

## **Exploring Hans Küng's Paradigm Theory for Understanding Religion: An Islamic Perspective**

Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin

Department of Akidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic Studies,  
Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.  
khairulnaim@um.edu.my

<https://doi.org/10.22452/usuluddin.vol51no5>

### ***Abstract***

*This article discusses the paradigm theory and its application to understanding religion, with a focus on the perspective of Islam. Hans Küng's paradigm theory is examined, which involves analyzing religious paradigms and their changes to understand religion comprehensively. The article explains that Küng's approach involves examining several aspects of religion, such as its history, development, current situation, and predictions or assumptions about its future based on its history and current situation. However, the article also highlights some questions regarding the methodology used by Küng to identify the stages of the paradigm and the shifts that occur. Additionally, the article notes that understanding religion based on paradigm theory is not sufficient to adequately describe the identity of a religion. Overall, this article sheds light on the strengths and limitations of using paradigm theory to understand religion, particularly from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of Islam requires sensitivity to its unique theological and textual contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Hans Küng, paradigm theory, religion, Islamic perspective.*

### **Introduction**

The paradigm theory, a shift theory first introduced by Thomas S. Kuhn for natural science, has been proposed by some scholars, such as Hans Küng, to be applied in other fields, including the study of religion and society. This means that the theory, originally developed for natural science, has been adapted for use in the study of religion with some modifications. Supporters of religious paradigm theory believe that using this theory can enhance a more comprehensive understanding of the development of religion. Before delving further into the religious paradigm theory, it is essential to first understand the conceptual aspect of the theory as presented by Kuhn.

### **A Discourse on Kuhn's Paradigm Theory**

According to Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a paradigm is defined as a set of shared beliefs and practices that are accepted by members of a scientific community. It serves as a standard or norm that regulates, shapes, and ensures the process of problem-solving in science. Science that emerges from this paradigm framework is considered “normal” science, and scientists who adopt the same paradigm tend to hold similar perspectives. A concept or theory becomes widely accepted as “normal” only after going through a prolonged period of development and maturity.<sup>1</sup>

A change in paradigm happens when there is an alteration in fundamental beliefs or a modification in an existing scientific theory. It is considered a scientific revolution that takes place when members of the scientific community start to doubt the ‘perfection’ of the current paradigm. When they adopt new techniques, values, and systems, a shift towards a new paradigm happens. This is considered a revolution because it leads to a complete paradigm shift.

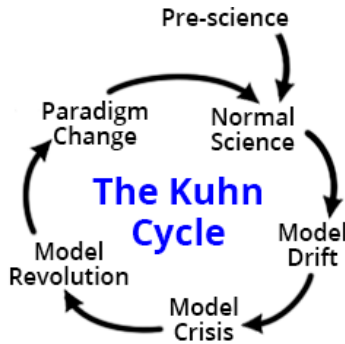
A crisis is necessary to ensure that science continues to progress and avoid stagnation. Paradigms that have undergone changes and are no longer used include the Ptolemaic paradigm, which held that the Earth is the center of the universe; the Copernican paradigm, which placed the Sun at the center of the universe; and the Newtonian paradigm, which saw the universe as governed by Newton’s laws of motion.<sup>2</sup> In short, the evolution and replacement of paradigms can be understood as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 23 & 43-50.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, *The Structure*, 23 & 43-50.

Pre-science – normal science – crisis – revolution – paradigm change-new normal science – new crisis<sup>3</sup>



Hans Küng introduced the idea of paradigm analysis for the study of religion through his books *Does God Exist?: The Problem of God in the Modern World* (1978) and *Theology for the Third Millennium* (1987), 16 years after Thomas Kuhn's book. He expanded on this concept in his book *Global Responsibility* (1991), where he first introduced the theme of 'global ethic' as part of the strategies for achieving inter-religious peace using paradigm analysis. According to Küng, a thorough understanding of religion is necessary for inter-religious peace, and paradigm analysis is an effective tool to understand human beliefs. He stated: "Anyone who want to serve peace cannot avoid a paradigm analysis".<sup>4</sup>

