

**TOWARD A POLITICAL DEFINITION OF RELIGION  
(EXPLORING AVICENNA'S DOCTRINE OF PROPHETHOOD  
POLITICS)**

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**P**olitical science seems rather unfamiliar with religions—as indicated by statistics at the centennial edition of *American Political Science Review* (2006) that religions-related topics constitute less than 2%. Nothing is surprising, therefore, that it is the least developed in theorising religious phenomena compared to other social sciences.

There are three major approaches to religions popular among political scientists—i.e. primordial (religion as identities), instrumental (religions as capitals), and constructive (religions as meanings)—which, unfortunately, are adopted or at least adapted, from other disciplines: sociology, economics, and phenomenology, respectively.

The worst is, political science has no established—let alone agreed—definition of religions. One major obstacle in building such indigenous theory of religions—as were the case in other disciplines—is that it must be drawn from within the so called “political phenomena”: i.e. power competition. In addition to the negative image of religions left behind by European social sciences, there seemed no religious phenomena in the last century inspiring/challenging enough to attract scholars to construct theories. However, cruising the 21<sup>st</sup> century dubbed by many as an era of religious revivalism, political science is in dire need for an indigeneous theory of religion.

Nevertheless, stretching the horizon into Islamic golden Age, there is one potential candidate by which political scientists may construct a political definition of religion—as a corner stone to build political theory of religions—in Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 981-1037) doctrine of religion as Prophetic Legislation (الصناعة الشرعية). Following Ibnu Sina’s doctrine, a political definition of religion will be: (i) *A Mechanism of Domination*; (ii) *By Authoritative and Powerfull Agent over The Masses*; (iii) *Through Legislation of Practical Knowledge Drilled through Repetitive Symbolic Acts*; (iv) *Devised with Ethical and Legal System of Incentives*; (v) *To Create Internal Sense of Existential Certainty and External Public Order*

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of writers predicted that the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be a century of the return of religions in public lives. Peter L. Berger, for example, revised his own theoretical statements with regard to the development of religion and secularism in modern society. During 1950s and 1960s Berger played substantial roles in endorsing secularization thesis, through his promotion of Weber's logic of sociological rationalization in which society gradually replace religious-based rationality with one based on science, and Schutz sociological phenomenology on the emergence of plural *Lifeworlds* and the gradual domination of secular *lifeworlds* over religious ones. Later on he confessed that he was committed a theoretical fallacy and confirmed that human societies—especially outside Western Europe—are as religious, or even more so, than ever.<sup>1</sup> A similar case was also made by French political sociologist Gilles Kepel who use an interestingly cynical term “the revenge of God” to designate the resurgence of religiosity among Jews, Christians and Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Samuel Huntington put forward a more provocative predication,<sup>3</sup> namely that not only will religions resurge to public but they also will be in conflict with each-other and seriously affect public lives.<sup>4</sup>

At the moment this was a serious prediction, for several reasons. Firstly, among academicians and especially among social scientists religion as already suffered from irrecoverable stigma of social and cultural backwardness. From the social Darwinism of Spencer and Comte,<sup>5</sup> to historical historicism of Karl Marx,<sup>6</sup> to Psychological

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger, (ed.), 1999. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Also, Steve Bruce, 2001. “The Curious Case of Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularization,” in Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas, David Martin. *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, London: Rutledge.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Kepel, 1983. *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Huntington, 1993. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Other group of writers known as the “New Age” also claimed such statements, but in this case it was more of statements of hopes and believes rather that scientifically calculated predictions.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that social sciences emerge from the observation on the decline of religions in public live in context of Europe industrial revolution. George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky (ed), 2011. *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorist Vol. 1: Classical Social theorists*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, Chapter 2 (Augusto Comte), Chapter 6 (Herbert Spencer)

<sup>6</sup> Although conventional readings on Marx will easily capture his negative outlook on the issue, there are writers who argues that Marx was in fact played comparable, if not

Analyticism of Sigmund Freud,<sup>7</sup> religions had been perceived with prejudice as source of human individual and social negatives. Even the more sympathetic scholars such as Durkheim and Weber believed that religions are benign social reality, still that there it is derivatives from other social factors—solidarity for Durkheim and ethic for Weber. Thus predicting the revival of religious phenomena would meant predicted the reverse of social progress or the gross mistakes of social sciences.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, among policy makers<sup>9</sup> and social activists as well,<sup>10</sup> the normative social progress was in a secular term—and recognized religions as a pseudo, derivative, reality. They, therefore, treated religions as valid rights with empty substance. For the former, the politics and the economy should be based upon measurable indicators—even though they recognize the cultural dimensions of development in terms of how people perceive and evaluate developments and public policies. For the latter, similarly, they recognized the religious dimension of democracy, human rights, gender equality, as well as environmental protection, but religion play no substantial part in the advancement of those ideals.

