AN EXEGESI OF "VERILY WE HAVE MADE YOU TRIBES AN NATIONS" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN DISCOURSES ON (RELIGIOUS) PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

Qur'an 49:13 offers a model for a theory of religious pluralism that escapes the unresolved theological differences of the world religions. It contains what one might call a convergence of the pluralist evidence that incorporates important sociological and epistemological reasons for adherents of all faiths to accept difference and to relate to one another positively. The evidence is in the common origin of all humans and in the fact of their living together within social arrangements that must increasingly become more diverse and pluralistic, a fact that will necessitate mutual recognition, respect and cooperation to attain the goal of *al ta' ā*ruf that is set for all people in this verse. A further segment of this verse stresses the idea that only God knows those who are the righteous.

Oftentimes, religious pluralism has been sought through theological reconciliation or by a comparison of the belief systems of Islam and those of 'the People of the Book', an approach that has led to more problems and left out other religious

groups. Based on Quran 49:13, I could see that an effective theory of religious pluralism does not have to be based on theology, because there could be other grounds. I argue that, in line with the import of this verse, an effective theory of religious pluralism could be based on the common origin of all human beings that is stressed in this verse and that tracing the

trajectory of the interpretative efforts on the verse in classical *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) sources and in contemporary scholarship is important for its application to the discourses on religious pluralism.

To
the seekers of knowledge

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars have written copiously on the exclusive versus the inclusive or the universal aspects of the Qur'an within the purviews of Islam's interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue. On the one hand, Quran verses such as 3:19; 3:85; 5:3 have been cited as proof of the exclusive view of the Qur'an. On the other hand, argument for the Qur'an's inclusive worldview has been supported by Quran 2:62; 2:256; 3:64; 5:48; 22:17; 109:6, etc. For over a century, the theme of religious pluralism has become increasingly important in most academic thinking, as shown by the growing number of works published on it, most extolling its virtues and necessity. Examples include: Sachedina's *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (2007), Esack's *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism*, Aslan's *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy,* Atay's *Religious Pluralism and Islam: A Critical Examination of John Hick's Hypothesis,* Safi's *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism, Osman's The Children of Abraham: An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism, Arkoun's Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers, Hick and Askari (eds)'s The Experience of Religious Diversity and* Swidler, *et all*'s *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths.* Some of these works attempt to relate the Qur'an to modern liberal ideals of democracy and civil society, or to the ideas of religious diversity and multiculturalism. Others focus on the response of Islam to the challenge of living in a religiously pluralistic society, etc., while others still are devoted to exploring the

Qur'an's polemical-dialogical verses regarding its relationship with the other Abrahamic faith traditions of the Jews and Christians.

Religious pluralism as conceived in those works goes beyond notions of Islam's relationships with 'the People of the Book' that have traditionally characterized Muslim interfaith dialogue. It has been extended to other religious and cultural groups that do not share similar origins with Islam. It is about the peaceful co-existence of various religions in a global society. Thus, the view of a Muslim homeland as an ideal Islamic society that is set up against the land of the enemy, the non-Muslims, is being eschewed today by Muslims as a medieval idea.[1]

Since religious pluralism has been conceptualized in different ways, as I will examine here, it is important to identify a particular framework for my study. It is also necessary that my conceptual framework should have a bearing on, and consistent with, the import of Qur'an 49:13. Thus my notion of religious pluralism is one that views pluralism as a concern of all humans and a particular concern of all faith communities, each collaborating with one another within the larger human society and working cooperatively to accomplish the goal of *al ta`āruf* (knowledge of, and respect for one another), as identified in Qur'an 49:13. Among scholars whose theories of

[1] See a recent discussion of this in "Roots of Misconception: Euro-American Perceptions of Islam Before and After September 11" in J Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, World Wisdom, 2009, p 176 ff.

religious pluralism may prove useful for my purposes here, a mention can be made of Alan Race, John Hick, Remundo Panikkar, Diana Eck, Leonard Swidler, etc. (among non-Muslim western scholars) and Joseph Lumbard, Ali Asghar Engineer, Hassan Askari, Farid Esack, Ihsan Yitik, Ali Asani, etc., among Muslim pluralists. My work responds to their thought on religious pluralism from broader perspectives on Qur'an 49:13 in classical as well as contemporary Islamic scholarships.

Theoretical Foundations:

At the theoretical level, several approaches have become noticeable, especially in the works of Muslim pluralists. One of these attempts to reinterpret the basis of Islam's exclusive claim to salvation in a new way that allows access to salvation through other faiths, especially the Judeo-Christian religions. Another one seeks to extend the notion of *ahl al Kitab* to cover other religious communities outside of the Judeo-Christian traditions, such as the Hindus, the Buddhists, etc.[2] Yet other scholars model their thought on the mystical approach or a combination of the mystical and the metaphysical such as represented by the schools of Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, etc. for solving the problems of Islam's exclusivism. Majority of these approaches can be traced back to medieval times and thus are not completely a novel idea introduced by contemporary scholars. Some contemporary Muslim

[2] We see examples of these in the works of many Muslim pluralists like Joseph Lumbard, Ali Asghar Engineer, Ali Asani, Hassan Askari, etc., that will be explored later.

intellectuals are calling for abrogation of the old interpretative claiming that the past methodology is no longer suitable and must give way to a new hermeneutic, a modern interpretive scheme. This is reflected at various levels in the works of Joseph Lumbard, Farid Essack, Asgar Ali Engineer Fazlur Rahman, among others. Not any one of these approaches serves as a perfect model for my work. Rather, they all individually and collectively provide important analytical tools for what I intend to do in this work.

Nevertheless, a common ground or close affinity can be found between my conception of pluralism and John Hick's postulations on this subject. In several of his works that have developed into what is now described as Hick's 'Pluralist Hypothesis', [3] Hick offers a theory of pluralism that avoids the knotty theological differences among world religions. He suggests that a theory of religious pluralism should be built on philosophical and epistemological principles rather than religious and theological tenets. My task is to investigate how the components of Qur'an 49:13 (i.e., the common origin of human race, their creation by divine plan to live sociologically as nations and tribes - to recognize and respect differences, to coexist peacefully, and to develop positive attitudes toward diversity of religion and cultures - provide the basis for a non- theological approach to

[3] Hicks uses this phrase in several palaces in his works especially in *Rainbow* and *Interpretation*
both of which are cited later in this work.

resolving the issue of religious difference, for accomplishing *al ta'aruf* and contributing to the current debate on religious pluralism. In doing this, my work explores the exegetical tradition as well as contemporary scholarship to draw attention to pluralist interpretations of Qur'an 49:13.

Litaārafū: "that you may know, honor and recognize one another"

The concept of *al ta'aruf* introduced here has been viewed from a wide range of perspectives. Majority of the commentators and translators, as well as contemporary Muslim pluralists, have tried to identify what the phrase *lita`ārafū***:** "that you may know, honor and recognize one another" may entail and how it can be accomplished. Qur'an translations by Pickthall, Ali, Asad, etc. offer meanings that include acquaintance with, knowledge of, recognition and respect for, and having a good relationship with one another. As examples, Pickthall translates this as, 'that ye may know one another,'[4] Asad, 'to respect and safeguard each other's dignity'.[5] How can this knowledge, recognition or positive awareness about the other happen and what are likely to be the enabling factors for gaining this awareness of the other? *Ta'aruf* entails interaction, mutual interest and desire between

[4] Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Glorious Quran Translation*. Tahrek Trasile Inc., New York, 2009, p. 353.

[5] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an. The Book Foundation*, England, 2003, P 904; Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an,* Amanah Publication, Maryland, USA, 1991.

two parties to know and respect one another and to work together on common concerns. In this respect also, I find it propaedeutic to cite the following statement by Ali Asani: "The implication of the Quranic sanctioning of diversity and its injunction to create harmony in diverse societies through the promotion of mutual knowledge needs to be more seriously explored by Muslim theologians and interpreters of Islamic holy scripture."[6]

Methodology

Although some of the Muslim pluralists have cited this verse in contemporary discourses,[7] they have not endeavored to situate the verse within the larger tradition of *tafsir* scholarship nor the broader perspectives of contemporary theories of religious pluralism. In this work, I intend to analyze a trajectory of interpretations of this verse in *tafsir* literature by reference to Quran commentaries ranging from classical through modern in the Sunni, Shī`ah and Sufi sub-traditions. The aim is to establish the fact that although it is true that our modern times are different and require a new hermeneutic, the new hermeneutic needs to be guided by the old and should rise to the level of the new challenges we are faced with. The

[6] Ali Asani, "So That You May Know One Another": A Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam", Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities (July 2003), p 48.

[7] Ali Asani, "Pluralism, Intolerance and the Qur'an", *The American Scholar* Vol. 71, No. 1 (WINTER 2002), pp. 54; "So That You May Know One Another": A Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Vol. 588, Islam: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities (Jul., 2003), pp. 40-51; Fathi Osmani, in Jane Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.135; Joesph Lumbard, in Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 2003, p. 52; 73

methodology of this work engages an interdisciplinary approach that combines traditional theory of *tafsīr*, the subfields of *asbāb al nuzūl* ("occasions of revelation") and the legal theory of al *'āmm wa al khāss* (the general and the particular) with modern theories of religious pluralism. If the Qur'anic text is not to remain frozen in time, there may be a need to invoke past scholarship to broaden and open a new interpretative horizon.

It is important also that any discussion about religious pluralism should start by acknowledging the problem the world religions have in grasping the reality of religious pluralism. World religions is used here to refer to the major eastern religions of Buddhism and Hinduism and the western religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. As Hick once suggests in *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, the term "world religions" might sometimes be used to refer to "what is commonly called the great world faiths or religions that have produced inspiring scriptures and rich succession of saints."[8] As such religious systems set for themselves the goal of securing salvation for their followers, each of them represents itself as the only or at least the most effective system through which redemption can be attained. These religions – with possible exception of Hinduism - developed within a particular set of social conditions that included hostile environments and challenging cultures. This is true about Buddhism, Christianity,

[8] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*… p 56.

Judaism and Islam, etc. The followers of each of these religions think of their own system as the only way to salvation. As Hick notes: "Each religion is accustomed to think of itself as either the only true faith, or at least the truest and best".[9]

The religions' exclusivist postures must be understood and studied in the context of their emergence and growth. I will examine in this work how the concepts of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism are being constructed and deconstructed in the literature on world religions, especially, Islam. Christianity and some Eastern religions. I will also show how, under the pressure of modernity and the breakdown of cultural and religious barriers in contemporary societies, the world religions are updating their theologies to reflect the sensitivities of the modern world and to become increasingly open to religious pluralism. Indeed, exclusivism is proving to be unsustainable in view of the growing challenges of diversity. But this still poses a serious challenge to the integrity and coherence of traditional religions, pushing them to investigate their theological and soteriological matrixes for help in making necessary adjustments. Even so, far from becoming the norm, religious pluralism remains an experiment or creates a predicament both in theory and in practice.

Although several theories and hypotheses by Muslim scholars have used

[9] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Islam" (Lecture delivered to the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, February 2005) Available at*: http://johnhick.org.uk*.

certain Qur'an verses as bases for their pluralism views, I will argue that Qur'an 49:13 is more suited for building a more enduring theory of religious pluralism for reasons such as follows: firstly, it is premised on the dignity and equality of all humans, religious and non-religious. Secondly, it emphasizes mutual recognition and respect among all people. Thirdly, it avoids or rather transcends the theological discourse or the need for a resolution of the conflict of truth-claims of the religions.

A group of Muslim scholars have used some Qur'an verses to build inclusive and pluralist views of Islam. These include Qur'an 2:62; 3:64; 5:48; 5:69; 11:118-119; 16:93, 22:34, 30:22, etc. Their theories in this regard will be analyzed particularly in the works of Hassan Askari, Asgar Ali Engineer and Joseph Limbard, for any insights that they may offer and for any inadequacies or problems we may find with their arguments.

Some of the verses used in these theories such as Qur'an 2:62, 3:64, 5:48 and 5:69 share a common characteristic in that they are addressed to religious people, specifically to members of the Abrahamic faith groups. While this is somewhat useful, it apparently limits their application to other faith groups that have less in common with the Abrahamic faiths. Another set of verses speaks about diversity in nature and yet another group talks about religious diversity as happening due to the will of God or to undesirable human actions. A more comprehensive view of pluralism needs

to be based on premises common to all humans. Has the Quran not said that God has sent a prophet to all nations of the world?[10] For that reason, Quran 49: 13 helps us to overcome this limitation and works better for being premised on the brotherhood of humankind regardless of colors, religions and cultures.

One may argue that there are other Qur'an verses that suggest pluralism in non- theological approach such as Qur'an 30:22, 35:28. Therefore, what is special about Qur'an 49:13? Upon reflection, it is true that a few other verses may also serve this purpose. What makes Qur'an 49:13 stand out is the open exhortation to *al taʿāruf* addressed to all humans and other sociological facts of modern society such as the breakdown of the barriers to interactions among nations and increasing connection between religions and cultures, hitherto not seen at this magnitude -that are built into it. This has been acknowledged in some classical commentaries as well as in the works of many contemporary scholars some of whom are cited in this work. It is interesting, from an intellectual point of view, to see a trend like this reflected in traditional works on *tafsīr* across various schools of thought suggesting that this verse may be universally applicable for religious pluralism.

Considering Qur'an 2:62; 3:64 and 5:48, for example, one could say that

[10] For example, see Qur'an 10:47; 16:36; 35:24, etc.

these verses too suggest pluralism except that each one of these assumes a reconciliation of the theological differences among these faiths, something too difficult to overcome. In this respect, Qur'an 49:13 is different in that it is addressed to entire mankind irrespective of their faiths or racial origins. It is also different in that *al al taʿārūf* enjoined in the verse as a program of action appears to be theologically neutral and more easily adaptive to the situations of the different faiths, i.e., it is addressed to all of the communities of humans.

Chapters

After the introduction in chapter 1, I begin chapter 2 with an examination of the concepts of religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism and religious pluralism, tracing their origins and analyzing the various views about these terms by some of the leading scholars of religious pluralism, specifically, Allan Race, John Hick, Ramundo Panikkar, etc. I raise questions in this chapter about the conventional understanding of these categories and suggest a new way of viewing them as related concepts rather than as disparate ideas. Subsequently, I will discuss how several of the world religions manifest these attitudes in certain degrees. Drawing from the works of scholars like Galvin D'Costa, Alvin Platinga and Ian Markham, I will indicate some of the conceptual disagreements and indeterminacies associated with these terminologies. The chapter concludes with my observations on the challenges these concepts pose for Muslim scholars and for my work.

In chapter 3, I analyze three Qur'an-based theories of religious pluralism by Muslim scholars, namely, Joseph Lumbard, Asghar Ali Engineer and Muhammad Hassan Askari. The chapter examines the Qur'anic verses each one has used to build his theory, their modes of interpretation and arguments to draw attention to any inadequacies at the levels of theory and application. Specifically, I engage with the view held by some of these scholars that tradition is not helpful for religious pluralism and provide

evidence to prove that tradition does in fact offer more insight for religious pluralism than has been acknowledged in these theories. I note also in the chapter that any of these scholars who may have referenced Qur'an 49:13 as being supportive of their theory did not relate it to prior scholarship or specifically to classical *tafsīr* resources.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of *tafsīr* methodologies, principles and approaches focusing on issues about diversity in Qur'an interpretation and their relevance for religious pluralism. This includes a consideration of the concepts of *al tafsīr bi al ma ´th ūr, al tafsīr bi al ra'y* and *al tafsīr al lughawī.* The new theme of *al tafsīr al maw*ḍū`ī (genre-based commentary) in contemporary scholarship is also covered. It is my belief that a consideration of these matters is important for this study as a work both on tafsir and religious pluralism. I particularly relate my work to the subfields of *asbāb al nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) and the legal theory of al ʿāmm wa al khāṣṣ (the general and the particular) in order to explore how this might help us in understanding the Quranic text and in applying it to contemporary issues, in this case, the discourse on religious pluralism.

Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of the general theme of Qur'an chapter 49, *Surat al Hujurat*, "Chapter of the Chambers", albeit in a limited way; my focus is on the opening verses 1 - 4. Here, I discuss the *asbāb al nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) as it relates to the context of chapter 49 in general and to verse thirteen in particular. I also consider the role of *asbāb*

narratives in the book of al Wahidi and its influence on the opinions of Qur'an commentators in selected commentaries to indicate that, although al Wahidi's narrations generally deal with racial discrimination, it did not stop the Qur'an commentators from applying the verse to related issues or important matters of their times, as shown for examples, in the works of Ibn Kathir and Abu A'la Mawdudi

Chapter 6 analyzes commentaries from the more extensive classical *tafsīr* compendiums (sometimes described as ummuh*āt* al *tafsīr* or the mothers of *tafsīr*) on Qur'an 49:13 relating to discourses on religious pluralism. These include works from narration-based commentaries, from rationalist as well as Sufi orientations by *tafsīr* masters such as Ibn Kathir, Qurtubi, Tabari, Zamakhshari, Alusi, Razi, Biqaʿī, Qushayri, Baqli and the contemporary Sha'rawi. It deals more comprehensively with what Qur'an 49:13 can offer for a broader perspective on religious pluralism.

In conclusion I briefly present my findings in this work, stressing the relevance and importance of *tafsir* studies and its subfields for modern discourses on religious pluralism. As demonstrated here, the diversity offered by traditional sources examined in this work helps us to understand the possible dual role that tradition can play for advancing novel ideas or stifling them, depending on the depth of our perception. It shows that the traditional scholars or at least some of them had thought about the implications of Qur'an 49:13 for religious pluralism and paved the way for us

to connect their perspectives with our modern theories. Although Qur'an 49:13 is best suited for this purpose, as argued in this work, other verses too have the potential for generating new ideas about how we view the Qur'an in relation to the discourses on religious pluralism.

It is my hope that this book will help to develop a new hermeneutic of Qur'an 49:13 that can serve the interests of religious pluralism as one with strong roots in *Tafsīr* scholarship. By linking classical works and methodologies with contemporary ones, I hope that my work will also contribute to a wider conceptualization of *al ta`āruf* beyond mere re acquaintance. My work treats *al ta`āruf* as an epistemological issue and investigates the various interpretative perspectives on it in selected classical *tafsīr* literature. By doing this, I hope also that my work can help move the religious pluralism project past the theological obstacles it has been faced with.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM, RELIGIOUS INCLUSIVISM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

In this chapter, I explore the origins and development of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism theories. These terms have been used freely in contemporary religious pluralism discourses, but their definitions are not clear-cut. Different scholars have used various definitions of these concepts in slightly or significantly different ways. Even if we assume there is a common understanding of these terms - which is probably not what existing literature suggests- we will still be faced with a question about whether the terms truly describe the attitudes in the world religions they are trying to describe as the religions see themselves and according to their own self-awareness. In what follows, I examine the views of some of the leading scholars of religious pluralism, namely, Alan Race, John Hick and Raimundo Panikkar in this connection.

Alan Race on Religious Exclusivism

Born 1951 in Stockton-On-Tees, England, Alan Race is Professor of Christian Theology and former Dean of Postgraduate Studies at the St. Phillips Canter for Study and Engagement in a Multi-faith World, Leicester, UK.[11] His works include *Christian and Religious Pluralism*, *Interfaith*

[11] See *https://www.theguardian.com/profile/alan-race*

Encounter and *Thinking About Religious Pluralism: Shaping Theology of Religions for Our Times* Fotress Press, 2015. Race is also the editor-in-chief of *Interreligious Insights*. His latest book, *My Journey as A Religious Pluralist*, was Published in 2021.[12]

In his earliest work on religious pluralism, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Race proposed a three-fold typology for analyzing Christian attitudes to religious pluralism.[13] These are namely, exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, which he thinks are applicable to other religions as well. His three-fold typology has been widely used by other scholars, some of whom have sought to modify it in important ways. Race's model is intended to be a flexible framework as he indicates in his introduction:

> Each heading contains within it a number of different options or variations of a theoretical type, and the differences between these variations are largely a matter of emphasis on the part of the particular writers concerned. The general theoretical type indicated by each heading remains the constant factor which warrants the inclusion of a number of approaches under one heading.[14]

Race's definition of religious exclusivism relies more on biblical texts than anything else.

[12] https://books.google.com/books/about/My_Journey_as_a_Religious_Pluralist.html. Accessed 6/16/2022

[13] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p 7. See also, Rifat Atay, "Religious Pluralism and Islam: A Critical Examination of John Hick's hypothesis" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, UK.,) p. 14, http://research-repository.st- aandrews.ac.uk/ for further discussions of this subject.

[14] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. (London: SCM Press) 1983, p 7; 150 (the University of Michigan, 1993).

According to Race, the scriptural supports for exclusivism are to be found in the New Testament (NT) statements such as "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John: 14:6)" and

> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18, New International Version).

Other examples include Timothy 2:5-6; John 1:14; Acts 4:12; Corinthian: 15: 21-22.[15]

Based on these proof texts, he states, "Exclusivism counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated…"[16]

It probably would be incorrect to conclude from Race's citation of these texts that he considers the exclusivist attitude acceptable. On the contrary, he thinks that the attitude displayed in these texts would be problematic for religious pluralism. In his word, "Its overall reading … projects a negative evaluation of other faiths.[17] So, one can understand

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[15] See Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Wheaton, Illinois: American Society of Missiology, 1985), p.182 *ff* for a critical discussion of these biblical passages.

[16] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 29.

[17] Alan Race, *op. cit.*, 27; Rifat Atay, *op. cit.*, 14.

from his final remarks that he agrees that these biblical texts pose a challenge for religious pluralism.

John Hick on Religious Exclusivism

Born January 20, 1922, in Scarborough, UK, John Hick was the author of *The Philosophy of Religion*, *The Myth of God Incarnate, Faith and Knowledge, Problems of Religious Pluralism, An Interpretation of Religion* among his several works. He was a theologian, philosopher, and the leading advocate of religious pluralism. He taught at the University of Birmingham and lived in the same city where most probably he first encountered practicing Muslims, Hindus and others before emigrating to the United States. He was appointed Danforth Chair of the Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University of California, from 1979 to 1992.[18]

In a paper presented at a conference of Muslim philosophers and theologians in Iran, Hick defines religious exclusivism as:[19]

> The belief that the gift of, or discovery of salvation, is confined within a particular religion, such as Islam, Christianity or Buddhism. As a Christian position, exclusivism is the belief that Christianity is the one and only true faith and that salvation, which Christian exclusivists understand as entry

[18] See www.famousphilosophers.org/john-hick/; https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-03/john- hick-influential-philosopher-religion

[19] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Islam" (Lecture delivered at the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, February 2005) Available at*: http://johnhick.org.uk*. For further reiteration of this idea in Hick's published works, see for example, John Hick and Hasan Askari, eds., *The Experience of Religious Diversity (England:* Gower Publishing Company, 1985), p 5; *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1985) p.31

into heaven, or paradise, is confined to Christians.[20]

In this definition and others, Hick also delineates two issues, namely, truth –claim and salvation as the two most important questions that have become the bone of contentions between the pluralists and their opponents. His discussions of this concept in several of his works enable us to see various strands of Hick's own theory and other important elements of the general discourses on the subject. We can also notice from these discussions how he relates his theory specifically to Christianity and Islam.

1-) On Exclusivism in the Catholic Church:

Hick traces the history of the teaching of exclusivism within Catholicism to the Council of Florence in 1445 CE when, according to Hick, a theology was developed within the Catholic Church that there could be no salvation for anyone outside the Church (*extra ecclesiun nula salus)*.[21]

> For many centuries this was taken for granted by most Christians and was enshrined in such official declarations as that of the Council of Florence (1438-45 CE) that 'no one remaining outside the Catholic church, not just pagans, but also Jews or heretics or schematics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before the end of life they are joined to the Church. It was only at the second Vatican Council in the 1960's (specifically in 1965) that it officially recognized that salvation can occur

[20] Hick's definition of exclusivism or any of the other two concepts is very consistent and can be found in several of his works especially in the *Rainbow of Faith*, p.23-27.

[21] Concerning the history of the Catholic doctrine of "*extra ecclesiun nula salus*", see Robert B Sheard, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Church Since Vatican 11 An Historical and Theological Study (Toronto Studies in Theology; vol. 13) (*Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Pr, 1987), p 137 ff.

within other religions. [22]

2-) On Exclusivism within Islam:

Hick also helps us define Islam's exclusivism in a manner that I think is consistent with the Muslim exclusivists' view. He states,

> I don't know to what extent there are Muslim exclusivists, believing that only Muslims, or perhaps only those of the three religions of the Book, can enter Paradise. I know that there are some, because I have myself once been told very firmly by a Muslim that I will go to hell if I do not convert to his particular minority form of Islam.[23]

Hick is suggesting here that Islam too is as exclusive as Christianity with the result that Muslims also or some of them do not believe that people outside of their faith can have any chance of being saved. His discussion of this question covers basic issues about how Islam's exclusivism has evolved over time from the early period. This reminds us of two Turkish scholars; one of whom claims in his work that Muslims have a monopoly over Paradise and another one who wrote a counter article stating that no one particular religion has a monopoly over Paradise.[24]

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[22] John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1995), P 20-21.

[23] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Islam" (Lecture delivered at the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, February 2005) Available at*: http://johnhick.org.uk*) Here I am particularly interested in how he .defines Islam's exclusivism to an audience of Muslim scholars and philosophers using Islamic sources, the Qur'an, etc.

[24] See Ali Ihsan Yitik*,* "Islam and Pluralism: Does Qur'an approve religious pluralism?", Journal of Religious Culture, No. 68, (2004), accessed 2/10/2022 at: http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/irenik/relkultur68.pdf.

Raimundo Panikkar on Religious Exclusivism

Born in 1918, Raimon Panikkar Alemany (also known as Raimundo Panikkar), was Professor of Religious Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara and author of several works on religion and interreligious studies, including, most notably, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, The *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, *The Experience of God*. A prolific writer on religious pluralism and a leading exponent of interreligious dialogue, Panikkar has been nicknamed the "apostle of interreligious dialogue." [25]

For Panikkar, exclusivism is a religious attitude that affirms the truth of one religion and denies the truth claims of other religions: "A believing member of a religion in one way or another considers his religion to be true. Now, the claim to truth has a certain built-in claim to exclusivism. If a given statement is true, its contradictory cannot also be true**."[26]**

His definition raises an issue about the classical or classist definition of truth as an either-or proposition. Does the truth claim of one religion necessarily invalidates the truth claims of others? Panikkar tries to resolve this issue. One way he does this is by considering how the exclusivists tend to hold the view that any religious truth that is true is already included in their truth even if the holders of that truth call themselves by another name.

[25] See Rebecca Mays, ed., Interfaith *Dialogue at the Grassroots*, (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2008), P

[26] Remundo Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), P. xiv, 14.

Panikkar also tries to resolve this through a theory of 'parallelism'[27] by which he thinks that, in the eschaton, all these various religions will coalesce into one.

Attempting to get into the mind of the exclusivists, Panikkar makes another point worthy of attention. He says, "…the exclusivist assumes a heroic posture seeing himself as consecrated to the truth that is perfect and universal. Therefore, standing up for that truth is not from following one's whim or desire but rather, it is defending God's right".[28] The above statement could be used to justify the exclusivist's looking down on the rest of humans with a sense of pity for having received the grace of God that others are deprived of. She/he genuinely feels sorry for them for not having received the grace. Therefore, the exclusivists consider it a mission to proselytize others to save them.

It could also be said that exclusivism divides people into 'we' and 'they' or 'we' vrs. 'they'. We who are safe and they who are not. This is something that could be inferred from a Qur'an verse which categorizes the humankind into two basic groups: the group that is destined for Paradise and the group that will go to hell: "*fariqun fi al Jannah wa fariqun fi al saʿīr"* (Qur'an 42:7). Some Muslim scholars have built an exclusive view on a verse like this and similar ones.

[27] Pannikar, Op Cit. xviii.

[28] Remundo Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), P. xv

They claim that human beings constitute only two major parties; a party of the believers who will go to Paradise and a party of the disbelievers who will go to hellfire. This could limit the opportunity for mutual respect and cooperation among followers of the different religions. There is a way to mitigate this if we consider other verses which sate that true believes from other religions shall have no fear.

Exclusivism may also result from having a negative view of other religions because they are considered untrue. As Panikkar observes, a claim to truth necessarily entails that a counter claim is untrue. "The claim to truth has a certain built-in claim to exclusivity. If a given statement is true, its contradictory cannot also be true".[29] However, some scholars such as Swidler and Hick have argued that religious truth claim need not be viewed the same way as the Aristotelian definition of truth as we will see later. Nevertheless, the inability of the exclusivist to fully accept the other religion's truth claim will very likely lead to a dismal view of the religious Other. As a general attitude, exclusivists do not see any hope of salvation for people outside their own fold.

Race on Religious Inclusivism

Race also proposes a theory of religious inclusivism. According to Race, religious inclusivism may arise from attempt to connect with the truth

[29] Panikkar, opcit., p xiv

of the 'Other' and to integrate it into one's own religious truth, "creative integration".[30] Sometimes it may involve an offer of a conditional salvation to the religious Other, i.e., that another religion could be a path to salvation to the extent to which it reflects our truth. It also may be the way to make sense of statements in the Scripture which extend God's mercy to all creations. He states,

> Inclusivism is both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a dialectical `yes' and `no.' On the one hand it accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is savior. To be inclusive is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from him.[31]

It is obvious from Race's statements that the boundaries between religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism can sometimes be fuzzy. They both hang human salvation upon the Christian theology, one overtly, in open confrontation and the other subtly, through the so-called 'creative integration'. But they still are saying the same thing, perhaps. This in fact highlights the conjunction of exclusivism and inclusivism in many of these theories.

[30] Race, op. cit., p.30; Atay, op. cit., p. 27.

[31] Alan Race, op.cit. p. 30; Rif'at Atay, op. cit., p 27 ff

Hick on Religious Inclusivism:

According to Hick,

> Inclusivism in its Christian form is the belief that, on the one hand, salvation for anyone depends solely on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but on the other hand that this salvation is available not only to Christians but in principle to all human beings. Thus, non-Christians can be included within the sphere of Christian salvation - hence the term 'inclusivism'. [32]

Two questions arise from Hick's proposition. The first one is about whether non-Christians can be saved by Christ's sacrifice, even if they do not believe in it. The traditional interpretation is that none Christians are excluded. The second question relates to the theory of 'anonymous Christians' first proposed by Catholic theologian Kahl Rahner (d.1984) as a way to provide hope for salvation for non-Christians.[33] Hick rejects the theology of 'anonymous Christian' in his other work, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, where he claims that this theology is difficult to reconcile with the *extra ecclesim* nula *sola* dogma on the one hand and Christian missiology on the other.[34] He thinks that it is disrespectful of those non-Christian religions' followers. He even goes further in *God Has Many Names* to say that rather than to treat the Buddhists, for example, as anonymous Christians, it is the Christians who should be considered as anonymous Buddhists.[35] So, the basis

[32] John Hick, 1995. *The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues…*, MacMillan, 1985, p.23-7.

