ through whom Gentiles know one true God of Jews (Swidler, 1988).

He clarifies that Yeshua firmly believed in oneness of God and whenever he used the terms father or spirit of God his early Jewish followers took it in metaphorical and picture language but later on the followers of Jesus as Greek Christians use to think in a broader sense in Greek philosophical, abstract and ontological ways and in this regard the doctrine of Trinity emerged. Swidler holds that yeshua and his early followers emphasized on doing instead of thinking, while the later Christians have to raise the questions and explain the answers in a new changed mode of thinking (Swidler, 1999).

### **Dialogue between Christians and Muslims**

Swidler considers dialogue of Christians and Jews with Muslims very important in context of today's world. He appreciates the role of Muslims to emphasize on dialogue of Christians with Muslims on the base of his personal experience.

On the base of his personal experience he appreciates the theoretical and practical efforts of some Muslim scholars for effective dialogue because they have deabsolutized view of truth like Smail Balić, Asaf Fyzee, Muhammad M. Arkoun, ,Muhmud Muhammad Taha, Khalid Duran, Mohammad Talbi, Hasan Askri and Riffat Hassan. He illustrates their views regarding study of religion, critical thinking and dialogue (Swidler, 1992).

He declares their efforts to be very limited because their effectively played role can only be seen in their work outside their homelands; the Muslim world. For this he refers to an Egyptian scholar Fathi Osman who worked in America for a long time. He planned with Swidler to write a dialogic article for the journal of Ecumenical Studies but as he had to return to the Muslim world for some reasons, he could not write it and in Swidler's words "the intellectual atmosphere was just too restrictive for him to be able to think the thoughts needed in order to write the article." (Swidler, Islam p. 446) Likewise he illustrates the example of Dr. Fazlur Rahman who was in favour of freedom of thought and worked for ten years as Pakistan's education minister and six years for the Islamic Research Institute Karachi but he had to resign in 1968 in despair because the institute could not proceed to achieve its goal.

There are many examples of Swidler's active participation in trialogue. Swidler and Paul Mojzes were working on Trialogue in Indonesia. When civil war was broke out in Macedonia, they brought the trialogue in Macedonia on the invitation of its president Boris Trajkovski to abolish the conflict between majority of Orthodox Christians and Albanian Muslims who were a significant minority. Although they could not succeed to stop the violence but due to their efforts the scholars from both religious institutions agreed on the following points (Adams, 2007):

1. Religious leaders would meet twice a year for discussions over various issues to find solutions of the problems and to settle the matters with peace and cooperation.
2. An interreligious cooperative council would be set up.
3. Faculties and student bodies would meet for the collaboration between Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

**Swidler comments for this "there is still so much to do." (Adams, 2007, p. xvii)**

Swidler and al Faruqi not only played their part in the development of trialogue, they have their efforts to bring the followers of the Abrahamic faiths close to each other to eliminate the

misunderstandings and creating new avenues of collaboration. Al Faruqi's role for trialogue can be seen in the following points.

### **Al Faruqi's Trialogue**

Through the assistance of MJCC the American Academy of Religion's council of Islamic Studies in 1979 organized a conference titled "Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths". Nine members from the three religions presented their papers on the three agreed topics relevant to the true understanding of these religions and their positive relations to one another. Al Faruqi not only participated in that meeting, he as the chairman of Islamic Studies Group of American Academy of Religion edited the work of those scholars. Al Faruqi declared it a great effort for the three faiths to cooperate with one another.

Talking about Arab Muslims intellectuals engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue Jane I Smith acknowledges, "Among the most deeply involved Palestinians in such exchanges several decades ago was the late Ismail al Faruqi of Temple University, who was uniquely prepared for a deep level of discourse because of his level of scholarship in Christian theology and ethics. His seminal work on Abrahamic dialogue served as a basic text for the consideration of interfaith issues." (Smith, 2007, p. 45-46).

She further holds, "As the title of al Faruqi's pioneering work Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths indicates, he was one of the first to advocate the three-way conversation among Muslim, Christians, and Jews." (Smith, 2007, p. 125).