When the century eventually came, the prediction that religions will burst into public sphere was true, but not so much true. It is true that religions would influence public discourse, from political campaigns, policy issues, business investment, even international relations such as military invasions,<sup>11</sup> and refugee-related issues; however religions that now came play the game are not peaceful and tolerant spiritual attitudes but fanatical and political mobilisations.

Started from the eve of the century in Balkans, 9/11 terror attacks, the event has been spiralled down into Afghan and Iraq wars, followed up by Arab Spring and the emergence of ISIL and current refugee crisis that spilled into Europe. This has been accompanied by other violent events under religious names in various parts of the globe. In the non-violent forms, religions also affect public opinions, political mobilisations as well as policymaking.<sup>12</sup>

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equal, with the prophets in Jewish history, to mobilize public sentiments against social and political injustices, and thus he was actually not so hostile to religion, but rather to the Church. See, John Raines, 2002. *Marx on Religion*, NY: Temple University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Totem and Taboo.

<sup>8</sup> Time magazine, 1966 issued a provocative edition asking affirmative question on the Death of God.

<sup>9</sup> Religion and the missing dimensions of statecraft\_

<sup>10</sup> Religions and human rights\_

<sup>11</sup> Denied but true, exist: Afghan, Yemen

<sup>12</sup> Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart, 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religiona Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ibid, 2006. "God, Guns, and Gays:

In short, religions have now been part of public, thus political, issues. Growing numbers of studies and analyses have been published especially in relevant academic disciplines: i.e, political science. Unfortunately, however, political science seemed unfamiliar with religious phenomena. A surprising findings have been put forward showing how it so. First, an article appeared in centennial edition of the *American Political Science Review* (APSA) shows how inattentive the journal in its first century was toward religious issues. Using title search to the whole century editions, only 35 articles are containing words referring to religions—which means one article in every three years; and out of them only 21 discussed religious issues—which means one article in four plus years!<sup>13</sup> Another surveying article confirmed the same situation with regard to other major political journals. Taking up twenty top ranking political science journals that contain in total 7,245 articles, it found only 184 articles dealing with religions—2,54% of the total articles. Further analysis shows that out of these, only 97 articles discuss religions as the main issue—which means only 134% of the total publications.<sup>14</sup>

Closer observation reveals more serious issues. Political science is not only unfamiliar with, and inattentive to, religious issues, but it also do not have an in-built theory of religion. Or perhaps it is because of it. While more political scientists have written topics on religious issues, so far they always rely on theories from other academic disciplines. There are three theories popular among political scientists when dealing with religions: (a) essentialist or primordialist which treat religions as collective identities; (b) instrumentalist perspective that treats religion as capital for pragmatic interests; and (c) constructivists which perceive religion as perspectives for meanings making.<sup>15</sup> These perspectives are in fact adopted—or at least adapted—from sociology/anthropology, economics, and phenomenology/post structuralism respectively. The *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (2006), which excluded

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Supply and Demand of Religions in the US and Western Europe,” *Public Policy Research*, Januari (pp. 223-233)

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Wald, Clyde Wilcox, 2006. “Getting Religion: Has Political Science Rediscovered Faith Factor?,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4. Pp. 523-529.

<sup>14</sup> Sephen Kettel, 2012. “Has Political Science Ignored Religions?” University of Warwick Repository File (<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>) retrieved 16.09.2015

<sup>15</sup> Sabina Stein, 2011. “Competing Political Science Perspective on The Role of Religion in Conflict,” *Politobis*, No. 52-2 (pp. 21-27)

political science from nine approaches it enlisted, blatantly shows the complete absence of theorising on religion in political science.<sup>16</sup>

Even worse, political science has no definition of “religion”, thus has no conceptual apparatus to differentiate it from other phenomena, as well as unable to take independent position in the existing constellation of religious studies. This become unfortunate bot for political scientists and religious studies as well, because religions are now seemed hanging in a gulf no one can reach. Religious politics is an island both political scientists and scholars of religious studies are not familiar with.