According to him, one of the primary causes of conflicts between followers of different religions and even within a single religion is the coexistence of old and new paradigms formed by the interaction of religion with current developments. Divergence in handling change leads to conflict. Thus, analyzing paradigms is crucial for followers to understand their shared beliefs and the issues that can be resolved collectively. However, the question remains on how it can be implemented to attain the aforementioned objectives. The following discussion will delve into the definition

<sup>3</sup> "The Kuhn Cycle", *thwink.org*, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/KuhnCycle.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. John Bowden (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 126.

and methodology of religious paradigms, the differences between paradigms and religions, their features, and perspectives on post-modern paradigms as the paradigms of each religion.

### **Religious Paradigm Theory: Its Definition and Methodology**

Küng believes that every religion goes through its own shift in paradigm. He argues that no religion is immune to accepting these changes. He says: “For on the one hand, there can be no religion without a paradigm.” In accordance with that, Küng defines a paradigm as follows: “With paradigm we mean (following the definition taken over from Thomas S. Kuhn and constantly used in this book) a total constellation: the conscious-unconscious ‘total constellation of convictions, values, and patterns of behaviour’ that obviously shape religion but not just religion.”<sup>5</sup>

In this context, Küng adopts the definition of a paradigm introduced by Kuhn, as a holistic set of beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior that are either consciously or unconsciously held by the followers of a particular religion and that shape the religion and goes beyond it, influencing other areas such as the economy, law, politics, science, culture, and others. Consequently, the paradigm in question here is a large-scale and all-encompassing paradigm referred to as macroparadigms, and it does not include minor changes in perspectives (micro or mesoparadigms). Furthermore, it is not only a religious paradigm, but also a societal one, as it encompasses society as a whole. However, religion is a key determinant in the creation of such a paradigm.

In terms of methodology, paradigm analysis means an effort to analyze the overall constellation within a religion, how it is formed, developed into maturity, and then fades, stiffens, or becomes ‘fossilized’. It also seeks to explain how the ‘fossilized’ paradigm continues to persist in certain periods even though it is considered a tradition. The use of the word fossil for old paradigms is because they are still adhered to by some followers but are no longer developing.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, analyzing paradigms also means examining the rise of new paradigms and identifying the potential

---

<sup>5</sup> Küng, Hans. *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 223.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2007), xxvii.

for new perspectives or views within a religion in the future. According to Küng, this theory supports the idea that all religions are constantly and continually undergoing changes, contradicting the commonly held belief among religious followers that the religion they practice remains unchanged.

The following is an example of a paradigm shift that occurred in Christianity. It began with the early Christian apocalyptic paradigm, which was characterized by figures such as Jesus and Paul and the writing of the Gospels in the first century. This then evolved into the early Church Hellenistic paradigm, which saw the integration of Christian teachings with Hellenistic Roman culture from the first century to the seventh century. This was followed by the mediaeval Roman Catholic paradigm in the eleventh century, marked by the rise of scholasticism and the division of the Eastern and Western churches. It then progressed to the reformation Protestant paradigm in the 16th century with the rise of the Christian reformation movement led by figures such as Luther and Calvin. This was followed by the enlightenment-modern paradigm in the 17th and 18th centuries, marked by the emergence of modern philosophy, advancements in natural sciences, and the birth of nation-state theory, which led to the French Revolution. Finally, the most recent paradigm shift is the contemporary ecumenical paradigm (postmodern) that began in the 20th century. These six changes took place over a period of two centuries, from the early days of Jesus' mission until the 20th century.<sup>7</sup>

The change in paradigm in Islam began with the paradigm of the original Islamic community (622-661) which refers to the birth of the first Islamic community and teachings by Prophet Muhammad. It then progressed to the paradigm of the Arab empire during the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) which led to the emergence of empires by the Arab people. Later, it evolved to the classical paradigm of Islam as a world religion that took place during the Abbasid Caliphate until its fall (750-1258) which refers to the birth of various empires in Spain, Egypt and India, as well as the expansion of the Abbasid Empire and the emergence of schools of thought and jurisprudence.<sup>8</sup> It then changed to the paradigm of