[34] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, MacMillan, 1985, p 33.

[35] John Hick, God Has Many Names, (the Westminster Press, Philadelphia), p.27

for a theology of inclusivism here becomes shaky, as it can be seen.

Relating his theory to the Islamic scripture, Hick notes specifically that the concept of *ahl al kitab* might be the Islamic equivalent of the theory of anonymous Christians. He states,

> Is there an Islamic form of inclusivism? I suppose that the concept of the People of the Book could be regarded as a limited inclusivism - with the full and final truth being in Islam but with Jews and Christians nevertheless coming close to it, as distinct from the eastern religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism which from Islamic perspective are NOT monotheistic religions.[36]

One might disagree with Hick on his assumption here because it does not quite align with the Muslims' understanding of this question. Muslims probably do not think that the Jews and Christians are anonymous Muslims as I will discuss later in this work. Nevertheless, it does show Hick's interest in applying or relating his theory to the Muslim scripture. Also, the fact that the Muslim concept of *ahl al kitab* has sometimes been extended to religious groups other than the Jews and the Christians will likely complicate Hick's view.

Panikkar on Religious Inclusivism:

Pannikkar defines inclusivism as "the attitude that affirms that the truth of one's own tradition includes at different levels all that there is of truth

[36] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Islam" *(Lecture delivered to the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, February 2005) Accessed: http://johnhick.org.uk;* see also his *God Has Many Names,* Westminster Press, Philadelphia, *1982, p.* 119-20.

wherever it exists".[37] Elsewhere, he states: "The most plausible condition for the claim to truth of one's own religion tradition is to affirm at the same time that it includes at different levels all that there is of truth wherever it exists."[38] Also, according to Panniker, "inclusivism usually adopts the contradictory role both of acceptance and denial of the other".[39] As an example, he cites the case of a Christian who might think that Islam could be a true religion because it upholds monotheism and recognizes the special status of Jesus Christ but who at the same time, upholds that anything less than a confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior does not guarantee salvation.

At the same time, Panikkar thinks that an inclusive attitude can encourage a magnanimous attitude toward others and can help create some level of tolerance. He states, "This attitude has a certain quality of magnanimity and grandeur".[40] But I can observe that inclusivism does not always produce a magnanimous attitude because inclusivism sometimes operates along different and contradictory plains. For example, inclusivism of Islam and its Abrahamic sister

[37] Raimundo Pannikkar, *Intrarerligious Dialogue* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 5.

[38] *Ibid*. p. xvi, 16.

[39] Raimundo (Raimon) Pannikar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), P 6.

[40] Ibid., p 17.

religions is sometimes politicized beyond the level that could allow for mutual affirmation of one another. Rarely do we see mutually affirmative acknowledgements among these religions. A similar situation exists at the intra-faith level within Christendom between Catholics and Protestants and within Islam between Sunni and Shiah. Intolerance at these levels is sometimes hyped to the point of negating everything about the other. Yet the idea that their truth operates at one of the many plains at which our truth operates is good.

Religious Pluralism

Meanings of religious pluralism range from co-existence and equal treatment of all religions to cooperation among religions, mutual acceptance, ecumenism, interfaith encounters, inter-religious dialogue and so on. Pluralism incorporates the meanings and ideals of inclusivism and carries them into a higher level.[41] At the heart of this is the contentious issue as to whether all religions are valid and culturally different ways of responding to the Reality.

The notion that all religions can be equally salvific taught by the likes of Hick is hard to accept by many of the followers of the Abrahamic religions

[41] Basinger, David, "Religious Diversity (Pluralism)", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (summer 2015 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed June 15, 2022 at: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/religious-pluralism; R. Panikkar, *Interreligious Dialogue*, op. cit., p xxvii, p. 18, 27; John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, p. 23.

because it deprives these religions their uniqueness and challenges their theological worldviews.

Alan Race on Religious Pluralism

Race describes religious pluralism as meaning that:

> There is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God's revealing and redeeming activity has elicited responses in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, and unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focused perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality.[42]

One might say that Race opens himself up for being accused of relativism as his definition of religious pluralism departs completely from the Christian attitude he previously described. He seems to have reverted to the proverbial analogy of the elephant and the three blind men as he ignores the contradictions in the truth – claims of the religions and as he seems to place other religions on the same pedestal as Christianity. Why some scholars think that Race is right about this, others disagree. One of such scholars on opposite side from Race is Gavin D'Costa whose ideas about Christianity and religious pluralism will be discussed later in this chapter.

[42] Alan Race, *op. cit*., p 33.

Hick on Religious Pluralism According to Hick,

> Religious pluralism is the belief that no one religion has a monopoly of the truth or of the life that leads to salvation. Or in the more poetic words of the great Sufi, Rumi, speaking of the religions of the world, 'The lamps are different, but the Light is the same; it comes from beyond.[43]

A curious note in this definition is Hick's fascination with pre-Enlightenment Muslim thinkers like Rumi and Ibn Arabi as shown in the above quotation from Rumi's poetry. This connection enables him to trace the origins of the teaching of religious pluralism beyond the Enlightenment, thereby sending a signal to the Muslims that their thinkers in the past have taken the matter about religious pluralism more seriously. He appears to be telling the Muslims that pluralism should not be treated as something new in their religion. The pre-enlightenment Muslim thinkers had laid down the groundwork for it and it is up to the contemporary scholars to follow on that path. The response he received form the Muslim pluralists may have been more measured compared to the one from his Christian counterparts.

Panikkar on Religious Pluralism

Panikkar offers alternative concepts of religious pluralism as he develops various models for his theory of religious pluralism, each one conveying a distinct idea. The metaphor of the elephant and the three blind men that is often used in pluralism hypotheses should be considered outdated; not so in

[43] John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faith*, p. 88.

Panikkar's theory where it evolved in a more sophisticated version. Some aspects of this are examined below.

According to Panikkar,

> The different religious traditions of mankind are like almost infinite number of colors that appear once the divine white light of reality falls on the prism of human experience: it diffracts into innumerable traditions, doctrines and religions. Green is not yellow; Hinduism is not Buddhism.[44]

Panikar states again[45],

> The different religions can be compared to the colors of the rainbow; a divine light that was shed on the world that produced the different colors of the rainbow. Each of these colors constitutes a complete system for human religious need and each is different in its individual respect. As long as they all eliminate from that divine light and are not mere darkness, each is complete and sufficient for the human religious' aspiration.[46]

Several issues remain unresolved in these models. For example, how are these lights supposed to interact with one another? What makes one of them a beam and another one a lamp? More importantly, who decides whether a particular one is from that divine light and not from mere darkness as he suggests? Panikkar does not address these questions. Nevertheless, he moves on with his analogy liking one religion to a stream, another to a river, yet another to an inundation and so on.[47] It seems to me

[44] Ibid. p xix-xx

[45] Remundo Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, p xviii, 18.

[46] Ibid., p xx.

[47] bid, P. xx.

that the analogy is self-undercutting because for example, a river will likely run over a stream and deprive it of its individuality if they encounter one another. Thus, Panikkar has favored perhaps inadvertently the so-called world religions supported by powerful social and political establishments. Already, it has been suggested that the whole idea of religious pluralism is being driven by Western imperialism seeking to extend its domain to the world religions, the same way that western economic hegemony has been extended worldwide. In other words, pluralism is the religious version of this power game. Going by Panikkar's writings generally, this political hegemonic reading is unlikely to be what he intends to convey by his religious pluralism theory.

Issues raised by Galvin D'Costa, Alvin Plantinga and Ian Markham Concerning the Three-fold Concept of Religious Pluralism.

A few issues and disagreements have been raised in the debate over the three-fold concept of religious pluralism. Some of these relate to how the concepts have been defined by some scholars. Ohers are concerned with the possibility of having them replaced, while others deal with the correctness or otherwise of the religious attitudes described in these concepts. Three scholars, namely Gavin D'Costa, Alvin Plantinga and Ian Markham exemplify these differences and criticisms.

1-) Gavin D'Costa

Born in 1958 in Nairobi, Kenya, Gavin D'Costa is Professor of Catholic

Theology and head of Theology and Religious Studies Department at the University of Bristol, UK from 2000 to 2006.[48] He is the author of *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (1986) and editor of *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*. Once a supporter of Hick's pluralism theology, he later reversed his position to become one of his most vehement critics. He articulates his points of disagreement in an article titled: "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions" among others.[49]

According to D'Costa,

> The demarcations between the three positions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism are as follows: On the one extreme of the spectrum there is exclusivism. This type is defined as holding that only one single revelation is true or one single religion is true and all other revelations or religions are false.[50]

So, one could say that he agrees with the concepts but that is not all because he goes further to say,

> Traditionally, pluralism is opposed to exclusivism, the former claiming that it is arrogant and untenable to make exclusive truth claims, and that all religions are potentially equal paths to salvation and truth. In contrast, I argue that pluralism must always logically be a form of exclusivism and that nothing called pluralism really exists. The main purpose of my paper is to show that there is no high ground in the pluralist position, for in principle its logic is no different from the exclusivist position.[51]

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[48] https://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/en/persons/gavin-g-dcosta(0a9d8782-e5f7-4f10-a973- c83542bb7fb0).html

[49] Gavin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions", Religious*. Studies, vol.* 32, No.2 (June 1996), pp. 223-232.

[50] Ibid, p 225.

[51] Gavin D'Costa, "Impossibility", P 225

From the above, it appears that D'Costa accepts the standard definitions of these concepts as a usable framework for analyzing religious attitudes both of Christianity and other world religions. However, he argues that pluralism is epistemologically flawed and impossible because, like exclusivism, pluralism too involves some form of exclusivity of opinion, i.e., accepting one side and rejecting the other. In other words, he is saying that the pluralists have no justifications for treating exclusivism as bad because they too are as bad as the exclusivists whom they attack. Thus, his focus is on the logic of religious pluralism as espoused especially in Hick's works. D'Costa's view concerning the episteme of religious pluralism is sometimes confused to mean that he rejects the terminologies.[52] I do not think that this is correct because he himself is unable to operate outside of those concepts. Furthermore, his definitions of the concepts are very close to those provided by Race and others and so his disagreements came to be based on epistemological considerations. Next, we will see how his position may be different from that of Plantinga.

2-) Alvin Plantinga:

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1932, Alvin Plantinga taught philosophy at the University of Michigan, his alma mater, from 1963 to 1982. He was Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Notre Dame University and Chair

[52] Rifat Atay, *op. cit.,* p 18-19.

of Philosophy at Calvin College.[53] A Yale-educated analytic philosopher, Plantinga's areas of interests include Metaphysics, Epistemology and Philosophy of Religion. He is John O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Does God Have a Nature?*[54]

In his essay, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism", [55] Plantinga classifies the criticisms against exclusivism into two categories: 1) ethical and 2) intellectual. After examining both, he concludes that they are not valid criticisms and they do not make the exclusivists worse than the pluralists. He states, "There are initially two different kinds of indictments of exclusivism: broadly moral or ethical indictments and broadly intellectual or epistemic indictments. I propose that the exclusivist is not as such necessarily guilty of these charges".[56] Plantinga's position, simply, is that Christian exclusivism is right and good; and Christianity needs not be placed on the same pedestal with other faiths. There seems to be much similarity between Plantinga's and D'Costa's views, but there is still an obvious difference in that

D'Costa's position derives mostly from epistemological considerations.

[53] www.veritas-ucsb.org, accessed 1/11/2022.

[54] Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

[55] http://www.philosophy.ucsb.edu/faculty/anderson/Plantinga_on_exclusivism.html

[56] Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith,* ed., Thomas D Senor (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p 175.

3-) Ian Markham

Ian Markham previously was Professor of Theology and Ethics at Hartford Seminary, Connecticut. His works include *Plurality and Christian Ethics* (1994); *Truth and the Reality of God* (1999) and *A Theology of Engagement* (2003). He co-edited *A World Religions Reader* (1999*)*, among others.[57] Currently, the 14th Dean and President of Virginia Theological Seminary, Ian Markham was scheduled to teach a new course on Faith and Conspiracy Theories in 2022/23 academic year at the seminary, per the latest information about his continued teaching activity.[58]

Markham's important contribution consists in drawing attention to the fact that the three- fold concept should not be viewed as having any role in the discussion more than as labels around which materials are organized. Therefore, they do not deserve the much importance or attention they are being paid. But he also points out that the terminologies, even as labels, hide underneath them various undercurrents of assumptions and presuppositions and are not in every sense completely objective. He concludes that "the theology of religions' debate has been stifled by an

[57] Ian Markham, "Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist' Paradigm" (New *Blackfriars*, Vol. 74, No. 867, 1993), p 33; https://www.jstor.org/stable/43249351

[58] https://www.vts.edu/page/academics/faculty-and.../the-very-rev-ian-s-markham-phd; http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0631236023.html; https://twitter.com/ianmarkham Starting November 2022.

overemphasis on the standard threefold paradigm at the expense of more important considerations..."[59] In his view,

> The underlying problem with the traditional classification results from the conflation of three matters: 1-The conditions for salvation. 2-Whether the major world religions are all worshipping the same God. 3-The truth about the human situation. The traditional paradigm emphasizes the first: is confused about the second, and, with regard to the third, links truth questions with soteriology. This is easily exposed as unsatisfactory. [60]

Markham's position regarding the typology must be understood in terms of his question about whether the typology truly represents the Christian view of other religions. Beyond that, he also questions whether exclusivism or pluralism in the manner that pluralists such as Hick have framed it helps us to definitively answer the question raised by the contradictory truth- claims of the religions about salvation. For Markham, the fault is not necessarily with the typology but with how the typology is being used to interpret Christian truth-claim and salvation.

So, as we could see, Race theory has been contested on several grounds, epistemological, moral and theological by these scholars. Nevertheless, the observations made by these scholars do not provide sufficient grounds for us to completely discard Race's typology. Race himself has acknowledged

[59] Ian Markham, "Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist' Paradigm" (New *Blackfriars*, Vol. 74, No. 867, 1993), p 33; https://www.jstor.org/stable/43249351

[60] *Ibid.* p. 34.

some of these problems.

Despite all this, in my view, there still is another angle from which we can look at this problem that has not been particularly addressed, i.e., the possibility that the three typologies can be treated as interconnected, as working in tandem or as a continuum. In view of the above discussions, it is possible that we should view these three attitudes as having an underlying affinity or relationship despite the obvious particularities of their meanings. This is because we can almost find elements of each of these attitudes in the theological metrics or worldviews of many of the world religions, as I will examine further in this work.

Muslim scholars' Response to the Three-fold Theory of Religious Pluralism.

Muslim scholars writing on religious diversity and Islamic attitudes have also employed this framework in their analyses. Among these are Ali Asghar Engineer, Hasan Askari, Joseph Lumbard, the three whose works are are discussed in the next chapter, and others such as Hussein Nasr, Farid Esack, Adnan Aslan, Rifat Atay**,** Ihsan Yitik**,** etc. The fact that several Muslim scholars have jumped on the bandwagon with Race's model creates a certain problem. One would have thought that a different approach would have been necessary for analyzing Muslim's attitudes simply because, carefully considered, the bases of all the three attitudes highlighted in Race's study can be found in the Qur'an. Support can be found for each of the three

rubrics in the broader Quranic interfaith discourse. It is not enough to say that Islam is exclusive, inclusive or even pluralistic without qualifying the statement in important ways. Thus, in my view, a different approach or framework ought to have been applied for analyzing Islam's attitude(s). I think that religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism and religious pluralism are not mutually exclusive. I will devote the last part of this chapter to a general discussion of the devices and strategies used by Muslim to address and deconstruct these phenomena.