It is therefore urgent—and not just interesting—for political science to have its own in-built theories of religions. For such a purpose, this article propose a stepping stone by formulating political definition of religion. This definition will serves two objectives: on the one hand, it will help political scientists in particular, and social scientists in general, to interpret religious phenomena from political—i.e. power competitions and managements—perspectives. On the other hand, it will also beneficial for scholars of religious studies to come to term with complex and complicated dynamic intermingle between religions and politics—since conventional theories of religions tend to be static, which one-dimensional assumption both of institutions and actors behaviours.

In the following sections, this article will firstly explores the deficiencies of existing definitions of religions in explaining current phenomena of intersection between religions and politics. Secondly, it will dig up relevant theories from unlikely place, namely the Golden Age of Islam in the philosophical doctrine of Ibnu Sina, better known as Avicenna in the West, on religion as “Prophethood Politics”. Lastly it will formulate Ibnu Sina’s doctrine into political definition of religion, utilising method of “Explication” as formulated by neo-positivist philosopher Rudolph Carnap.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Existing Definitions And Its Deficiencies**

In a broader outlook, there are at least three dominant scientific approaches to the phenomena of religions and religiosity, each with its own distinct approaches, theories, and methods. It is important to note at this point that, although the phenomena human religions have been existed since prehistory, the idea of religion as a unified framework, differentiable from one another in a more or less parallel ways, is a modern invention. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in his classic piece notes that

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<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Segal, 2006. *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

in the Western world the religion that denote Christianity was only started at 17<sup>th</sup> century. Previously, the term religion refers to interpretation of denominational groups, rather than the sum of them.<sup>17</sup> This also applicable to the case of Islam, in which the religion had been referred to with different terms with different connotations in different periods.<sup>18</sup> It means that studying religions, just like other studies on human subjects, is never merely descriptive but rather always involve interpretations, construction, and reconstructions. Which means that there is no “rights or wrong” in explaining religious phenomena, but only more or less satisfactory with regards to the questions at hands. It applies to the following approaches.

*Firstly*, speculative approach of theology and philosophy. The term speculative refers to the way theology and philosophy explore religious phenomena, by using logic and metaphysics as the main reference. They discuss not the empirical reality of people’s religious lives, but rather the idea of religions as it is understood by the people. Their questions are not pertaining to the existence or non-existence of such and such religious realities. Rather, they ask whether such and such idea of religious reality conceivable to logical scrutiny. Since their subjects are not empirical realities, the only possible way to assess the validity of religious statements, claims or reports are through logical scrutiny. And since their main methodological apparatus are logic, what they can answer are nor empirical realities. Theology and philosophy have equally speculative approach. What differentiate the two is, theology start with affirming certain religious statements, while philosophy start with questioning them.<sup>19</sup>

*Second*, observational approaches of social sciences and humanities. These academic disciplines emerges as an endeavour to study human realities which are constructive in nature—subjective, cognitive, relational—and present them into scientific body of knowledge complete with standardized theories and methods—i.e. observable, communicable, testable. Since proponents of these sciences reject speculative approaches, consequently they also reject have methodological apparatus to deal with non-empirical realities. However,

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<sup>17</sup> W. C. Smith, 1964. *The Meaning and End of Religions*, New York: Mentor Books, Chapter 1.

<sup>18</sup> In Islamic history, religious knowledge initially known only as Knowledge (*‘ilm*), later on it was called *Fiqh*, and then into *Sharia*. See Fazlur Rahman, 1979. *Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 101-103.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Davies, 1993. *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 1. Pp. 1-20. Gareth Jones, 2004. *The Blackwell Companion to Modern theology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