---

<sup>7</sup> Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 123 and Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, 582.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, 582.

the ulama and Sufis with the development of the Sufi movement in the Islamic world beginning in the 13th century. From this paradigm, it changed to the modernization paradigm in the 17th-20th centuries with the colonization of the Islamic world by European powers and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The current paradigm is also said to have changed to the contemporary (postmodern) paradigm after World War II, which saw the emergence of various movements such as Arab nationalism, Pan-Islamism, Islamic Reformism, Islamic Traditionalism and others.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, instead of focusing on what is considered 'classical theology' such as the relationship between God and humans in the study of religion, Küng concentrates on analyzing the time and events that occur within each religion. He argues that by using this method, religion can be evaluated holistically by taking into account the historical developments and its context. Furthermore, he argues that previous methods used in religious studies such as text analysis, archaeology, etc. are not sufficient in understanding complex religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Therefore, the study he presents is capable of evaluating a religion as a whole, from the historical developments and impacts of teachings to the structure, patterns of beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and actions of its followers.

### **The Difference between Paradigm and Religion**

According to Küng, there is a clear distinction between paradigms and religion. Religion is like a model that shapes an individual's beliefs and understanding of their worldview. It is also a way of life based on teachings that are absolute and considered the highest truth.<sup>10</sup> From this explanation, religion is not a paradigm but it lives and develops through paradigms that occur through certain stages in history. Religion exists and evolves in each era with different paradigms. Religion is a conscious belief while paradigms are applied in every era, whether someone is aware or unaware that they are adhering to a certain paradigm. Küng gives some analogies to make it easier to understand the difference between them. Religion can be thought of as the content, and the paradigm is the form, religion is also like an image, while the paradigm is its frame, and

---

<sup>9</sup> Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, 584.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, 212.

religion can also be thought of as a text, and the paradigm is its context.

An example of the difference between religion and paradigm can be examined through the concept of conversion. According to Küng, if a Catholic Christian believer is dissatisfied with their beliefs and switches to Protestantism, or if a Protestant sees the benefits of the more universal teachings of Catholicism and changes their adherence to Catholicism, this is called a change in paradigm. Their religion remains Christian, but their paradigm has shifted. However, if a Christian believer changes their beliefs and follows Buddhism, it is not a change in paradigm but a change in religion. Adhering to the teachings of Christianity is understood as following the teachings of Christ, whereas following Buddhism means embracing the teachings of Buddha.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the explanation above, paradigm and religion are different but interdependent. One may follow the same religion but have different paradigms. The doctrine remains the same, only the way of interpreting it might change, in response to changes in the environment. In general, the characteristics of religious paradigms can be summarized as follows:<sup>12</sup>

- a. The process of paradigm development cannot be applied universally to all sectors and disciplines. For instance, the term modern in relation to art, science and religion have different connotations and historical contexts. The change in paradigms in the field of art differs from the change in paradigms in religion. For example, the shift in the Hellenistic paradigm of the church in the first and second centuries did not affect the change in paradigms in art during the same period. Thus, Küng argues that if one wants to study religious paradigms, they must look at the historical background of religion.
- b. The change of paradigms is based on the stages that occur in history, and the interpretation of them is relative. In other words, the process of dividing

---

<sup>11</sup> Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, 212.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, 214-215; Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

paradigm changes and its subjects is under the knowledge and interpretation of the researcher. Therefore, the division may differ between researchers. As is understood, paradigms are related to time and they cannot be described without the aspect of time and historical evaluation. Therefore, according to Kūng, an individual's evaluation of paradigms and their changes is relative because an individual's interpretation of history is also based on their relatively knowledge. Although historical facts and events are permanent and not repeatable, history is always open to interpretation. In this case, researchers need to look at all facts fairly and at the same time not close or deny their own views. In addition, researchers need to select and choose the most agreed-upon facts and historical events to ensure accuracy and validity.