Strategies within Islam for Alleviating Religious Exclusivism

Here, I would like to briefly consider some of the important elements, or if you like, strategies, used in constructing and de-constructing Islam's exclusivism that could help mitigates its problems within Islam or help us build an inclusive or even a pluralist view:

First, an important tool in this regard is the Qur'an's acknowledgement of a primordial *Islam* that may have continued to exist in some form especially in the religions of the people of the book such as the Jews and the Christians and possibly beyond those specifically mentioned in the Qur'an. The reason why this is important is because Islam acknowledges that there have been Muslims in every human apogee, i.e., that God has sent someone to call to the true religion among every nation of the world (Q. 16:36; 35:24; 42:13).

Thus, Islam becomes like the word 'religion'; a common human spiritual experience that provides a path to salvation for various individuals and collectivities at different stages in human history. Its two major components can be found in pure human nature (*fitrah*) and in divine intervention in human life such as manifested, for examples, in the covenants given to Noah and Abraham, in the revelation of the Torah to Moses, in the miraculous birth and mission of Jesus, and finally in the message of Prophet Muhammad (Qur'an 42:13).

Thus, Lumbard, relying on sources such as Itzusu and McAullife, etc., defines *Islam* to mean, "to give over something that is particularly precious to oneself to someone who demands it".[61] This in fact could be acceptable evidence for the universality of Islam and its primordial nature.

Islam's exclusivism is also diffused by its open acknowledgement of "people of the Book", the Jews, the Christians, and others such as the Sabeans and the Magus, etc. The Qur'an affirms that the true adherents of these faiths too will receive salvation (e.g., Qur'an 2:62; 5:69). This, much likely, would be the basis for Ali Asani's proposal for a more extended definition of *ahl al kitab* "to include all the different religious groups such as those encountered by the Muslims in the early days of Islam".[62]

[61] Joseph Lumbard, *op. cit.*, p. 153; 157.

[62] Ali S Asani, "Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an." *The American Scholar* 71, no. 1 (2002): 52-60. Accessed July 12, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41213250.

Islam's exclusivism is further ameliorated and softened by its liberal approach to the freedom of religion, i.e., that people must be free to choose their religion: "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2: 256) and "You have your religion, I have mine." (109:6).[63] It is generally accepted among Muslim theologians that no one can be forced to accept Islam. This provides a basis for the recognition of other religions and for positive interaction with them in areas of common interest. Other similar verses addressing this matter include Qur'an: 2:148; 5:48; 22:17 and 109: 6. Also, by extolling and honoring all humans as Children of Adam whom God created by His own hands and into whom He breathed from His own spirit as found in Qur'an 17: 70 and 38:75, the Qur'an further provides a solid foundation for brotherhood of mankind and for the practice of mutual acknowledgement among people of different faiths. Acknowledgment of a common ancestry presupposes the common dignity of all humans and the need for respecting their difference in religion and other areas. Qur'an 49:13 resonates with these verses and holds a special appeal for fellowship of humans irrespective of the differences of race and religions.

According to the Muslim theologians and Qur'an commentators, both sound nature and divine intervention are required before the Islamic faith becomes binding on anyone; such that the absence of either or both can

[63] The Qur'an, trans. Wahiduddin Khan and Farida Khanam, Good Word Books, 2020.

become a mitigating factor for someone who fails to answer the call to Islam. The Muslim theologians have declared both as necessary conditions and have adduced as proof, among others, the Qur'an verse: "We never punish (a people or individual) until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning (17:15). Thus, al Baghawi, the Muslim theologian and Qur'an commentator, states in his commentary on Quran 17:15, "whatever is obligatory only becomes so by hearing it", i.e., only if you ae informed about it and not by reason alone.[64] Ibn Kathīr supports the same idea with other verses such as (67: 9-8); Q. 35:37; 39: 71 and narrations from the Hadith relating to the subject.[65]

One of the major concerns of the pluralists is whether it would be fair if God had reserved salvation for some people based on their geographical locations or based on where they were born. According to Hick, ninety-five percent of the people follow the religions of their parents or the religion prevailing in their country.[66] The Qur'an's answer is neither yes nor no. The answer seems to be that people are not to be held accountable until they have had the opportunity of being exposed to the true religion. Thus, it would appear as if people living in an environment that prevents them from gaining a good exposure to the religion of Islam would be treated different

[64] See http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/baghawy/sura17-aya15.html

[65] See http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura17-aya15.html#katheer, accessed June 10, 2021.

[66] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Macmillan, 1985, p 47, 73.

from the people where such an opportunity exists. This suggests that the environment or culture into which someone is born can work in both ways. After all, the pluralists themselves acknowledge what they call "religious immigrants",[67] to represent people who may choose a religion that is unpopular in their area.

Another question is whether the concept of *ahl al kitab* (the people of the book) should be limited to those that are specifically mentioned in the Qur'an (i.e., the Jews, the Christians, the Sabeans and the Magus) or whether this can be extended to other religions. This question the treatment of people belonging to religious traditions other than those commonly known as *ahl al kitab*, reverberates in the works of several Muslim scholars –including Engineer, Lumbard, Asani, Yitik, etc. The scholars' opinion may have been based on a hadith in which the Prophet was reported to have said that these religious others too may be treated the same way as ahl al kitab".[68] It has been said that historical evidence shows that when the Muslims came into contact with the Eastern religions of the Hindus and Buddhists they extended the status of *ahl al kitāb* to them. Yitik's essay, "Does Qur'an approve pluralism?" may be mentioned particularly for providing a good discussion of this

[67] Ibid., p 73.

[68] http://fatawapedia.com Accessed July 11, 2021; http//www.fatwaped.com

matter.[69] Also, in this respect, a Hadith in the sources states that the Prophet accepted *jizyah* from the Magus and said, "Treat them like *ahl al kitab*".[70] However, some scholars said that this is intended for accepting *jizyah* from them and does not grant them the full status of the people of the book.

Finally, several verses in the Qur'an discourage the Muslims from engaging in disputes over who is safe and who is not, stating that only God can judge who is upon the right religion (e.g., Qur'an 16:125 and 28:56). Thus, controversy over who is saved and who is not is disavowed and is consigned to the realm of God's unique knowledge: "He alone better knows who is upon guidance (Qur'an: 16:125)". "Unto Him is the return of all of you and He will inform you about the points over which you differ (Qur'an 5:48)" However, this should not be understood to mean that those who fulfill the Islamic requirements for salvation are still in danger of being excluded from salvation. Thus, the Qur'an clearly reiterates that religious differences are only to be settled finally in the hereafter.

[69] Ali Ihsan Yitik, "Pluralism: Does Qur'an approve religious pluralism?" (Journal of Religious Culture (68) 2004 (electronic copy accessed from: http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/irenik/religionskultur.htm) Accessed 2/22/21.

[70] http://fatawapedia.com Accessed July 11, 2021; http//www.fatwaped.com

Conclusion

The above has been about some of the undercurrents and crosscurrents of the discourses on religious pluralism. It shows how diverse the views have been and how the variety of ideas and conceptualizations espoused in the works of those scholars provide an opportunity for critical views that could enrich the debate. The various approaches taken by the scholars across the religious traditions is indicative of the many roads that could be followed in analyzing the problems of religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism and religious pluralism and for presenting solutions from a Quranic point of view. Other important dimensions having been examined, I think that the main ideas in this chapter provide an adequate framework for further exploration of the subject.

My analysis of the concepts espoused in those theories about religious exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism by scholars from various religious traditions has shown that there can be many different directions for the discourse to proceed and for contributing to the on-going intellectual debate on the subject. In the next chapter, I will focus more specifically on three Muslim responses.

CHAPTER 3

A CRITIQUE OF THREE QURAN-BASED THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM BY JOSEPH LUMBARD, HASSAN ASKARI AND ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

The basic criterion or qualification for selecting the three scholars discussed below –Joseph Lumbard, Hassan Askari and Asghar Ali Engineer- is the fact that each one of them premises his view of religious pluralism on one or more verses of the Qur'an in a way similar to what I am attempting to do in this work. In addition, the three have become influential interfaith scholar- activists in the contemporary period. The depth of their thoughts – rather than the length of their writings - is another reason to justify their selection for my analysis. In other words, their theories are more methodologically relevant to this study than many other views on religious pluralism by Muslim scholars. In the following, I will focus on the main points of their religious pluralism views.

Joseph Lumbard and His Religious Pluralism Hypothesis

Born in 1969, Yale-educated Joseph Lumbard has held several academic positions including Professor of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates and Professor and Chair of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis University. Having been born to a devout Christian family, Joseph reverted to Islam in 1993

while attending George Washington University, DC.[71] Professor Lumbard is the editor of *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars* (2004). He also contributed a chapter in *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age* (2008), edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar of Iqbal Academy, Pakistan where much of what I relied upon here comes from. He also served as advisor to the King of Jordan on interfaith affairs.[72] Currently, he is associate professor of Islamic Studies at Hamad bin Khalifah University, Qatar.[73]

In his paper titled: "Quranic inclusivism in an Age of Globalization", Lumbard states:

> What first drew me to the teachings of the Qur'an, and even persuaded me that they were the teachings by which I wish to live my own life, are the verses that clearly advocate an attitude of tolerance and acceptance toward people of other faiths. [74]

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[71] Revitalizing the Heart of Islam: An Interview with Joseph E. B. Lumbard: Life and Work: accessed from: www.holosforum.org; Holos: Forum for a New Worldview, vol. 3, No.1 (2007). https://www.brandeis.edu/now/2008/january/JosephLumbardstory.html (8/15/20)

[72] Huffingtonpost.com (accessed March 17, 2018). He occupied this office for about two years around 2005-7.

[73] http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Joseph-Lumbard.aspx. Accessed July 13, 2021.

[74] This is an electronic copy of a paper presented by Professor Lumbard at the AAAR conference in 2001 according to information on the website. I have searched through AAR publications trying to locate this essay to no avail. Nevertheless, it was a paper presented by the author at AAR conference in 2001 and is available on Google: www.academia.edu/11266564/Quranic_Inclusivism_in_an_Age_of_Globalization Later, I found this article published with the same title and a little variation *in The Religious Other – towards a Muslim Theology of other religions I the Post-Prophetic age* edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar.

At the top of his list of the verses of inclusiveness - or what he calls the Qur'an's "universalist" verses[75] - are Qur'an 2:62, 5:69 and 10:47, etc. He contrasts these with other verses such as 5:3 and 3:85, which he designates as exclusivist. Thus, one can say that Lumbard considers both exclusivism and inclusivism as integral to the Qur'an. Based on these verses also, he identifies two modes of interpretation. Firstly, there is the exclusive interpretative methodology which, according to Lumbard, tends to explain the universalist verses in favor of exlusivism and which he claims is rooted in traditional scholarship, as shown by his quotations from scholars like al Nawawi (d.1277).[76] Lumbard blames the classical scholars for using philology to adapt the meanings of the inclusive verses to suit their exclusive agenda. In his words, "The universalist verses of the Qur'an are either explained away through creative and clever philology or are claimed to have been abrogated by later revelations. Rarely are they allowed to stand alone as the unencumbered word of God".[77] On this point, Lumbard makes it seem that philology alone should have been enough for generating meanings of Islamic

[75] Apparently, Lumbard is using 'inclusive', 'universalist' and 'pluralist' interchangeably unlike other pluralists such as Hick, Swidler, Engineer, etc. who are making distinction between these terms.

[76] Joseph Lumbard, "Qur'anic inclusivism in an Age of Globalization" in: *The Religious Other – towards a Muslim Theology of other religions I the Post-Prophetic age* edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar, Iqbal Academy, Pakistan, p 152.

[77] Ibid., p 4, 152.

concepts. He ignores the fact that meanings of religious symbols often do not derive from denotative significations alone.

The second methodology identified in this essay stands in contradistinction to the first. As Lumbard notes, "some contemporary Muslim scholars have attempted reviving a new hermeneutics that privileges the "pluralist" and "universalist" dimension of the Qur'an, while explaining away or even dismissing the more exclusivist verses".[78] He further states: "While such an effort gives hope for a more tolerant mode of Islamic theology and Qur'anic exegesis, works such as Farid Esack's *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism* have demonstrated such blatant disregard for traditional Islamic scholarship that they have no hope of any influence beyond a select group of Western and Westernized Muslims."[79]

The more important observation made by Professor Lumbard for my purpose here is that the universalist interpretation needs not set itself up against traditional Islamic learning, so that it does not become alienated from the majority of Muslim scholars. As he states, "the fact is that we have yet to find a way to emphasize the universalist element of the Qur'an and the Prophet's message without estranging the majority of Muslims and

[78] Electronic copy accessed Jan 31, 2019 at: http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct05/07.htm

[79] Joesph Lumbard, "Qur'anic inclusivism in an Age Globalizatiion" in The Religius Other – Towards a Muslim Theology of Other religions in a Post –Prophetic age, ed., Muhammad Suhel Umar (xxx), p 4.

breaking completely from tradition".[80] His statement here signals an important methodological aspect or direction still missing in many religious pluralism theories and it is the one that I will pursue in this work by exploring traditional commentaries on Qur'an 49:13 for pluralist or "universalist" interpretations.

How Lumbard has applied this principle in his essay is another thing we might want to consider. Is he, in the referenced paper - or any other works of his that I know of -, able to truly represent the tradition and at the same time account for a pluralist interpretation? When put to test, his approach reveals certain problems. As we could see, his interpretation of some of the pluralist or universalist verses that he has chosen puts him to task. For example, he claims that Qur'an 5:48 and 22:67-9 support plurality of religions on the basis that the two Qur'anic terminologies: *shir'atan* and *minhajan* constitute different ways of approaching the Reality and different creeds. With reference to Qur'an 5:48 specifically, Limbard also said,

> A well-known Qur'anic verse contends that the multiple means by which human beings worship God is part of the test that they confront in this world: This reveals that there are different ways of understanding God and the relationship with God for different human collectivities. God has not revealed one law, but many laws. To each law corresponds a particular creed.[81]

[80] Op. cit., P 5.

[81] Lumbard, op. cit., P 10.

If this is correct, then it would agree with the pluralists' view that the different religions constitute culturally different ways in which people respond to the Reality as Hick maintains in many of his works. But this is not what traditional sources offer in terms of the meaning of this verse. His assertion here is contrary to what we find, for example, in Tabarī's or Ibn Kathīr's works on the interpretation of the verse and on these two terminologies. Lumbard further claims that pluralism, i.e., religious pluralism, is the test intended in the verse without citing evidence for this in classical Islamic scholarship.[82]

Reference to representative traditional *tafsīr*s of al Tabarī, Ibn Kathīr and even the reformist work of a modern scholar such as Mawdudi (d.1979) does not support the interpretation that the different *shariahs* constitute different religions. Instead, they are unanimous on the point that the true religion is essentially one with different sets of rules for the various religious communities at different times in history. According to Tabarī on Qur'an 5:48, "The *Tawrah*, has its own laws, *the Gospel* has its own laws different from the *Tawrah* but the essence of these religions lies in worshipping Allah alone with devotion and sincerity".[83] Ibn Kathīr expresses a similar opinion stating that the religion of all of God's prophets is one. He cites in support of this interpretative opinion the Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad said

[82] Lumbard, op cit., p 10.