since human realities are in fact non-empirical, the sciences cannot deal with them directly. The only possible way they can grasp human realities are through indirect ways, by observing empirical behaviours as expressions of the non-empirical realities. Sociology, anthropology, and also psychology observe human actions and interactions in order to get to know human intentions, divisions, values, hierarchies, conflicts, and cooperation. What is intriguing is that, since social scientists do not have any mean to validate or invalidate the non-empirical realities, what is certain for them are the observable empirical ones. Thus although in concept they observe empirical reality in order to infer non-empirical ones, what is actually happen is they construct non-empirical realities from whatever empirical observations they manage to do. It exactly in this way that social sciences and humanities study religious phenomena: religion and religiosity are derivative realities constructed from observable empirical behaviours: for Marx religion it is derivative of class conflicts, for Durkheim it is from solidarity, for Weber it is from ethics, for Freud it is from neurosis, while for Jung it is from collective unconsciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Third, experiential approach of the phenomenology of religion. This refers to scientific enterprise initially known in its German term '*Religionswissenschaft*' which literally means 'Science of Religion' but such an English translation never gained currency because of heavy 'natural science' connotation of the English term science. Instead, its English substitute is 'History of Religions', and the discipline's professional association is International Association of the History of Religion (IAHR). Different from what social sciences do, and at some point represent a reaction toward it, founding figures of phenomenology of religion perceived that religions are not derivative, but rather *sui generis*, realities. It is a reality in its own, and not just effects of other realities—personal or collective, conscious or unconscious—as social scientists believe them to be—and therefore it must be dealt directly and indirectly through other phenomena. Proponent of this discipline believe that religious realities consisted of both empirical (symbols, rituals, communal) and non-empirical (concepts, beliefs, experiences). For empirical realities it devises itself with empirical observation, while for non-empirical realities it relies on non-empirical ones that are equal to the reality being observed. In order to study intellectual concept, ones need to have intellectual understanding of religious concept; in order to grasp religious beliefs ones need to have any belief; while in order to

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<sup>20</sup> Grace Davie, 2006. "Sociology of Religion," in Robert A. Segal (ed.), 2006. *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ch. 8, pp. 171-191.

reach religious experiences ones have no other choice other than to have some kind of such experiences. In short, according phenomenology, only religious people can study religions adequately.<sup>21</sup>

The three approaches delineated above represent three different scientific clusters, each with multiple sub-fields and sub-schools with many different theories and methods. Be that as it may, however, they share similar characteristic that—in relevance to the present article—constitute their common deficiency: Static! These definitions of religions depict religious people and their religions in static ways. Firstly, the relations between the people and their religions tend to be one way: religions affect people, and hardly the other way around. Secondly, religious institutions and communities tend to be described in isolation, as if they never interact—and thus mutually affect—with other group or institutions such as the state, market economy, or other religions. Thirdly, the description or evaluation of religiosity tends to be classificatory, in which they assume people and institutions are either religious or secular. There is no indication to perceive that people and institutions can play different roles at the same times with different category of religiosity.

From this point it will soon become clear that such static elaboration of religions and religious phenomena are no longer adequate to come to terms with real world public live where religions are assert increasingly greater effects. Furthermore, contemporary social sciences and humanities—more specifically political science and economics—tend to move into dynamic models in constructing human realities, exemplified by four currently dominant theoretical modelling of Behaviorism, Rational Choice, Neo-Institutionalism, and Game Theory.

There are, for example, two typical cases found in contemporary settings pertaining to the issues of religions in public spaces that conventional, static, mode of interpretation of religion cannot cope. The first, perhaps one of the most popular topics in political science, is the emergence of Islam-based political parties competing in democratic politics. This phenomena is endemic in the last three decades—from FIS of Tunisia in Northern Africa and AKP of Turkey in Western Asia, to Jamaat E-Islami of Pakistan in South Asia, to PKS of Indonesia and PAS of Malaysia in Southeast—and has causes lively as well as combative debates, as weather it represents externalization of Islamic doctrines in

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ryba, 2006. "Phenomenology of Religion," in Robert A. Segal (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Jaques Waardeburg (ed.), 1973. *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religions*, London: Brill. "Introduction".



democratic politics or merely political mobilisation of Islamic sentiments by irreligious political actors for non-religious political objectives?<sup>22</sup>

The conventional interpretations of religion are unable to tackle such an issue, because the questions cannot be answered with description of what constitute religious actions or institutions and what are not, or yes/no qualification of such and such actions and institutions. In this point Olivier Roy provides sharp hint, that this issue can only be answer with dynamic modelling of human actions and cross-cutting institutional settings: people can have more than one different positions in more than one different institutions at the same times, thus play more than one different roles at the same times. At this level, in order to explain such a phenomenon ones need a “scale” by which ones convert different values of actions and institutions, and to measure proportional combinations of values in certain case of behaviours or certain institutional settings. Thus, in this way ones can explain certain situation as, for instance in the case of PKS in Indonesia, that at earlier period of its history the party was organisationally more democratic, communally more solid, ideologically more hold stricter interpretation of Islamic teachings. Meanwhile at later period it became organisationally more oligarchic, communally more divergence, and ideologically polarised between the puritans and the pragmatists.<sup>23</sup> The people are the same, the party is the same, but they are constantly oscillating from one position to another.