- c. In accordance with Kuhn's perspective on scientific paradigms, changes in religious paradigms also only happen when an idea or movement is fully developed, meaning it has been presented to the general public, accepted by society and forms a normative view. This means that a view that contradicts the existing paradigm will not be able to become a new paradigm if it is still in the stage of idea.
- d. The change from one religious paradigm to another does not erase the previous paradigm. This is unlike in the field of natural sciences, where new paradigms replace and invalidate old ones. In the field of religion, old paradigms can coexist with new ones, and may still be held by some followers even after new paradigms have emerged. For example, traditional Orthodox beliefs that developed in Christianity during the first century still persist and are practiced by some followers today.
- e. Changes in religious paradigms do not necessarily reflect progress for that religion and can sometimes lead to a decline. This is different from science as changes in natural science paradigms indicate a progressive development.



- f. A new paradigm in a religion may eventually be forgotten or ignored over time due to different interpretations. The principles that initially emerged in a paradigm can change significantly, deviating from its original view and no longer representing that paradigm. Additionally, a paradigm shift can also lead to negative changes in a religion, such as becoming more authoritarian, holding narrow views and oppressing followers. Therefore, not all changes in paradigms should be seen as positive developments.

Therefore, based on the explanation above, there is a difference between the scientific paradigms as introduced by Thomas Kuhn and the religious paradigms according to K ung.

Scientific Paradigms	Religious Paradigms
The new paradigm eliminates and negates the old paradigm.	The new paradigm does not erase or replace the previous one, instead it coexists with the new one.
The shift in paradigm guarantees progress and growth in the field of science.	The paradigm shift does not guarantee the ‘progress’ of religion, sometimes it even hinders the development of a religion.
Empirical studies that produce evidence can sustain a paradigm, which in turn justifies its continued relevance.	The presence of institutions within a religion can serve as a stronghold in preserving a paradigm from extinction.
As long as there is no evidence that contradicts its view, a paradigm will remain uneliminated.	After new interpretations emerge, a paradigm can become irrelevant and be disregarded.

**The Contemporary (Postmodern) Paradigm as a Paradigm for Every Religion**

The previous discussion mentioned that each religion has its own unique paradigm. However, K ung argues that every religion needs

to have a common paradigm for the present and future, based on current needs. This paradigm is known as the postmodern paradigm. Küng believes that the term postmodern is ambiguous and not easily understood. It is not just a definition of the transition to a new world era, but also a concept, slogan, and expression of society's disillusionment with the modern world. Due to this ambiguity, postmodernity needs to be defined clearly by examining the structural issues that led to this change and how it differs from the modern era. Using this basis, he created his own framework to define the postmodern paradigm and how it differs from the modern paradigm. Küng formulated characteristics of the postmodern paradigm that can be examined as follows:<sup>13</sup>

- a. The shift to the postmodern paradigm does not eliminate the values of the modern era but transforms them into better values that are in line with current developments. This change in values is also fundamental. Examples of such changes include shifting from a society that lacks ethics (an ethic-free society) to a responsible society with ethics; from technology that dominates humans to technology that serves humanity; from an industrial process that destroys the environment to an industry that meets the real needs and interests of people while also depending on environmental preservation; and from a democracy based solely on legislation to a 'living' democracy in which freedom and justice can be harmonized.
- b. These changes aim to create a more balanced social transformation and not hinder the progress of science, technology, industry, and democracy. Modern values like rationality, efficiency, success, punctuality, among others are not disregarded but are combined with postmodern values such as imagination, sensitivity, emotions, humanity, among others.
- c. The postmodern paradigm presents a comprehensive and holistic outlook. It reconciles the European-American viewpoint and mindset with the Asian perspective by celebrating diversity and combining various disciplines from both different and

---

<sup>13</sup> Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 2-19.

complementary parts of the world. It offers the global community not just politically, socially, and economically-oriented views developed in the West, but also incorporates aesthetic, ethical, and religious dimensions and perspectives developed in the East.