[83] See Tabari (on Qur'an 5: 48) at http//www.tafsir.com Accessed 10/10/2021.

regarding all of God's prophets, "All of us, prophets and messengers of God, we are all like brothers from maternal side; our religion is the same."[84] The verse is interpreted similarly in Mawdudi's *Tafhim*.[85]

In view of the above, one can say that Lumbard has not paid attention to the distinctions that have been made between *din* and *shari'ah* in traditional scholarship. He erroneously states that both *din* and *sahri'ah* mean the same thing and that both refer to different religions and ways of life. The traditional understanding is that the *din* essentially is the same; i.e., to submit to God's will and to worship Him alone, whereas the *shari'ah* refers to the particular way of life of each faith community in terms of what may be lawful or unlawful for them or how they are to conduct themselves in their socio-economic activities, among others. Nevertheless, I still find his recommendation that we need a methodology that will account for both the traditional as well as the pluralist interpretations of aspect of the Qur'an commendable

1-) Lumbard on the Meanings of Islam

Lumbard observes, as do many pluralists, that in Islam today the institutional meaning of *islam* has taken over the linguistic meaning. He cites

[84] See Ibn Kathir (on Qur'an 5: 48) at http//www.tafsir.com; accessed 10/10/2021.

[85] See Tabari and Ibn Kathir (on Qur'an 5: 48) at http//www.tafsir.com. For Mawdudi's *Tafhim*, see http//www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.

several examples of Qur'an verses that indicate there were *islam* and *muslims* before the advent of Prophet Muhammad and his community such as Qur'an 2:128; 2:133; 7:126; 22:78, etc. In his words,

> At face value such verses very clearly state that *islam* is a universal and perennial way of life practiced by the great founders of all previous religions/ways (*dins*) and their followers. But once "*islam*" becomes Islam, an institutional definition or conception is formed and such verses become more problematic. In other words, the institutionalized meaning of "*islam*" has trumped the linguistic meaning.[86]

It is true that the Qur'an refers to the righteous among the Jews, Christian and others as Muslims. But how does traditional Islamic scholarship come to define Islam for the followers of Prophet Muhammad in exclusive terms? Lumbard does not address this issue satisfactorily.

The questions I would like to pose here are: Does the linguistic and technical meanings of a concept have to be the same? If they cannot be the same as often is the case in many scientific fields, do they have to be in conflict or in opposition to one another?

To answer these questions, I suggest we look comprehensively into the general discourse of the Qur'an on this matter intra-textually, letting the Qur'an define its own terms. We can see that there are two requirements or two important conditions and criteria that are hinted at in the Qur'an for defining *islam* or for describing who is a *muslim* in any generation. One of

[86] Joseph Lumbard, "Quranic Inclusivism in an age of globalization" in The Religious Other: Toward a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in Post-Prophetic Age, ed. Muhammad Suheyl Umar (Pakistan.), p 8.

these is the requirement to believe in the true God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc. as a requirement of Islam. But it is not the only one. The second is to believe in the prophet/messenger/messiah of the time and to follow his lead. Many of the verses cited above provide hints on these two. Thus, *islam* is submission to the will of God manifested through the mission of the prophet-messenger of God at the given time. It is in this sense that the disciples of Jesus and the believers of the Judaic community have been called Muslims in the Qur'an.[87] The earlier-mentioned Lumbard's explanation fails to fully account for the traditional view that he promised to respect.

Finally, Lumbard's discussion leads him to cite Qur'an 49:13 in support of his pluralist view. He too like other pluralists such Asghar Ali Engineer, Ali Asani, Tariq Ramadan, etc. considers as unmistakable the implication of the verse for religious pluralism. He thinks that the reasons for the differences in creeds are contained in the verse: *O Mankind! We have created you of a male and a female and have made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another; surely the most honorable of you with God is the most reverent; surely God is Knowing, Aware*.[88]

[87] Qur'an 3:53. Question about obedience to, and followership of, the prophet of the faith communities for the believers is a widely discussed subject in the Qur'an.

[88] Joseph Lumbard, "Qur'anic Inclusivism in an Age of Globalization" in: Muhammad Suheyl Umar, ed., The Religious Other – Toward a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age, Iqbal Academy, n. d., p. 160.

Like many other Muslim pluralists, he too does not seriously consider the special features of the verse that make it more suitable for exploring a new theory of pluralism. Neither has he attempted to investigate what the classical *mufassirun* from various schools of *tafsīr* offered regarding its relevance for the discourse of religious pluralism because he has already decided that tradition is not relevant for the modern discourses on religious pluralism.

2-) Methodological Constants and Variables:

By methodological constants and variables, I mean the points of convergence and divergence or the symmetric and the asymmetric in my work and the work of Lumbard. On the symmetric side, we share similar views regarding respect for tradition while at the same time we both hold that tradition is open to criticism. However, Lumbard, in the essay in focus does not see any basis or foundation for the pluralist or his so-called "universalist" interpretation in tradition. This is a major point of disagreement between my position and his. For me, tradition can help us build a pluralist interpretation because it holds within itself pluralistic elements that we can access for that purpose. Also, on the asymmetric aspect, I disagree with professor Lumbard about how we should understand the two concepts of *sharīʿah* and *dīn* which serves as the bedrock of his theory. I consider my difference here crucial for the notion of respect that

we both share about tradition. The terms s*hari'ah*, *din* and even *islam*, all have both the linguistic and technical meanings that need to be accounted for. I conclude that his approach, though helpful in some way, fails to resolve the question satisfactorily.

According to Lumbard, every *shir'at* constitutes a different creed and a different way of approaching God. As I indicated earlier, there are basically two problems with this interpretation. Firstly, it contradicts the traditional understanding that Lumbard pledges himself to promote. Secondly, his idea implies that all religions- including nature-based and all polytheistic religions - all are equally valid and sanctioned by the God of Abraham, – which contradicts the basic tenets of the Qur'an, the Tawrah and the Gospel. In this respect, Lumbard can be seen as taking the same position as Hick on this issue as discussed in chapter one.

As I could see, the major constraint in his essay seems to be that although a Qur'an-based religious pluralism theory needs to be supported, the right frame for building such support is proving to be difficult. While some attempts have been made to reconcile the traditional interpretations of relevant Quranic verses with the emerging pluralist views, some of these efforts have overlooked some special characteristics of the former and so become inadequate for resolving the issue. In what follows, I consider another Qur'an- based view on religious pluralism by Asghar Ali Engineer.

Asghar Ali Engineer's Religious Pluralism Hypothesis

In a short autobiography, titled: "WHAT I BELIEVE", Asghar Ali Engineer (d. 2013) [89] affirms his Ismaili origin and states that he has devoted his entire life to issues of philosophical and spiritual nature and has actively championed the course of religious pluralism and social justice in India and around the world for many years. He writes:

> I have completed sixty years of life in March 1999 and I thought it is time to state what my beliefs are. I have spent years and years reflecting on many issues that kept on troubling me for long. I must state in the beginning that I was born in a Bohra orthodox priestly family. The Bohras are Shi'ah Isma'ili Muslims. My father was a learned scholar of Islam and serving the establishment of the Bohra head priest who holds the office of Da'i and popularly known as Saiyyidna (i.e. our Lord) … I believe that the Qur'an emphasizes four most important teachings without which one cannot be a good Muslim. These are 1) *'adl*, *ihsan*, *rahmah* and *hikmah* i.e. justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom.[90] Thus a person must be just, benevolent, compassionate and wise in order to be a good human being. Mere performance of certain rituals cannot qualify one for being a spiritual person. One must inculcate these qualities… I believe that religious pluralism enriches spiritual life and promotes human creativity. Thus, a truly religious person should have liberal disposition and should be far from being fanatical about his beliefs. He should accept plurality as a boon from God.[90]

Engineer received his early education in Arabic and Islamic studies before pursuing a degree in engineering. After serving in the metropolitan council in Bombay/Munbai for 20 years as an engineer, he retired and began to devote

[89] Asghar Ali Engineer, "What I believe" Nov.18, 2006, available at www.religiousconsultation.org; "Islam and Modern Age" July 1999 accessed from http//www.andromedia/rutgers.edu; *www.dawoodi-bohras.com/about_us/people/engineer/quest*

[90] Ali Asghar Engineer, *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 2003, p vii.

his effort to interfaith activities, community engagements and scholarly writings as mentioned in this autobiography. He has written copiously on religious pluralism, social justice and religious reform. His works include *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society* and several short essays, among others. In the following, I will analyze some basic features of his pluralism philosophy.

Engineer affirms that the Qur'an provides grounds for a theory of religious pluralism that not only recognizes the diversity of the human religious experience but one that also treats all religions as equal. He cites as evidence Qur'an 5:48, 30:22, 2:148, etc.[91] On this basis, he argues that God creates religious differences, and, for that reason, we must not only respect religious pluralism but also celebrate it. In fact, as he states, "… a truly religious person should have liberal disposition and should be far from being fanatical about his beliefs. He should accept plurality as a boon from God."[92] He further argues that we must view pluralism as a fact of the religious life that we need to embrace and incorporate into our religious experience. Christians, Hindus, etc. must do the same, declaring, "to be religious now is to be pluralistic".[93]

[91] Ali Asgahr Engineer, *On Developing Theology Of Peace in Islam* (Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 2003) p 52; 162.

[92] Ibid., p 2; 162

[93] Asghar Ali Engineer, "what I believe" www.csss.ne-isla.com accessed March 2020.

Like Hick and others, he asserts that the role of religion in general and Islam in particular, is to bring people into communion with God and to working actively for the transformation of their society. Thus, he seeks to modify the traditional understanding of religion and its goals by thinking that the essence of it and of being a religious person is to be involved in the struggle for social justice and bringing about peace and love into human society. He is in perfect agreement with the biblical statement: "Ye shall know them by their fruits".[94]

However, upon scrutiny, I can see that the very basis of Engineer's definition of religion and of religious persons raises some fundamental problems. Firstly, his view denies the religions their essence and self-awareness as vehicles for salvation and repository for ritual devotions and observances. Secondly, Engineer is claiming that his soteriological view of religion is what Islam is all about. But he has not done much to prove this, although the contrary view - i.e., that Islam has nothing to do with altruistic or socially beneficial works- is also not established by default. Both require evidence. What we are concerned about here is whether one can rightly reduce the essence of Islam, or any other religion for that matter, to the performance of altruistic activities alone, as he seems to argue. Thirdly, Engineer recognizes *certain* core values of the Qur'an that he thinks serve as

[94] Matthew 7:16 (KJV)

anchor for Islam's ethical and religious worldview. He claims that these values are conveyed through concepts such as *'adl*-justice, *hikmat*-wisdom, *ihsan*, goodness or kindness, *rahmat* -mercy.[95] He probably thinks erroneously that acceptance of these values will automatically result in religious pluralism.

Anyone who is familiar with the Qur'an will not disagree on the much emphasis it places on justice-fairness, kindness-mercy, reason-wisdom, benevolence-compassion, etc., urging Muslims to uphold and defend these principles. But the benefit of all of this is pegged on a definitive set of beliefs and devotional acts required from the faithful. The verse of righteousness (Quran 2:177) as one example out of several bears a testimony to this fact. The importance of these ethical foundations for Engineer is that they must be applied to all actions, statements, or positions that a Muslim may take on any issues. Since our attitude to religious pluralism affects our interactions, it is important, in his view, that these principles should inform any opinion we may hold about other religions and their followers.

There appears to be a relationship between Engineer's Qur'an 'core values' and the theological principles of the Mu'tazilites, a group in early Islam that pitted God's justice against God's mercy.[96] The Mu'tazilites'

[95] Asghar Ali Engineer, "What I Believe," accessed from http//www.csss-isla.com; *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, p. vii.

[96] Riffat Hassan, "Asghar Ali Engineer: India's Reformist Scholar-Activist," in *Reformists Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T Hunter Routledge, 2009), p.179-80; p.186.

concern about balancing their view of God's justice with God's mercy – a person who receives guidance is rewarded with paradise and a person who fails to receive guidance stands condemned- led them to develop canon for rationalism or what may be considered as an early attempt at systematic theology. [97] Although they came to be known as *ahl al tawhid wa al 'adl*, (the Upholders of Oneness of God and His Justice), [98] nonetheless, they were not open to religious pluralism, as evidenced by their persecution of those who disagreed with them even among Muslims.[99] In fact, they were intolerant of religious difference so much as to have caused the first *mihnat*,[100] inquisition in Muslim history when they became aligned with the Abbasid Government during the time of the Caliph Ma'mun (d. 833 CE).[101] It still could be said that the Mu'tazilites' contributions in the field of philosophy and scholasticism made them influential in Muslim thought up to the present. This historical knowledge could have served a dual purpose and helped the Muslim scholars to draw lessons from past theological reflections

[97] See Phillip K Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (Macmillan, London, 1937), p. 245 ff. for a discussion of the basic doctrines of the Mu'tazilah.

[98] See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.88-89.

[99] Ibid, p 90; See also "Mu'tazillite" in Encyclopedia Islamica online. The debate of pluralism is tied in an interesting way to the question of God's justice vis a vis God's mercy. The pluralists are saying that if salvation were to depend upon where you were born how could that square with God's justice?

[100] See Phillip Hitti, op. cit., p 430.

[101] On the *mihnah* or "persecution of heresy", see Hitti, *Op.Cit*., p.430.

for the new discourses on religious pluralism. Acceptance of the core values of justice, etc. can sometimes be used to promote religious pluralism but it doesn't necessarily result in acceptance of religious pluralism. As Sikand observes regarding the works of Engineer, "One can discern in his thought and writings a multiplicity of influences:
Mu'tazilite and Isma'ili rationalism, Marxism, Western Liberalism, Gandhism, Christian liberation theology.[102]

Engineer also applies his knowledge of Islamic and world history to a specific issue in his analysis of problems of religious pluralism. In this respect, an important historical point of reference for Engineer was the period from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries when Spain was under Muslim rule. This is the period sometimes referred to as an era of "*convivencia*"[103] during which Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together peacefully and contributed to the growing Muslim civilization at the time. Engineer taps into the era to make an important point about how religious and racial persecution were experienced differently during that time, especially by Jews and Christians. In this regard, his point buttresses Hick's assumptions about the Muslims in the pre-Enlightenment co-existing peacefully with other religions or building a religious pluralism friendly

[102] Yoginder Sikand*, Muslims in India Since 1947: Islamic Perspectives on Inter-Faith Relations. (*London and New York: Routledge and Curzon, 2005), p.13.

[103] Joseph Lumbard, ed., Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition, (World Wisdom, 2009), p 315.

society.

He points out further that the Muslims did not persecute the Jews during this period. Rather, for the most part, it was the Christians that were persecuting the Jews. In his short essay, 'Pluralism and Islam' (Aug 2011), and more elaborately in his book titled: *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, Engineer states as follows: "It is also well-known fact of history that Islamic regimes never persecuted Jews and Christians and many Jews and Christians held high administrative offices under Abbasid, Fatimid and other Islamic empires".[104] Nevertheless, one may ask, 'Does it matter whether the Jews were persecuted by Christians or by Muslims?"
Regardless of what may have been the true picture during the '*convivencia*', it still could be said that certain events in early history of Islam involving hostilities between the Jews and the Muslims may be cited as counter-facts, standing in the way of appreciating this experience.