The second case is found in the context of legal issues, where adjudicators oftentimes face asymmetrically competing claims from conflicting parties with regards to the validity of religious claims. For example, in 1999 the government of China disbanded and banned Falun Gong community, deemed it as a malicious organisation threatening social harmony and disrupting public order. Meanwhile, in respond, the Falun Gong claimed itself as a spiritual community and fraternity seeking for spiritual harmony and communal peacefulness. Meanwhile in many other cases, there have been repeated persecutions carried out by religious communities—commonly the majority—toward another—commonly minority. In this case what the Human Rights Adjudicators are facing is not a conceptual issue that can be solve by consulting to theoretical formulations of what religion is or is not. But rather it is about people safety and wellbeing, in the face of political system with its power to exercise force. In such cases it is impossible to separate, or sometime even to differentiate, religions from force and violence, not only because

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmad-Norma Permata, 2008. *Islamist Party and Democratic Participation: Prosperous Justice Party in Indonesia 1998-2006*, MIAMI Publishing, pp. 1-10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 289-297.

religions may become both the victim and the culprit, but also because sometimes religions is inseparable and undifferentiated from politics.<sup>24</sup>

### **Avicenna's Doctrine Of Religion As Prophethood Politics**

But why, one may ask, political science so negligence to religious phenomena? Three factors have been hypothesised: firstly, disciplinary origin. Different from European social sciences such as sociology and psychology that emerge amid chaotic transition from traditional to modern society that involve transformations—and hence dilemmas and conflicts—both physical and value systems, political science found its birthplace in post-revolutionary America with its desperate need to invent effective and efficient governance systems. It dealt more with institutional mechanism of political behaviours than anything related to traditions and value systems. Hence, religion was not an issue. Secondly, social backgrounds of political scientists and policy makers which indicate low level of religiosity and religious attachment among social scientists. Surveys by Carnegie in 1969, 1975, 1984 show that in 1969 30% of political scientists being surveyed reported they did not have religious attachment; while in 1984 only 6% reported being religious, while 53% of them are indifferent or even hostile to religion. Lastly, the problem of measurement. Since the advancement of behavioural revolution in 1950s, political science swiftly moved toward measurement of political preferences and behaviours, and the stuck at a dead end when it came to measuring religions due to its complex expressions and complicated linkage with almost every aspect of people's lives.<sup>25</sup>

And why don't political scientists seem to do something about this? As a matter of fact, there are a number of political scientists who tried to theorising religious phenomena. However, the three factors put forward above seriously hampered their efforts. Nevertheless, there is one name worth further explanation with regard to this issue, by the name of Samuel Huntington. He holds a special place not only because he was among scholars who predicted the revival of religions in public space, and accurately characterized the revival as combative, but rather because he formulate a definition of religion and theorises its nature and characteristics. For him religion is the core of civilization—a complex pattern that encompass values, collectiveness, advancement, traditions,

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<sup>24</sup> T. Jeremy Gunn, 2002. "The Complexity of Religion and the Definition of Religion in International Law," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Vol 16. pp. 189-116

<sup>25</sup> See Wald and Wilcox, 2006. pp. 525-527.

and polity that differentiate a group of people from another in fundamental ways.<sup>26</sup>

The problem with Huntington, that make him infamous as much as he is famous, was unfortunate combination of constructive description and evolutionary narratives of civilizations. For the former he argues that civilizations—i.e. religions—are fundamental and encompassing in structuring people's identity and behaviours. Ones may have mixed ethnicity, or double nationalities, or command multiple languages, but they can only have one religion. Thus encounters between civilisations—i.e. between religions—tend to be rivalry or combative. For the latter, he maintains that the fiercest possible civilizational encounters will be between the most archaic and the most advance—which are represented by Islam and Christianity respectively. This thesis, when seen as referring to the second point first, looks like a descriptive evaluation of civilisations and religions, whereas a closer inspection will show that it actually start by referring to the first point, and it is thus a constructive projection.

In the perspective of current article Huntington definition of religion appears like a “misleading-link”, in which it represent a step forward toward the development of dynamic theoretical modelling of religion. However, due to its incompatible assumptions between metaphysical and observational dimensions, and confusing structures between description and construction of religions and religious relations, it ended up describing politicking of religions instead of formulating political interpretation of religion.