Thus, Kūng's concept of postmodernity differs from that of philosophers like Lyotard and Welsch.<sup>14</sup> He perceives postmodernity as intertwined with the history and progress of the world. Therefore, the postmodern paradigm pertains to the human outlook and dimension towards a fundamental agreement that is advantageous to humanity and honors diversity. These traits are deemed essential for humans to sustain their existence as members of society in a diverse world.

### **Analysis of the Application of Paradigm Theory and its Implications for Religious Understanding**

In the context of the religious paradigm theory, Kūng describes religion as a historical entity of humans. This perspective acknowledges its evolution and development from ancient teachings. Kūng contends that religion did not emerge gradually from other fields, but rather from the beginning, as a structured religion. He refutes the notion that early humans systematically and gradually believed in spirits or magic until they believed in God. Thus, he recognizes the development of religion, but posits that it emerged in a structured manner from its primitive and straightforward nature, in accordance with the intellectual development of humans at that time, towards a more sophisticated and systematic religion.<sup>15</sup>

This understanding necessitates religion to be perceived from a historical standpoint. While anthropological and sociological research may recognize ancient religions, paradigm theory is utilized as a methodology to comprehend the development of

---

<sup>14</sup> Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin, "Analisis Teori Paradigma (*Paradigm Theory*) Hans Kung Dalam Kajian Agama," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 20.1 (2018), 143–178, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol20no1.5>.

contemporary religions. The above perspective can be disputed on at least two grounds.

One objection to the view is that employing historical methodology to comprehend religion, assuming it is a historical entity, should only be limited to certain religions. Such religions can only be studied by exploring their developmental history that continually evolves based on the prevailing environment and era. Hence, religious texts are insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the religion. An instance of this is the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, which arose from historical processes.

Niebuhr argued that the formation of both religions' beliefs, practices, social relationships, and historical development is the result of a combination of various ideas, values, and cultures of society. He refuted the claim that both religions are exclusively based on the Bible, as it does not align with their current teachings. He used the metaphor of "a forest that emerges from various trees that grow from separate seeds" instead of "a tree that is born from a single seed" to describe the birth and development of these two religions.<sup>16</sup> Harvey Cox also acknowledged that Christianity, being a European religion, assimilated cultural values from Westerners<sup>17</sup>.

As per al-Attas, the comprehension of Christian teachings by its adherents solely relies on historical understanding. The exegesis of the Bible and the foundation of their religion is based on the history of the clash between the religious faction and the pure rationalist. The outcome of this clash led to numerous interpretations, resulting in changes in Christian teachings that make it challenging to determine the belief aspects in its doctrine.<sup>18</sup> In the end, it reduced to a set of religious doctrines and rituals that grew and changed in accordance with human history and processes. Due to these changes, religion was not interpreted through theology, but rather through a combination of self-developed disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. Eventually, this gave rise to a specialized discipline known as philosophy of religion.

It is clear that the teachings of Judaism and Christianity were formed from various sources throughout their historical

---

<sup>16</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 108-109.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 12.

development. Therefore, the Jewish and Christian views on truth are not based on revelation and religious beliefs, but on cultural traditions that are reinforced by philosophical foundations that arise from speculation and assumptions. With this reality, it is inevitable that religious scholars have to allow their teachings to be interpreted and reviewed to make them relevant to current realities. The appropriate methodology for assessing these changes is through paradigm analysis, as proposed. However, these characteristics and methodologies should not be associated with all religions. Kūng's views on religion as a historical entity are seen to be influenced by the characteristics of his own Christian faith and the methods used to interpret it.

In addition, the perception of religion as a historical entity can also be associated with the impact of secularism in appraising religion. Al-Attas argues that the notion of religion being a part of a historical trajectory is a form of secularization that regards religion as a set of beliefs, practices, attitudes, values, and aspirations that emerge from human history and the human-nature confrontation. Religion evolves through the process of the human consciousness transitioning from a childish state to one of maturity and from being dependent on others to becoming independent, including dependence on religion.<sup>19</sup>

The concept aligns with the idea that religion evolved from a simple form to its current state through historical development. Some Western scholars argue that religion becomes unnecessary at a certain point in human history and that human focus should shift to science instead of religion. Thus, examining religion from a historical perspective aims to liberate humans from the control of religion or external interference, acknowledging the ever-changing nature of religion and urging humans to shape their own destiny. When religion is viewed as a historical entity, it is only relevant to human life in the world and is considered temporary and relative. The perception that religion develops based on the historical changes of humans is a secular perspective that rejects absolute value.