However, we still could agree that the part of history that he has invoked, "the *convivencial*" in Spain, supports his theory, i.e., that the Muslims had an experience of living peacefully with the religious 'Other' even to the point of affording the religious Other a protection. Thus, his point seems to be that the opposite of what happened then is happening

[104] Ali Emgineer, "Pluralism and Islam". He discusses this further in his *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 2003, p 158-9

now, i.e., that the West, in alliance with the Jews, or the West finding itself in the position of the defender of the Jewish people, allows the Jews to persecute the Muslims or the Arabs in Palestine. For Engineer, this is an issue of social justice, which constitutes an important principle of his religious pluralism theory.

1-) The Qur'an, *Shari'ah* and Hermeneutics

In his, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society*, Engineer reiterates a point regarding how the Qur'an should be understood and interpreted, "The Qur'an, a divinely revealed text, gives principles, values and guidelines. One must develop detailed rules in the light of these principles, values and guidelines. Fundamental values are divine but instrumental principles to implement them in given conditions are not."[105]

He believes that the Qur'an contains both the 'eternal' and the 'normative' as well as the spacio-temporal or the contextual elements, following examples of Fazlur Rahman, Farid Esack, etc. However, his definition of the 'normative' has been challenged by some critics for being inconsistent with the established norm in Muslim scholarship.[106] One critic, Yoginda Sikand, for example, suggests that Engineer is inconsistent about this. He states, "Ali is picking from the Qur'an whatever supports his views

[105] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society* (New Dawn Press, Inc., USA, 2005), p 4. See also, Engineer, "On methodology of Understanding Qur'an" at http//www.andromedia.rutgers.edu

[106] Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society*, p. 25-26.

and giving them the quality of being normative and other things that do not support his views as temporal..."[107]

Based on his above sated view of the normative and the temporal, Engineer thinks that certain practices that Islam discourages such as slavery and subjugation of women were difficult to eradicate in the traditional Muslim society due to the culture of the time. He persuades the modern Muslim scholars to take on the challenge of changing those things. He argues that these issues should be viewed the same way as the issue of religious pluralism.

Thus, he blames lack of progress in those areas on literalist interpretation of the Qur'an by early Qur'an commentators, whom he said, missed the opportunity to promote those ideals. In this respect, his thought intersects with those of Fazlur Rahman and Essack that traditional Muslim scholars and early Qur'an commentators did not do enough to support justice for women or to encourage religious pluralism, though some exceptions could be found.

2-) Engineer and the Unfolding of Religious Pluralism in America

Another dimension of Engineer's postulation on religious pluralism that

[107] Yoginda Sikand, "Asghar Ali Engineer's Quest for an Islamic Theology of Peace and Religious Pluralism", http://www.svabhinava.org/meccabenares/YoginderSikand/AsgharAliEngineerIslamicTheology-frame.php

I would like to comment on is his discussion of how pluralism has unfolded here in the United States of America. He notes that America has undergone two experiences of diversity and pluralism in its recent history, an earlier experience described as the "melting pot" and a later one known as the "mosaic". [108] "Mosaic model is much closer to the spirit of pluralism", so stated Engineer.[109] The melting pot model was adequate when majority of the immigrants first arrived from Europe in the period before World War 11. They were all white, Protestants with minority Catholics. The second wave of immigration took place after World War II. This brought immigrants from Muslim countries, India, Southeast Asia and the Middle East with a relatively large number of Muslims, Hindus, and so on. From that time, America began to have a new experience of diversity that has created the mosaic formula or model. [110]

This analysis by Engineer is analogous to Eck's description of the new experience of pluralism in America. According to Eck too, the melting pot developed from waves of European immigrants in the pre-WWII. Eck says

[108] Asghar Ali Engineer, *"Problems of Pluralism"*. Accessed from *www.csss-isla.com* 5/5/17.

[109] Asghar Ali Engineer, *"Problems of Pluralism"*. Accessed 4/16/20: https://raheelraza.wordpress.com/2011/08/04/pluralism-and-islam-by-dr-asghar-ali-engineer/

[110] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism", http// www.andromedia; *www.csss-isla.com/dr-asghar-ali- engineer/;* see also *"Interreligious dialogue – Its Significance and Rules" and "Problems of Pluralism"* at the same website; Accessed 4/16/20.

that after the September 11 attacks on America, the "We" is no longer defined in terms of Protestants, Catholics and Jews. America is opening up to becoming more inclusive of other cultural and religious groups that are now forming or transforming the religious landscape of the United States of America.[111] Here Eck discusses the "We" further from a wide range of perspectives.

3-) Is *Shari'ah* a human Product?

One of Engineer's most radical statements is that the *Sharī`ah* is a human product.[112] In *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*, he states as follows concerning the *Sharī`ah:*

Islamic *Sharī`ah* is a product of the various socio-cultural conditions of the people or peoples who produced it such that Indian Islam has its own distinct features different from Arab Islam, Indonesian different from Hausas etc., and so must be clearly distinguished from the Qur'an.[113]

According to Engineer, the interpreters of the Qur'an, like other human beings, are members of certain social groups, located in specific spatio-temporal and social contexts and consequently their understandings of the

[111] Diana Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion" (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol.75 number 4 December 2007) p.761.

[112] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Some Thoughts on Inter-Faith Dialogue" and "On methodology of Understanding the Qur'an" accessed from *www.csss-isla.com*

[113] Engineer, *On Developing* … p iii; viii.

Qur'an are colored by their own location. He claims that as a result of this their formulations of the *Sharī`ah* may not be treated the same way as the words of the Qur'an.[114] Statements like this caused Engineer to be vilified by those who take it as casting aspersion on the Qur'an.

This can be upsetting for the ordinary Muslims. But it only needs to be carefully understood because it can have two dimensions. If his statement, as it appears, is in reference to the extended elaboration of the Islamic law by the classical scholars or the extensions therefrom by scholars in any age, in that case, it may be true. Commentaries on the Qur'an and the elaboration of its laws as codified in the *Shari'ah* and Fiqh (Islamic legal system or Islamic jurisprudence) have never been considered as sacred as the revelation itself. The source of the law itself, the Qur'an, is what the Muslims believe to be sacred and immutable. The jurists and the Qur'an commentators in the classical time – or at any other time, even if they may believe they were being inspired in their interpretations or applications of the Law- did not regard their work as divine, sacred like the word of God, the Qur'an. All they were doing was to try to understand, interpret and apply the revelation as best as they could. Such efforts were limited by factors of the sociology of knowledge and by the circumstances and times in which

[114] See also, Yoginda Sikand, "Asghar 'Ali Engineer's Quest for an Islamic Theology of Peace and Religious Pluralism" accessed March 2020 at: http://www.svabhinava.org/meccabenares/YoginderSikand/AsgharAliEngineerIslamicTheology-frame.php

those scholars lived. As Rahman stated, no "significant interpretation" of the Qur'an can be "monolithic" and that there "is always both room and necessity for new interpretation, for this is, in truth, is an ongoing process."[115] In other words, what Engineer has said regarding Qur'an interpretation as a human effort that can be influenced by the time and by the men and women involved with it and subject to historical process will be correct for that reason.

On the other hand, if Engineer's above-mentioned statement was meant to suggest that the source of the Islamic law –the Qur'an is a human product, then his statement would be contrary to to what the Muslims, both their elects and their faith communities, hold about the Qur'an. Their tenacious belief is that the source of the Law is divine and that the Qur'an originates from the Supreme Being, Allah. This seems not to be what his statement implies.

So, it is important to know where the focus of his arguments really lies: Is it in denying the divine origin of the Qur'an or in claiming that the interpretive process is human and thus subject to historical process? As for the first proposition, i.e., challenging the divine foundation of the Shariah or denying the divine origin of the Qur'an, I think that the pluralists would not need to deny or contradict the established belief of a faith community about

[115] Rahman, *Islam* Op.cit., p 145; see also, Swidler ed., *Muslims in Dialogue – The Evolution of Dialogue*
(The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1992), p 313.

their scripture as condition for engaging them in dialogue about religious pluralism. More so, every religion claims something transcendental about their truth. But for his second proposition, the answer may be 'yes'. The interpretative process is human with a dynamic aspect that could be subject to historical process.

Muhammad Hassan Askari and His Religious Pluralism Hypothesis

Muhammad Hassan Askari (d.2008) was interfaith professor at several institutions around the world including most notably the Center for the Study of Islam and Christian- Muslim Relations, Selly Oaks Colleges, Birmingham, UK. This may have brought him into physical contact with John Hick, since, as I have earlier noted in the preceding chapter, the latter too taught and lived in Birmingham around the same time. Swidler mentions Askari as having previously served as the Chair of the Sociology Department of Muslim University of Aligarh, India and as an "authentic interreligious dialogue partner".[116]

Askari proposed a theory of religious pluralism similar to Hick's "Pluralistic Hypothesis". In a work he co-edited with Hick*, The Experience of Religious Diversity,* one can clearly see the highlights of his theory that utilizes the conflicts within the Abrahamic faith communities as a starting

[116] Swidler ed., *Muslims in Dialogue – The Evolution of Dialogue* (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1992), P 16.

point. His approach is unique for turning the Quranic polemics around to make important observations about how to understand the problems of religious pluralism from a Muslim scholars' perspective. His theory like the ones before is not without some serious problems, as will be shown shortly. Like many pluralists, Askari begins his essay with a proposition:

> Should one say that the known world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with their diverse and conflicting beliefs and claims, are at worst a scandal and at best a mystery, or should one at least tentatively assume that there is a purposeful, ongoing, creative movement of the religious history of humanity incorporating the whole of its past and present and carrying it into the future? [117]

Askari's hypothesis is grounded in a fourfold analysis of the nature of religious conflicts militating against mutual acceptance among religions. First, he recognizes four types of inter- religious discourses as, namely, the literal, the static, the symbolic and the dynamic.[118] From observation, it turns out that the two categories of the literal and the static have so much in common and are very similar in the effects they produce that they can be subsumed in one another. Similar is the pair of the symbolic and the dynamic in that they too work the same way. What does he mean by those categories and what are the implications? He seems to view the conflicts generated by obsession with literalism as tending to produce unhealthy and

[117] Hick and Askari, eds., The *Experience, p.*191.

[118] Hick and Askari, eds., op. cit., p. 192.

negative conflicts leading nowhere and possibly hurting religion. That is probably true for the literal and the static. The second pair – the dynamic and the symbolic- by its very nature derives from positive difference and lead to mutual awareness and understanding among religions, even if only at a higher level of reflection. For Askari, literal interpretation of religion or religious truth results in interreligious conflicts and antagonisms. He states:

> Diversity presupposes differences, and they are fourfold: literal, symbolic, static and dynamic. The conflicts that arise out of them seem to be governed by two paradigms: 1) differences which are literal are perceived on a static plane of reference and tend to engender destructive conflicts; and 2) differences which are symbolic are perceived on a dynamic plane of reference and tend to lead to creative conflict.[119]

How far is he willing to further his argument with respect to Islam, the Abrahamic religious traditions and other world religions? Askari would favor a symbolic interpretation of the religious truth, believing that this approach helps us to reach beyond the apparent contradictions of the truth claims of the various religions. This is because, as he states, "the nature of the symbolic is to point beyond itself."[120]

Another important premise for Askari's pluralism hypothesis is what he describes as antagonism between Islam and Christianity, which he also sees as offering the promise for mutual awareness and reconciliation between the two. He thinks that this idea can be applied to not only the Christian-

[119] *Ibid.* p 168.

[120] Ibid. p 168.

Muslim differences but also that of Islam and Judaism, and by extension, to differences among all of the world religions. According to Askari, "Diversity as creative conflict is one of the positive principles of religious dynamics… The example of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is for the purposes of this study a very instructive one…" [121]

In this regard, Askari cites the Quran verse:

> O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist, it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs (4: 171).

Three important points arise from Askari's understanding of this verse. First, he extends the notion of *ahl al kitāb* (people of the Book) to include the Muslims themselves. So, like the Jews and Christians, the Muslims too constitute another community of *ahl al kitāb* in that the warning: (Do not commit excess in your religion.) may be applied to them as well. Second, he explains "committing excess in religion" to consist in any of these faith communities' claiming that they have exclusive knowledge of God or that they have an absolute special relationship with God, just based on their self-awareness. Lastly, his opinion about what "the book" in the verse refers to;

[121] Hick and Askari (eds.), p.193 - 4

is it the Qur'an, the Torah or the Gospel that we hold in our hands? It is interesting to see how Askari has turned some of the Quran's arguments inwardly, by asking the Muslims to judge themselves with the criteria they are using to judge others.

According to Askari, the verse in reference (Quran 4: 171) indicates that God transcends the self-awareness of any of these religions and that the doctrine of any religion is not to be equated with God. As he says, 'the limits set within each religion are reminders that God transcends each religion by virtue of his mystery that eludes all description and unveiling'.[122] But he stops short of developing a concept similar to Hick's concept of noumenal /phenomenal attribute of God by which Hick says that the revealed God, or the Transcendent as revealed in any of the world religions, is different from God in his real self. Thus, a dichotomy is created between the nature of God as revealed in the scriptures versus God as truly is. The reason I suggest that this resembles Hick's idea derives from Askari's further statement that,

> To say the truth concerning God is not to say a true statement (proposition) about God, for such a statement presupposes knowledge about the part or the whole, change internally emerging or externally caused, or one or other aspect or quality, quantity or magnitude of a thing – and none of these are available to us concerning God.[123]

[122] *Ibid*., p.197.

[123] Hick and Askari, op cit., p 194.

Hick discusses this question in the chapter on "The Real, Ineffability and Criteria" in T*he Rainbow of Faith* and in other places in his works. There, he suggests that the God that the religious people worship might be different from God in His real self. Hick has been widely criticized for this view beyond what we are concerned about in this work.

1-) The Religions' Critical Affirmation of One Another and the Qur'anic Concepts of *tasdīq/ shahādah* in Askari's postulation

Earlier on, Professor Askari had stated that we should view the Abrahamic religions each as a plurality within its own realm, suggesting that the differences within each of these religions mirrors the differences among world religions. Thus, he views the Qur'anic polemics against Islam's two sister religions, Judaism and Christianity as coming from what he calls "affirmative- critical appreciation". "The diversity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, constituting as it does a meaningful framework of creative conflict, can be seen as mutually enriching through an affirmative critical appreciation of each by the others." [124]

Askari advocates for the three religions to confirm and witness for one another through a method of critical affirmation derived from the Quranic concepts of *shahādah* and *tasdīq* "affirmation of the past by the present, of the present by past: *tasdīq* must go both ways." He proposes "a sympathetic

[124] John Hick and Askari, eds., op. cit., p. 204

framework of mutual critique and affirmation" insisting 'There could be no such thing as exclusive and one-sided mission and witness, but a co-witness, a mutual mission'.[125]

Linguistically, *tasdīq* and *shahādah* share similar meanings as: 'testifying to the truth of something, witnessing for and accepting as true and real'. [126] In an essay by W C Smith, "Faith as at Tasdiq", *tasdiq* is defined as 'ratification, confirmation, attestation'. He states that it is "to recognize a truth, to appropriate it, to confirm it, to attain it, to actualize it."[127]

In the Qur'an context, *tasdīq* / *shahādah* refer to Islam's confirmation of the messages of the Prophets, Moses and Jesus and the affirmation of their faith communities as we see in several Qur'an verses such as for *tasdīq*, 2:41, 3:3, 4:47 and for *shahādah* Qur'an 2:143, 4: 41, 4:159, 22:78, etc. Mutual *tasdīq* is one feature of the Islamic system that could be used to facilitate reconciliation between Islam, Christianity or Judaism, if carried to its logical conclusion as proposed in this essay by Askari. The Muslims affirm the authenticity of both the persons and missions of the prophets of Judaism and Christianity. Islam will need to be reciprocated if this is to work for

[125] Op. cit., p. 195

[126] Edward Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon* (Edited by Stanley Lane Poole (William and Norgate, 1877).