This article will do the latter. A definition, by definition, is characterisation of something by focusing on its distinctive feature(s) that constitute its core identity as well as differentiate it from other thing.<sup>27</sup> Definition can be formulated from different angles, thus there can be several definitions for something at the same time: such as dictionary definition which focus on linguistic perspective, and terminological definition which focus on certain aspect of the object in question following certain perspective. It is the latter type of definition that this article will accomplish. Furthermore, there are different methods by which ones formulate a definition: building from scratch, or revising existing ones, or combining several ones into a new, more comprehensive, definition, etc. this article will follow the last example by combining static-descriptive definition of religion from social conventional approaches delineated in the previous paragraphs with

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Huntington, 1997. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon Chuster, pp. 40-44.

<sup>27</sup> reference

dynamic-speculative definition from Muslim philosopher from Islamic Golden Age, Ibnu Sina or Avicenna (980-1037).

Before we proceed into formulating the definition it is natural to introduce briefly who is Ibnu Sina and what is his concept of religion. His full name is Abu Ali Hussein Ibnu Sina, born in Bukhara northern Persia to a local aristocrat family. His father was a local chieftain, who resigned his position and moved to neighbouring region when his kingdom conquered by its rival and he refused to join the conqueror. Since then, Ibnu Sina live a moving life from one small kingdom to another, and curiously undermined several opportunity and invitation to join greater kingdom, or to move to Baghdad the capital of Islamic world. Officially he work as the palace physician, but he also take the position as intelligentsia by compiling and writing various branches of knowledge—from theology and philosophy, to astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology and medicine, to linguistic, poetry and Qur’anic exegesis. In the history of Islamic thoughts and philosophy, Ibnu Sina holds a highest position with very few equals, and become a major source of both inspirations and controversies for latter generations.<sup>28</sup>

Older accounts on Ibnu Sina in the history of Islamic philosophical books described him as a pseudo Neo-Platonian who mixed legacies of Hellenistic philosophy, especially those of Aristotle and Plotinus, arbitrarily—due to incomplete and unstructured translations of Greek manuscripts into Arabic. Recent studies, however, have uncovered new facts and new readings that gradually shape a new and significantly different picture of Ibnu Sina. Firstly, he was a committed Aristotelian and consistently follow peripatetic methods. Secondly, he built his own comprehensive peripatetic system, to a degree that after him those who read Ibnu Sina did not need to read Greek translations anymore. Thirdly, along with recent increasing publications on Maturidi theological school, it become more apparent that Ibnu Sina also made fundamental contribution to Islamic theology through his doctrine of God as a necessary being that become standard theological terminology in later period. Lastly, Ibnu Sina formulated the most widely followed classification of human knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

It is from his last contribution this article find a foundation. Ibnu Sina classify knowledge into two major groups: ‘theoretical knowledge’—which consist of Medicine (which discusses the structure and conditions of living beings), Physics (which discusses features and motions of physical objects), Metaphysics (which discusses essence and

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<sup>28</sup> David Reisman (ed.), 2004. *Before and After Avicenna*, Leiden: Brill

<sup>29</sup> Dimitri Gutas, 2014. *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical Works*, Leiden: Brill.

substance of things), and Theology (which discusses realities of spiritual beings); and ‘practical knowledge’—which consist of Ethics (management of individual behaviour), Economics (management of household wellbeing), Politics (management of public order), and Prophetic Legislation (a special knowledge that combine the three practical knowledge but only a Prophet can teach). The last category of knowledge, for Ibnu Sina, is needed because on the one hand in real life people live the three practical knowledge as one and unified experience, whereas on the other hand the three branches of knowledge deal with different levels of human behaviours that methodologically cannot be mixed with each other. There is a need for a breakthrough.<sup>30</sup>

Ibnu Sina found the solution in the teaching of prophets. In Ibnu Sina’s cosmological theology, there are four levels of human souls with regard to its capacity to comprehend the essence of reality. The lowest is the soul of laymen, who can only comprehend reality as they are perceptible to human senses; the second is the soul of practical men [rulers and aristocrats] who can master up to the highest level of practical knowledge but lack the capacity of theoretical one; the third is the soul of philosophers, who can master theoretical knowledge up to the highest level but lack the capacity of practical ones; the last is the soul of the prophet, who can master both theoretical and practical knowledge at the highest levels. It is due to this very special capacity of the prophets that they can formulate a special doctrines that can teach laymen to master practical knowledge—i.e. to attain personal ethical virtues, well-managed family life, and well-organised public order—without going through painstaking of conceptual and technical learnings.