Thus, in the second argument, Kūng's aforementioned viewpoint cannot be universally applied to all religions, particularly Islam. This is because Islam, as outlined, is a divine revelation that

---

<sup>19</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 26.

surpasses the process of historicization. Within the context of Islam, the foundation of Islamic doctrine is perceived through a worldview lens rather than from a human paradigm or perspective. The Islamic outlook on its worldview perceives a balance between the spiritual and physical, as well as the worldly life and the afterlife. This perspective pertains to the present world, which is where human beings gather good deeds and execute Allah's commands that are attributed to the hereafter, which is the ultimate purpose of life. Each action carried out by humans in this world is guided by the objective of attaining the hereafter. Consequently, human attention is primarily focused on the afterlife without neglecting the world.

Based on this fact, the Islamic worldview is not based on human reasoning, but founded on the guidance of revelation. It encompasses not only the physical world and its history, society, politics, and culture, but also the hereafter as the ultimate destination of humanity. This perspective does not solely focus on material aspects that prioritize the world as the purpose of life, nor only on the hereafter that neglects worldly roles, but rather combines both.

Thus, the Islamic worldview is unchanging and all-encompassing, both the visible and invisible, reconciling the spiritual and physical realms, and integrating the world and the hereafter.<sup>20</sup> Due to the limitations of human reason, this perspective is derived from Allah's guidance. Muslims have adhered to this worldview without alteration. Placing Islam within the context of a historical religion has implications for the status of its teachings. History pertains to the social organization and civilization developed by humans. It encompasses the culture of a society that is born, grows, matures, declines, and sometimes vanishes altogether.<sup>21</sup> Hence, it is a part of society and arises from its activities. If Islam is viewed through the lens of history and the actions of society, then revelation is seen only as an indistinct and ambiguous influence or occurrence like other events. The outcome is described as a conjecture produced by human reasoning, emotions, and imagination. As a result, religion is perceived merely

---

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, *Fiqh al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah: Ma'a Mawjiz li Tarikh al-Khilafah al-Rashidah* (Damsyik: Dar al-Fikr, 2007), 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> `Abd al-Rahman bin Khaldun, *Muqaddimah al-'Allamah Ibn Khaldun* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2008), 50.

as a pattern of thought or internal inspiration that is recognized as sacred only by its adherents. Ultimately, positioning Islam as a historical entity or product diminishes the stature of revelation and confines its purpose.

As part of history, Islam will also be subject to the process of change. Hence, there cannot be an absolute claim to its correctness or infallibility as it is contextual. Some of its laws (sharia) may be appropriate and logical during a particular period, but may not be applicable during another. Moreover, while these laws may have been seen appropriate for the era and context in which they were introduced, they may eventually become outdated and irrelevant as society evolves. The view of religion stemming from the customs and cultural traditions of a society is viewed as a creation and heritage of humanity that is passed down from generation to generation. Hence, it is not regarded as sacred, being perceived as relative and a matter of choice. While these traits are also present in other religious teachings, they do not encompass the true essence of Islam, which is founded on resolute faith and observance of established Sharia law.

Can Islam be understood by analyzing its paradigms? Kung's definition of paradigms is unclear, and while he acknowledges the existence of both fixed and changing features within each paradigm, he does not provide a clear distinction between them. Moreover, his definition of paradigm only encompasses superficial aspects, limiting views of religion to a collection of things, values, and cultural expressions that are present in the life of religious communities. This paradigm cannot be applied to Islam as it fails to capture the religion in its entirety. Furthermore, a depiction of religion mixed with other sources, resulting from societal practices, only reflects religious practices and not the religion itself.