[127] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Faith as Tasdiq" in: Islamic Philosophical Theology, ed. Parviz Murewedge (State University of New York press, Albany, 1979), p 106; For *shahādah* similarly defined, see Lane's as well.

bridging the gap of understanding and respect. Askari explores this idea further in another essay titled, "The Dialogical Relationship Between Christianity and Islam" along the same line. [128]

But at the same time the Qur'an attests to their truth, it also acts as witness against their errors - possible or probable- and the deviation of the two faith communities from the way of their prophet-messengers. Thus, it is at the same time both for and against certain claims of the Jews and Christians. This can be seen even in the import of Qur'an 5:48 used by many of these pluralists in their discourses. However, this dimension did not receive much attention in
Askari's essay.

This calls us to consider other two categories or concepts that often accompany *tasdīq* and *shahādah* as can be found in verses such as Qur'an 5:48 and 3:3. These two are called *furqān* and *haymanah* in Qur'an terminology. Taken together, the two would involve an idea of the Qur'an being the overseer and the criterion over the truth claims of those religions.[129] This may make Askari's proposition a little problematic in that this is unlikely to promote dialogue or accepting those religions on their own

[128] Hasan Askari, "The Dialogical Relationship Between Christianity and Islam" in L Swidler ed., *Muslims in Dialogue – The Evolution of Dialogue* (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1992), p 35-6.

[129] Both Tabri and Mawdudi provide materials in their tafsīr of Q.5:48 that can help us understand the problematic nature of these two concepts for religious pluralism.

terms. *Haymanah/Furqān* is what enables the Muslims to reclaim their authority over the two earlier scriptures. Askari does not devote due attention to this, which could have shown the limit of his theory. Thus, we can say that *shahādah* and *tasdīq* stand either in apposition or in opposition to *haymanah* and *furqān* in the Qur'an polemic / dialogical discourse. It would have been necessary for someone interested in conflict and resolution to account for *haymanah* and *furqān* alongside *shahādah* and tasdīq.

2-) Finality and Truth Claim

Askari writes concerning the truth and finality of Islam,

> If finality is a characteristic of truth, we dear not simulate God. But the question of finality comes back again and again on a different and equally significant t level, namely, that of certain pronouncements – 'I am the Way', or Muhammad is the last, is the Seal of the Prophets' , to take the well-known examples, one by Jesus and the other a Quranic reference. Is there a real conflict here?[130]

Askari cautions that we cannot ignore finality claim; we cannot relativize it, either. An important dimension of his theory consists in his attempted departure from relativizing or relational-izing finality claim. How he managed to do this is something of interest. He does it by using certain philosophical and interpretative devices. First, he observes that there have been several of finality claim statements including those made by the Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. Second, he wants us to view these statements as positive but

[130] Hick and Askari, eds., Op.Cit., p 209.

at the same time non-literal.

To resolve the conflict introduced by finality claims, I believe Askari may have taken recourse in the interpretations of Qur'an 24:35 (Verse of the Light). He states, "As soon as it downs upon us that these are mirrors, so polished, as it were, by the hand of God Himself that they reflect the Light which is not in them but from another source. We have then the vision of the real candle of God who is the Light of the heavens and earth.[131] He suggests that we can resolve the contradictions in the statements of these religious leaders by viewing each one of them as a mirror upon the light of God. So, to the extent to which a mirror reflects the light of the candle, to that extent it can make a finality claim. Thus, every one of them should be viewed as a true mirror of the Absolute with respect to the message they convey. And this, per his theory, will apply to such claims in the Abrahamic religions and by the Buddha, as well as similar claims in other religions.

Conclusion

The above has been concerned with analysis of important elements of Askari's theory of religious pluralism. Based essentially on Qur'an verses such as 2:41; 3:3; 4:171; 24:35, etc., his hypothesis also utilizes other aspects of the philosophical, the linguistic and the interpretative devices with

[131] Hick and Askari, eds., *The Experience*, p. 209-10.

significant outcomes. His idea that the religions live in conflict with one another

while being in affirmative relationships at the same time is something calling for more attention from religious pluralism scholars. How could we use this conflict for positive results remains still to be seen within the Abrahamic faith communities as well as among world religions? I might say here that a notion of conflict or opposition though subdued in Qur'an 49:13, it is there in the binaries of male and female, tribes and nations that often stay in antagonistic relationships. Notions of conflict still can be traced in Qur'an 49:13 in the binaries of male and female, tribe and nation with elements of difference and opposition mediated by al *ta'āruf* as a way to mitigate opposition and its negative effects, and to create opportunities for mutual recognition and cooperation.

Conclusion

The chapter engaged with the views of three Muslim scholars on religious pluralism who all based their theories around some Qur'an verses. These include verses conveying a general view of Islam as being the way of life followed by all the prophets sent to every nation and that those nations were also *muslims*. Their intent seems to be the inclusion of all faith communities within the scope of the Qur'anic notion of "people of the book" as we see particularly in the works of Lumbard and Askari. Quran

verses that address the diversity of religions at a broader level outside of the Abrahamic religions were viewed as providing the platform for Islam's openness to religious pluralism. Some of the other verses used by these theoreticians build on biodiversity in nature and on the principle of no compulsion in religion to address the issue of religious difference and to stress the importance of religious freedom especially in the work of Asgh. Engineer particularly draws much support from verses depicting natural biodiversity for his views on the possibility of religious pluralism. In Askari's theory we see how intra-religious conflicts can serve as checks and balances for the faith communities and as building blocks for conflict resolution in the sense that some of the verses focusing on differences often hide underneath them an undercurrent of affirmation and appreciation of the other.

CHAPTER 4

TAFSĪR: CONCEPTS, SCOPE AND TYPOLOGY

This chapter examines how the study of *tafsīr* impacts the pluralists' interpretations of the Qur'an. It adopts a dialogical approach that attempts to harmonize the divergent views of the scholars on the scope of *tafsīr*. Using a combination of old and recent works, classical and contemporary sources both in Arabic and English, I will analyze concepts such as taʾwīl*, tafsīr bi al ma'thūr, tafsīr bi al ra'y and al-tafsīr al-lughawī* as major *tafsīr* typologies of the discipline. Added to these is a new approach known as *al tafsīr al mawḍūʿī* (the theme-based *tafsīr*). The related field of *asbāb al nuzūl* will also be discussed. At every critical juncture, I will stress the relationship between these approaches and the various discourses on religious pluralism. I will argue that there are existing mechanisms within the field that support a pluralist interpretation of Qur'an 49:13 and that *tafsīr* is not a rigidified or locked up process; rather, it is malleable.

1-) Meanings and Scope of *Tafsīr*:

The Arabic word *tafsīr* derives from the trilateral root "f-s-r" (*fasara*) which means, 'to explain, expound, elucidate, or interpret.'[132] Referencing classical sources, Mahmood Ayoub notes that the letters in "f-s-r" can be

[132] See Arabic-English Lexicon, Edward W Lane, London: Williams and Norgate, 1863.

transposed as "s-f-r", in which case, it will mean, 'to expose, to uncover.'[133] Based on this, 'tafsīr can also mean uncovering the meanings of a text and exposing the deeper dimensions of it.[134]

Technically, *tafsīr* is defined in Badr al-dīn Zarkashī's *al Burhan* as: "the science of understanding the Book of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad and the method of explaining its meanings, of deriving its rules and accessing the wisdom behind its words and expressions."[135] Embedded in this definition of *tafsīr* is another terminology or concept known as *taʾwīl*. According to Ayoub, *taʾwīl* is derived from "*a-w-l*" which means 'to return or to revert'. *Taʾwīl* thus implies "going back to the original meaning of a word to see what its meanings and connotations are".[136] I will consider a few more significations of *taʾwīl* based on its usage in the Qur'an to argue that it is in fact a multivalent Quranic terminology. For example, in Quran chapter 12 verses 6, 21, 44 and 100, *taʾwīl* is used for the interpretation of dreams. In Qur'an 3: 7, it is related to (*al muhkam wa al mutashābih*), the decisive and the allegorical verses or (*al zahir wa al baṭin*) the exoteric and esoteric

[133] Mahmood Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), Vol. 1, P.20. Ayoub refers some of his ideas back to Zarkashi's *al Burhan*.

[134] Ayoub, Op. Cit., p 20. He states that this is as in the Arabic expression *imra't safirat,* meaning a woman who uncovers her face.

[135] Badr al din Muhammad Zarkashi, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. (Cairo: Dar al Turath, 1957), vol.1, p. 13.

[136] Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters, vol.1, p.20.*

aspects of the Qur'an, particularly, knowledge of its multivalent verses called *al mutashābihāt*. As for its usage in Qur'an 7:53, *taʾwīl* refers to the final fulfillment of the Qur'an message as indicated therein. In this respect, it could also be said that *taʾwīl* relates to eschatological events of the Day of Judgement.

Tafsīr and *taʾwīl* are both mentioned in the Qur'an with a descriptive adjective *ʾaḥsan*, as in Qur'an 4:59 and 25:23, which could mean better explanation, better interpretation and more appropriate. Occurrence of the phrases *ʾaḥsan tafsīr'* and *ʾaḥsan taʾwīl*' each once makes me think that *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* as modes of interpretation, and as human efforts, should be viewed as being in perpetual need for improvement. Thus, the two concepts of *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* together suggest that understanding the Qur'an – or at least some aspects thereof- could be better in any generation. They both could be taken as an indication for scholars to search for a more appropriate interpretation and application of the Qur'an message/meaning to relevant questions in every age and in every generation.

2-) *Tafsīr* and *Taʾwīl*: the Distinctions

Muhammad Hussein al Dhahabi, Badru al din al Zarkashī, Muhammad Abdul ʿAzim al Zurqanī and Mahmood Ayoub[137], all offer materials that can

[137] Muhammad al Dhahbi, *al tafsīr wa al mufassirun*, vol. 1, p 19-..; Badr al din al Zarkashi, *al Burhan*, vol. 2, p.146-153; Muhammad 'Abdul Azim al Zurqani, op.cit.., p3-10 and Mahmood Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 1, p. 18, 20-21.

be used to further reflect on the two concepts of *tafsīr* and taʾwīl.[138] The complexity of the matter is indicated for example by Dhahabi's statement, quoting al Nīsabūrī (Nishapuri, d. 1014), that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* such that "some commentators of our time cannot or will not be able to differentiate between the two!" [139] He further notes that the two concepts are used sometimes as 'interchangeable and arbitrary.' In Isfahanī's view, however, *tafsīr* is broader, more general while *taʾwīl* is narrower and more specific.[140] In another opinion of some of the scholars mentioned by Dhahabī, *tafsīr* is considered appropriate for individual words while *taʾwīl* is reserved for overall meaning of a Qur'anic verse or chapter and therefore more appropriate for the revealed scripture.

Furthermore, Dhahabī relates the views of Baghawi and Karachi stating that according to these two *mufassirs* (commentators), *taʾwīl* involves interpreting a verse with a probable meaning while maintaining the harmony and consistency of the overall idea, so that one part of the message does not contradict another. Māturīdī (d. 944) probably builds his own definition on this. He thinks that *taʾwīl* involves preference for a certain

[138] But the question as to which one of these two is more suited or more relevant for the purposes of this work is an open question; it depends on perception. One thing that is clear is that many of the yardsticks that scholars have used to differentiate between the meanings of the two terms (such *as al muhkam wa al mutashabih, al zahir wa al baṭin,* etc.) have no particular relevance for this research. This is in view of that fact that Quran 49:13 is not usually considered as belonging to any of these rubrics as far as I can say.

[139] Dhahabi, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 19.

[140] *Ibid*.

meaning or choosing one particular meaning out of several other available ones. If there is evidence to support this, according to Maturidi, it will be considered an acceptable *taʾwīl*. If not, it is blameworthy and unacceptable.[141]

A contemporary scholar, Ayoub seems to apply other criteria of differentiation to tafsīr and *taʾwīl* vis-à-vis the concepts of *muḥkam vs. mutashābih* (the decisive vs. the allegorical) or *zhāir vs. batin* (the manifest vs. the hidden or the exoteric and the esoteric) and *al lata'if*.[142] The first criterion derives from a characteristic of the Qur'an as having both *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* components (Qur'an 7:3). He suggests that *tafsīr* will apply to *muhkam* and zahir verses and *ta'wil* to bāṭin and *mutashābih (the hidden or the multivalent)*. The second criterion consists in what is called, in the language of the mystics and the Sufis, laṭaʾif *al ʾishārāt*, which Ayoub defines as "subtle allusions to spiritual realities which are thought to be beyond the grasp of ordinary people, beyond the ability of the generality of Muslims to discern".[143]

A third rubric discussed in Ayoub's work deals with the background and orientation of the commentator *mufassir*, such as the commentator being a mystic or Sufi, a linguist or philosopher, etc. Any of these scholars

[141] Dhahbi, op. cit., p.20

[142] Ayoub, op. cit., vol.1, p.33

[143] *Ibid*.

can follow a meaning from the Qur'an to arrive at what one might call a customized interpretation, thereby doing what is specifically considered as *taʾwīl.* Ayoub said, regarding Fakhr al din al Razi's *tafsīr*, for example, that "his approach was at once theological, metaphysical, mystical, and even popular".[144] The orientation or concern of a *mufassir*, a scholar-activist or a researcher too can lead them to take a hard look into certain verse(s) of the Qur'an, which in their opinion address their concerns, that could result in a new understanding of the connection between the verse(s) and their subject of inquiry. This point is important for analyzing the views of the pluralists and will be further explored in this work regarding how the various conceptualizations and orientations of the scholars based on tafsīr / ta'wīl approaches *help* us to relate Qur'an 49:13 to the discourses of religious pluralism.

3-) Major *Tafsīr* Typologies: Traditional Concepts and Their Classification

According to Sharqawi, *tafsīr* works can be classified into two major types: *tafsīr bi al ma'thūr* (transmission/narration-based) and *tafsīr bi al ra'y* (rationality-based).[145] His reductionist approach can be challenged by the fact that scholars have traditionally recognized three typologies, *ma'thūr, lughawī* and *tafsīr bi al ra'y*. Nevertheless, his view does have some benefit if

[144] Ayoub, op. cit., p. 33.

[145] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sharqawi, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Rīyaḍ: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2004), p. 55.

we can consider the *lughawī*, i.e., the linguistic or language-based *tafsīr* typology as neutral, and I am inclined to this. But there is the fear that an important typology that has long been recognized in scholarship might be lost to us. Thus, I consider it necessary to account for the three major approaches, as briefly as possible, focusing on how this may impact theories of religious pluralism.