Following Ibnu Sina’s explanation, the special method the prophet use to indirectly teach practical knowledge to the laymen was by instructing them to perform symbolic acts, i.e. rituals, in strictly repetitive manner, combine with moral and legal incentives, reward and punishment, for those who obey and disobey. In a reflective manner Ibnu Sina conclude his elaboration on the Prophetic Legislation by implying that from the perspective of the laymen, the teaching of the prophet—definitely this refers to religion—is a path to attain happy worldly lives, personally as well as communal, and peaceful spiritual lives. Meanwhile from the perspective of the prophet, the teaching represent a capacity to exercise authority and power to make the laymen behave in orderly

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manner—through persuasion, or promise of reward and threat of punishment.<sup>31</sup>

From the previous elaboration on Ibnu Sina's doctrine of Prophetic Legislation, it is clear that religion is in fact—to play with Clifford Geertz iconic vocabulary—a political system, by which an authoritative prophet exercise his power to regulate people's behaviours to create worldly orders, by offering psychological contentment and spiritual attainments, accompanied by ethical and legal system of reward and punishment.

### **Political Definition Of Religion: An Explication**

Now it is the time to formulate a political definition of religion, based on what has been explains in the previous pages. There are two groups of definition elaborated so far, the first is a comprehensive but static conventional definition of religion from speculative, empirical, and experiential approaches; and dynamic approaches yet speculative approach to religion as a political system from Ibnu Sina. In itself, each of these approaches is inadequate to deal with contemporary real-world phenomena of linkage between religions and public affairs. In a join force, however, by combining the comprehensive capacity of conventional definition and dynamic character of definition of religion from Ibnu Sina, an ideal definition of religion from political perspective, that contain both comprehensiveness of understanding religious realities and the capacity to capture dynamic natures of contemporary public lives.

This can be done following methodological procedure of 'explication' formulated by ex-member of Vienna Circle Rudolph Carnap. According to him, explication is a scientific procedure to improve a simple, inexact, and subjective-based definition (he calls it *explicandum*) on certain topic into more exact, objective-based definition (he calls it *explicatum*). An improved definition, or *explicatum* in Carnap term, must fulfil four criteria: first, it must be equal to the old concept, as it is an improvement and not a new creation; second, it must have exact capacity based on objective criteria; third, it must be fruitful in terms of capacity to solve problems at hand; fourth, it must be simple or parsimonious, in which the previous advantages do not cost unnecessary complications. Furthermore, Carnap put forward three level of conceptual improvement, from the simplest (classificatory: yes or no),

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<sup>31</sup> M. Cuneyt Kaya, "Prophetic Legislation: Avicenna's View of Practical Philosophy", in Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar, Bilal Bas (ed.), 2013. *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epsitemology*, Cambridge: Scholars Publishing.

intermediate (comparative: with reference but no criteria), advance (quantitative: with objective criteria).<sup>32</sup>

He gives example of the concept of 'warm' which is a simple, classificatory, and at the same time inaccurate way to describe the situation in a room. It is because the term refers to subjective evaluations, and thus prone to be disrupted by other subjective factors. For instance, if a person feels not well he may experience the same room as warmer or cooler. A better way to describe the situation is by comparing the warmth of the room with other rooms, but still contains weakness as it would be difficult to tell how different they are from each other. Finally, the ideal way of describing the situation is by creating a criterion, in this case the concept of temperature, by which people can communicate the situation of the room, and compare the difference of warmth between rooms, in exact manner without being distracted by his subjective conditions or subjective experience with other rooms.<sup>33</sup>

Following Carnap procedure of explication, Ibnu Sina's doctrine of religion as Prophetic Politics will be super-imposed on the conventional definitions in order to create a new and better definition. From the previous elaboration, Ibnu Sina's doctrine of religion can be constructed as follow:

*Religion is (i) a system of domination, (ii) by authoritative agent over the masses, (iii) through ritualistic acts, (iii) to achieve worldly happiness and afterword spiritual attainment, (iv) endowed with ethical and legal incentives, (iii) to create public orders.*

To see weather this definition represent an explication, a conceptual refinement, it is need to be checked with Carnap four criteria:

1. Equality: This definition is design to improve the old definition of religion from speculative approach of philosophy and theology, observational approach of social sciences and humanities, and experiential approach of phenomenology of religion. In this respect, the current definition can level the old in its comprehensiveness in covering the multi-facets of religion:
  - a. It has *speculative* element, with regards to spiritual attainment in afterlife.
  - b. It has *observational* elements with regard to:
    - i. System of domination

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<sup>32</sup> Rudolp Carnap, 1962. *The Logical Foundation of Probability*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp 3-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp 8-15.