### **Mission, Da'wah and Dialogue**

His colleague and friend Dr. Khurshid Ahmed greatly appreciated his role "for the organization of the Chambésy Dialogue Consultation (June 1976) on 'Christian Mission and Islamic Dawah,' jointly organized by the World Congress of Churches, Geneva, the Islamic Foundation, Leicester and the Center for Study of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations, Selby College, Birmingham, England. I was co-chair of this consultation, with Dr. David Kerr. Brother al Faruqi's role in this unique consultation was pivotal...His command of the Christian sources was our greatest asset in this interfaith dialogue with the leading lights of the Christian world. His arguments could not be countered, despite sophisticated responses from the other side. The final communiqué of this consultation was a landmark declaration. This declaration bore his imprint on every paragraph. It was the Muslim draft, prepared mainly by brother al Faruqi, that was accepted as the basis for the final declaration. It was the first time in the global movement of Christian-Muslim dialogue that the Muslim position was presented so effectively and was grudgingly accepted at a joint forum such as that. It is unfortunate that this historic document has not been made the basis for future Christian-Muslims dialogue, with the result that the focus has once again moved from the real issues and concerns of the two faith communities to the sterile world of theological sophistry and ecumenical courtesy." (Ahmed, 2012, p. 20-27)

In the view of Anwar Ibrahim, "Thus unshackled, he took the dialogue to a universal level at a time when the term 'globalization' was not even coined yet. By being able to bring together the discourse of the three Abrahamic faiths, al Faruqi's efforts thus represented a tour *de force* and became the precursor to the systematic engagement among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in

discourses which we now take for granted as being part and parcel of civilizational dialogue.” (Ibrahim, 2012, p. 30-32).

### Christian Muslim Dialogue

Al Faruqi’s work in his trialogue can be seen mostly on Islam and Christianity. Jane I Smith says, “He was also one of the very few Muslims who engaged in a thorough study of Christian theology and ethics. As the title of al Faruqi’s pioneering work Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths indicates, he was one of the first to advocate the three-way conversation among Muslim, Christians, and Jews. His untimely death in 1986 has been deeply regretted by his many Christian friends as well as the American Muslim community as a whole. One of his long-standing projects was to discover the real Christianity unburdened by the influence of Greek thought and other aberrations, as well as to defend the truth of Islam against the distortions and prejudices through which Christians have always tended to view his faith. Rapprochement between the religions, he insisted, is possible despite these historical aberrations.” (Smith, 2007, p. 125)

### Conclusion

Triologue as the dialogue among the followers of three major world religions is a prominent area in the field of dialogue. It has a significant place in the views and efforts of Swidler and al Faruqi who themselves belong to the Abrahamic faiths. They went through deep analysis and provided practical solutions in this regard. Their work on trialogue can be seen on two levels; first is their analysis to highlight the need for and importance of trialogue by suggesting layouts to make it effective. Second is their participation in the implementation of those layouts. Swidler in his analysis emphasized on the need of trialogue basing it on the commonalities between the three religions and he focused on the role their followers can play as most of the world’s population. He stressed on Christians to acknowledge the original message and history of Judaism and Islam and vice versa to build mutual respect through dialogue. Al Faruqi in his analysis explained Islam’s close relation and respect for Judaism and Christianity. He considered the contemporary efforts for trialogue insufficient and emphasized to conduct serious dialogues. He criticized on Christian mission and emphasized to replace it with dialogue. Swidler and al Faruqi played a vital role by initiating and participating in trialogue meetings to clarify misunderstandings among the Abrahamic faiths and to bring them close to each other.

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ACW (A Common Word between Us and You) is an open letter from Muslim Scholars and Intellectuals almost from all major denominations and schools of thought to the Pope Benedict XVI and other Christian authorities sent in 2006 as a response to the pope’s lecture about faith and reason which showed criticism on some of the teachings of Islam. Expanded this response as the message of Islam in 2007 the Muslim Scholars not only clarified the true teachings of Islam but also provided the basis for future dialogue between Islam and Christianity which is highly appreciated by Christian and Muslim World. “Introduction to A Common Word Between Us and You | A Common ...” accessed May 12, 2019 <https://www.acommonword.com/introduction-to-a-common-word-between-us-and-you/>

King Abdullah and Pope Benedict xvi met in 2007 for mutual dialogue. Later on dialogue institute has been founded and after a seven years period of discussions its mandate has been decided to foster dialogue and peaceful cooperation among the followers of different faiths. It is organized by three governments; kingdom of Saudi Arabia, kingdom of Austria and kingdom of Paris. Its board of directors consists of the members from different religions of the world. [The International Dialogue Centre \(KAICIID\) https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are](https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are)

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