Therefore, Kung's paradigm is a human perspective that evolves with changing events or facts over time. It is a transient and adaptable viewpoint that allows for the replacement of paradigms in response to emerging problems. Kung emphasizes the need for the essence of religion to undergo fundamental changes to sustain its existence. He employs a natural science approach to researching religion, opening up opportunities to use the characteristics of scientific paradigms in religion. For instance, he equates the testable

and experimental nature of change in natural science with the absolute and eternal nature of religion as a belief system.

Küng argues that religion is not synonymous with paradigms, but rather that religion is a component of paradigms. This perspective highlights the vulnerability of religion, which should shape human thought but instead must conform to human viewpoints. Consequently, religion does not shape the worldview, but rather the worldview resulting from the combination of human ideas and culture shapes religion. The assertion that religion lives and evolves in every era with varying paradigms demonstrates the influence of human thinking on religion, rather than the reverse.

Furthermore, the paradigm concept, which is equated with constantly evolving human thinking, has been used to justify any religious alterations. Küng uses this methodology to justify each religion's adherence to his postmodern paradigm predictions. Küng is not the sole proponent of applying the paradigm theory to religion; it has also been used by others as the only methodology for creating a "scientific" revolution in theology and philosophy. For instance, Wilfred C. Smith, who introduced the concept of global theology, a new terminology for religion viewed in the context of human traditions, also employs paradigms to justify reinterpreting religion. Likewise, John Hick, who proposed the evolution of religion from a focus on one religion to a focus on God, emphasizes the importance of changing religion based on this paradigm. As a result, this approach is implemented in all fields, including religion. Since religion is linked to human thought, this method is deemed the most suitable means of describing any changes.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, Küng's methodology in understanding religion is based on the analysis of religious paradigms and their changes. This approach is a replication of the theory and methodology introduced by Thomas Kuhn, but it differs in its objectives and the form of its changes. Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that Küng has successfully developed his own paradigm theory that is not entirely reliant on Kuhn's theory. Küng employs the paradigm theory to investigate various facets of religion including its history, evolution, contemporary state, and projections or hypotheses about its future based on its historical and current context. Consequently,



his assessment and elucidation of religion necessitate a historical outlook rather than simply adhering to its doctrines. Such a study of religion in the paradigmatic framework is believed to be more comprehensive and exhaustive.

Küng's use of the paradigm theory raises questions about his methodology. Although he clearly distinguishes his paradigm shift concept from Kuhn's, he does not provide a detailed explanation of the methodology used to identify paradigm stages and shifts. Furthermore, he does not address how a researcher's formulated paradigm is deemed valid and accurate, its sources, or how research is conducted to gauge the perspectives of adherents when holding different paradigms. Thus, relying on the paradigm to understand religion is inadequate and insufficient in depicting the identity of a religion.

## References

- Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. *Islam and Secularism*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993.
- Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam*. Pulau Pinang: Penerbit USM, 2007.
- Al-Buti, Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan. *Fiqh al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah: Ma'a Mawjiz li Tarikh al-Khilafah al-Rashidah*. Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2007.
- Cox, Harvey. *The Secular City*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Ibn Khaldun, `Abd al-Rahman. *Muqaddimah al-`Allamah Ibn Khaldun*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2008.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Küng, Hans. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. John Bowden. Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Islam: Past, Present and Future*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Liotard, Francois. "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?". In *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

- Megill, Allan. *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin,. “Analisis Teori Paradigma (Paradigm Theory) Hans Kung Dalam Kajian Agama,” *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 20.1 (2018): 143–178, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol20no1.5>.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993.
- Roudometof, Victor, Agadjanian, Alexander & Pankhurst Jerry. *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-First Century*. California: AltaMira Press, 2005.
- Sheppard, James A. *Christendom at the Crossroads: The Mediaeval Era*. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Tartakoff, Paola. *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250-1391*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- “The Kuhn Cycle”. *thwink.org*. Accessed May 10, 2023. <https://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/KuhnCycle.htm>
- Willert, Trine Stauning & Liederman, Lina Molokotos. *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition?: The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012.