- ii. Authority
    - iii. Ritual and symbolic acts
    - iv. Ethical and legal incentives
    - v. Public order
  - c. It has *experiential* element of happiness
2. Exact indicator: All component in the new definition can be formulated in term of variable, so that it can be describe using scales and indicators:
    - a. Domination and Authority, can be explain using Weberian term of authority (*Herrschaft*) in which an agent can dominate the masses using persuasion, and thus indicate a genuineness of the prophetic claims; or in term of force (*Macht*) in which the agent need to apply force or even violence to dominate the masses, that may indicate it pseudo religion character—such as Nazism, Communism, etc.
    - b. Ritual, can be ascertain using ethnological understanding to weather an act has direct has instrumental function or not. Rituals do not have such functions, or do not have the directly.
    - c. Worldly happiness, can be assessed nowadays using findings of happiness surveys economists regularly carry out, both at international and national levels.
    - d. Spiritual Attainment, can also be assessed using a combination of philosophical and experiential ethnographic inquiries.
    - e. Ethical and legal incentives: ethical system of incentives can be discerned as to whether there are informal sanctions imposed by community (ethical) or imposed by the state (legal).
    - f. Public order: This point can be assessed using various indicators that measure up both actual capacity of public order such as political and economic stability, and its risk toward disorder in terms of vertical and horizontal fragmentation and conflict.
  3. Fruitfulness: For the purpose of this article, it will be assessed to what extent the new theory can handle two problems of the intertwined between religions and public lives: firstly, the need for dynamic modelling of theory of religion that include a depiction of religious actors played different—religious or non-religious—roles at the same time; and secondly the intersection of religions with other institutions such as the State, Market, Society, that involve possible asymmetrical claim over religions and religiosity.



- a. For the former, the definition provides a dynamic modelling of religious actors, in which a prophetic agent can or cannot dominate the mass—which means there are possible for rivalries between more than one prophetic actors with different supporting institutions, or conflict between prophetic actors and the masses which can also involve vertical conflicts of supporting institutions such as communal vs. political.
  - b. For the latter, the last point above—possible conflict that involve supporting institutions—represent a real-world approach of the new definition toward religious realities: what matters with regard to religions and religiosity is not only which one is valid, but also which claim is more powerful, which can exercise force and violence that may threaten people wellbeing and safety.
4. Parsimony: The new definition presents itself clearly in parsimonious fashion, in term that it follows theoretical assumptions of contemporary political and social sciences, with regard the dynamic interplay between actors, between institutions, and between actors and institutions. Actors are assumed to have certain set of properties—such as rationality, interests, reflexivity, etc. In short, it is not more complicated than the existing models.

## CONCLUSION

Religion has become one of the major players in contemporary politics, both at global and domestic, both formal and informal. The complexity and complication of intermingle between religions and public affairs have created new conceptual challenges the existing definitions of religion cannot handle with. It is unfortunate however that political science, the academic discipline that claims authority over political realities, so negligence and inattentive toward religions and religious phenomena, to an extent that it has no proper built-in political theory of religion, or worse it lack proper political definition of religion.

This article set a task to itself in formulating a political definition of religion, as a stepping stone toward fuller political interpretation and theorising of religions. It does so by combining the existing conventional definitions of religions that is comprehensive but static, with Muslim Philosopher of Classical era Ibnu Sina's doctrin of religion that is speculative yet have component of dynamic modelling, following methodological procedure of "explication" from neo-positivist philosopher Rudolph Carnap. The result is a new definition of religion that can preserve the advantages of old approaches while adding advantages of dynamic character of Ibnu Sina definition.

Finally, for the writer this article represent a personal journey to build a bridge to overcome narrow but deep strait separated religious studies from political science. It takes more than 25 years of temporal dwelling in academic studies of religions and political science, and exploration over vast theoretical landscape from theology, philosophy, social sciences and humanities, and also political science and economics—especially conceptual modelling of human behaviours from Behaviorism, Neo-Institutionalism, and Game Theory. In itself, this article represents intellectual and spiritual journey that involve various rituals and system of incentives, as well as bring personal happiness!