Ma'thūr or *al tafsīr bi al ma'thūr*: Interpretation by Narrations

Ma'thūr is defined as interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an, by Hadith or Sunnah and by narrations from the companions.[146] Sharqawi cites Tabari as example of scholars who applied it in this sense. Narration or textual reference is important for this typology and in this respect, it is of three kinds: Quranic, Prophetic and commentaries of the Companions (Sahabah) and the Followers (Tabeen). If we like, we might say that it relies on four types of authorities or sources, the Quran itself, as parts of it explain others, the Hadith or Sunnah, narrations of the Companions and narrations of the Tabi'in, the Followers. Saeed briefly discussed the different levels of texts covered in this approach and their interactions. [147] As for Sharqawi's

[146] Ma'thur is otherwise the term used for everything transmitted as explanation of the Qur'an form the Prophet, from the companions or from the successors. This may have something to do with a certain
opinion that ma'thur or Sunnah based *tafsīr* is used to uphold the authority of the early generations, the first Muslims, – like the idea in Christianity about the role of the Church Fathers for interpretation of the Bible.

[147] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran – Towards a contemporary approach* (*London and New York: Routledge, 2006*), pp. 3-4, 46 and 48.

claim that the principles of *ma'thūr* are 'the most secure and its theory the best founded' for relying

primarily on the Qur'an and on the hierarchy of interpretative authorities,[148] more will be said later concerning the problematic aspect of this statement. Some of the scholars want to limit *tafsīr* to the *ma'thūr* typology, claiming that this method alone guarantees interpretation authenticity as we can see in the above statement. This assumption has not been widely tested except perhaps within a narrow circle of the scholars of Hadith. On the wider plane, it continues to be challenged and remains yet to be convincingly proven.

Linguistically, *ma'thūr* derives from "*ʾathar"* or "*ʾathārah"*,[149] which means something passed down from older generations, a legacy, transmitted knowledge, or piece of information that acquires authority for having derived from the ancestors, etc. This word is mentioned in Qur'an 36:12 to denote a bequeathed value, a legacy, etc. In Qur'an 46:7, it connotes a vestige of knowledge or tradition: 'Bring me a scripture before this, or (*ʾathāratin min 'ilm*) some vestige of knowledge (in support of what you say), if ye are truthful".[150] Meanings mentioned in the dictionary include "footprints of the ancestors", "traces of their deeds that are left behind",

[148] Sharqawi, op. cit., p. 56.

[149] According to Lane *op. cit.*, *athar* derives from tracing the footprints of a camel, a mark left on something, a narrative, story, etc.

[150] Http//myislam.org/surah-yaseen/ayat12

their "footsteps", etc. These definitions fall within the scope of the theoretical concept of *al tafsīr bi al ma'thūr*.

Tabari's Approach to *Ma'thūr*:

Protagonists of this approach, chiefly represented by al Tabari, Ibn Kathir, etc. provide justifications for the veracity of their methodology as well as a critique or criticisms of *tafsīr* approaches that depart from it. According to Tabari,

> The necessity for this approach derives, (1) first, from the special status of the Qur'an as a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds, (2) from the medium by which the Qur'an was revealed, the Arabic language, (3) from the special role and authority of the Prophet to whom it was revealed and who explained or exemplified it to mankind and (4) from the special role of the first Muslim commnunity who learned and implemented the Qur'an firsthand. It is an accepted fact that bypassing the knowledge transmitted through these sources will produce undesirable consequences for the proper understanding of the message of the Qur'an in any generation. [151]

Tabari develops his theory recognizing three types of exegetical or interpretative possibilities- the *tafsīr* that can be learned only from the Prophet, the tafsīr that is known only to God and the *tafsīr* that speakers of Arabic language generally can grasp due to their knowledge of Arabic. He further compressed this into two categories, *tafsīr* that no Muslims can afford to not know or to be ignorant about, and another kind that is known only to the scholars. Ibn Kathir, another advocate of this methodology,

[151] Ibn Jarir al Tabari, *Jami' al bayan 'an ta'wīl 'aay al Qur'an* (*Bayrut, Lebanon: D*ar al Fikr, n. d.), vol. 1, p.32-34.

upholds a similar view and both claim their theses were grounded in the teachings of the early Companion Ibn Abbas.[152]

Tabari then proceeds to explain the three practical steps for the interpretation of the Qur'an. The first step is to look within the Qur'an itself; since it is believed that the Qur'an explains itself or that it contains its own interpretation. He states, "What is sketchy somewhere in the Qur'an is elaborated upon elsewhere and what is generalized in one context is specified in another". The second step is to search for *tafsīr* meaning in the Sunnah of the Prophet, because the Prophet is the primary interpreter of the Qur'an. He cites as evidence Qur'an 16:44 and 16:64 where God said, "We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought." Ibn kathir states similarly that *"al sunnah hiya al shārihah li al Qur'an al muwadhia iqh":* the prophetic practice serves as the elucidator and commentator for the Qur'an. The Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum; it was revealed to a Prophet who acted upon it and demonstrated its meanings.[153]

According to Tabari, the third step toward exegetical success is to look for *tafsīr* meanings in the knowledge transmitted from the Companions of the Prophet. His justification for this is that the information received

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[152] Jane McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir" in *Approaches to the History of Qur'an Interpretations*, ed., Andrew Rippin (Clarendon: Oxford, 1988), p. 48-9.

[153] McCaullif, op. cit., p 56.

through the Companions constitutes an eyewitness account on the revelation of the Qur'an. The Companions were involved in its events, and they experienced them firsthand. So, they are thought to have "perfect knowledge, complete understanding and full awareness of its meanings and dimensions."[154] A similar role or authority is advocated for the generation immediately following that of the Sahabah, the generation of the first major *tafsīr* scholars.

6-) *Tafsīr* of the Companions and Their Students, the Tabeen

According to Thameem Ushamah, "Some of the companions were excellent in their knowledge of *tafsīr*".[155] He mentions as examples the rightly guided caliphs (al khulafaa' al Rashidun) especially, the fourth one, Ali ibn abi Talib and others including Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, Ubay ibn Ka'b and Ibn Abbas, whom he said, correctly, became the best known of them all. Saeed summarizes the major points of this discourse in the following words:

> The Companions who engaged in exegesis had several sources for understanding the Qur'an: part of it explains other parts, information from the Prophet both oral and praxis; their own understanding of what the Quranic context meant. They were also familiar with the language of the Qur'an, the overall social context of the revelation, the Prophet's ways of thinking, and the norms and values and customs of the

[154] Ibid., p 56.

[155] Thameem Ushamah, *Methodolgies of the Quranic Exegesis* (Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, 1995) p 14.

Arabs…etc. [156]

When it comes to the era of the *Tabiʿūn*, the generation succeeding the Companions, he said that differences in tafsīr began to be noticed as the first tafsīr masters such as Mujahid, Ikrimah, etc. emerged. Personal opinions began to be expressed and a tafsīr scholar could freely exercise his *ijtihad* if the tafsīr was concerned with matters open to personal opinion. Generally, a *tafsīr* or interpretation by one of them that enjoys approval by others carried more weight and was considered authoritative. If the masters differed in their opinions on *tafsīr* the view of anyone of them would not assume authority over those of the others.[157] Saeed's views here echo the statement by Ibn Taymiyah in his *Muqaddimah*.

What is important in this discussion is that differences in *tafsīr* go back to the early times. It began somehow with the Companions and continued through the period of the Successors into later generations.[158] This being the case, the differences arise from several factors much of which could be attributed to the various intellectual levels of the people and to the changing social and cultural developments taking place in the Muslim

[156] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group), p.9.

[157] Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah, *Muqaddimah* trns. Abdul Haqq Ansari (UK: al Hidayah Publishing, 1993), p 59.

[158] Ibn Taymiyah, op. cit., p 13.

societies at different times.

The above brief review on the role of *al tafsīr bi al ma'thūr* is necessary for the application of Qur'an 49:13 to the religious pluralism discourses for several reasons. Firstly, it is important because of the role that narrations have played in *tafsīr* works on the interpretation of Quran chapter 49 in general and on verse 13 in particular. Secondly, it is important also because, although my work will draw on the views of traditional scholars, it will not treat tradition as perfect, complete in every sense and closed such that we cannot understand anything different from the assumptions of the traditional scholars of the past. There could always be new ideas and different interpretative views that could be applied to new situations. Thirdly, the notion of tradition as observed in this (will embrace the rationality based tafsir, the linguistic, Sufi or philosophical approaches as (inclusive) parts of the tradition) work and understood here will not exclude rationality based, us from benefitting from rationality based, linguistic, Sufi or philosophical approaches, etc. to interpretation. Part of the goals of this work is to bring these methodologies into collaborative relationships as an aid to understanding my subject matter from broader dimensions. For that reason, transmitted knowledge can serve as a building block for the application of Qur'an 49:13 to the religious pluralism discourse.

Criticism of the *Ma'thu*r Approach

Perhaps, the most severe criticism of narration-based tafsīr came from the scholars of Hadith themselves. For example, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) is reported to have stated that narration in *tafsīr* is one of the three things having no authentic basis.[159] A similar report from Shafi' said that only about 100 reports on *tafsīr* can be considered genuine. Smith views these reports as indicative of "a questionable activity about tafsīr in the first century." [160] While we may not agree completely with that view, we can still say that it undermines the arguments for the veracity of the *ma'thūr* type of *tafsīr* in the manner claimed by some of its proponents. So, the earlier statement by al Sharqawi, i.e., that *tafsir bi al ma'thur* is about perfect cannot be sustained in the face of criticisms like these, going back to the early times.

Furthermore, Tabari's and Ibn Kathiri's embrace of the *ma'thūr* as presented above needs to be understood carefully because narrations are not always necessary for the interpretation of every Qur'an verse. Of course, not every narration we can come across in tafsīr sources will automatically assume an interpretative authority. It is also unlikely that scholars in the caliber of Tabari and Ibn

[159] Jane Smith. *An historical and semantic study of the term "Islam" as seen in a sequence of Quranic commentaries* (Cambridge Massachusetts*:* Harvard University, 1975), P.37.

[160] Ibid., P.37.

Kathir necessarily see narrations as barring other efforts regarding interpretation or to assume that narrations alone, genuine or otherwise, is all it takes to produce a good tafsīr.

Tafsīr bi al ra'y: Interpretation by Personal Opinion

Tafsīr bi al ra'y is another major approach with significant influence on the discipline both in theory and practice. It has its roots in the diverse levels of humans' ability to reason and understand. Scholars have used ra'y sometimes approvingly and some other times disapprovingly for a variety of conditions.

The basis for *tafsīr bi al ra'y* consists in human reasoning and human understanding, seeing with your inner eye, intellectual speculation, or rationality.[161] In the technical sense, *tafsīr* scholars have used *ra'y* to signal different things such as: 1) an interpretation that is not based on transmitted knowledge. 2) Pejoratively, as *tafsīr* that is not supported by the clear rules and principles of the Sharīʿah and its proper application. 3) An interpretation considered as not deriving from or not based on correct understanding of the Arabic language.[162] When these dimensions are combined (any of these

[161] See Muhammad Shafiq, "The Meaning of ra'y and nature of its usage in Islamic law (an examination of selected cases of the legal reasoning in the period of 'Umar, the second Caliph)," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 23 no. 1 (Spring 1964): p 21-32.

[162] Ahmad Von Denver, *'Ulum al Qur'an (An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*), (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), p. 130- 131; Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah, *Muqaddimah fi usul al tafsīr,* trns.
Muhammad Abdul Haqq Ansari (Birmingham, UK: al Hidayah Publishing & Distribution, 1993), p. 60-64.

is found) in a *ra'y* based *tafsīr*, it is to be called *tafsīr bi al ra'y al mujarrad*, i.e., *tafsīr* by conjecture or mere opinion. In this case, according to Ibn Taymiyah, the interpretation is dubbed as one based on (*hawā*) whim, personal desire or sectarian tendency or deviation (*zaygh or dhalal*) that may be found in the *mufassir* commentator.[163]

However, this is only one arm of what I like to consider as a balance two-arm scale of the traditional view on *tafsīr bi al ra'y*. The vast majority of *tafsīr* scholars agree about the role of human reasoning in the understanding of the message of the Qur'an. This (is a position based on) position is based on several Qur'an verses urging the believers to contemplate its meaning and to ponder its signs. Such verses include Qur'an 12:2, 23:68, 38:29 and 47:24.[164] Those verses that appear to extol human reasoning provide scholars of *ra'y* and the philosophers a chance to appropriate the Qur'an for their enquiries. Saeed for example provides materials to show that in fact *ra'y* has a recognized important role in *tafsīr* including traditional *tafsīr*.[165]

Even a traditional scholar like Ibn Taymiyah would agree with this. Thus, Ibn Taymiyah in his *Muqaddimah* recognizes two categories of *tafsīr bi al ra'y,* one is the praiseworthy type "*al ra'y al mamduh"* and the other one

[163] Ibn Taymiyah, op. cit., p 64.

[164] See a further discussion of this in Ibn Taymiyah's *Muqaddimah*, p.13.

[165] Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur.an,* p 57.

is the blameworthy or the condemned type, "*al ra'y al madhmum*".[166] According to Ibn Taymiyah, improper use of *ra'y* applies to someone who disregards the *tafsīr* knowledge that has been transmitted from the Prophet, the Companions and the Followers or one who just says something out of their mind, 'just from their mind, without proper knowledge'.[167] After reviewing several reports discouraging *ra'y* and considering them carefully, he concludes that those reports are in reference to or applicable only to the person who interprets the Quran 'without proper knowledge'.[168] Thus, it appears that the traditional approach only advocates that human reasoning should follow upon text and transmitted knowledge, not the other way round. This shows that the position of the so-called traditional scholars is not based on a total rejection of reason, but against unrestrained and unfettered use of reason and reckless disregard for the Prophetic interpretation and the interpretations of the *Sahabah* and *Successors* where such information is credibly available.

Acceptable method of *ra'y* utilizes the human reasoning after due consideration to narrated reports and proper application of the linguistic and Islamic legal principles and procedures.

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[166] Dhahbi, Muhammad Husain, op. cit. vol 1, p. 265. See also discussion on the debate over *ra'y*, p 264- 5.

[167] Ibn Taymiyah, *Muqaddimah*, p. 13; 60-61.

[168] Ibn Taymiyah, op. cit., p 64; Dhahbi, op. cit., p265.

Both *ra'y* and *ma'thūr* have come to dominate the discourse and to serve as the two major platforms for critiquing works on tafsīr, with the one of them viewed more favorably than the other by groups of scholars. This has generated some controversy for a long time.[169]

In addition, advocates of ra'y also derive their evidence from Hadith, specifically, the well- known Hadith of Muʿādh in which Prophet Muhammad apparently authorizes the use of human reasoning to decide on matters where there are no clear-cut pronouncements from the Qur'an or Sunnah.[170] This Hadith is used to support approval of the use of personal reasoning after the Book of God and the Sunnah of His messenger have been considered. This being carefully done, and necessary backgrounds and new dynamics well considered, it can be hoped that the new information coming out of this can fall in the category of *al ra'y al mamdūh*- praiseworthy use of reasoning.[171] The diversity that can be observed in the approaches of the *mufassirun* following any of the major methodologies - *ma'thūr*, ra'y-based or linguistic approach - discussed below - presents a unique opportunity for scholarship in general and for the discourses on of religious pluralism in particular. It creates an opportunity for rationality and transmitted

[169] See Sharqawi, *op.cit*., p 122.

[170] https://sunnah.com/abudawud:3592. Accessed 10/10/2020.

[171] Ibn Taymiyah, *Muqaddimah*, p.60; Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, p 57; Fred Leemhuis, "Origins of the *tafsīr* Tradition" in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Clarendon: Oxford, 1988), p. 16 – 17.

knowledge to work together collaboratively for solving any new intellectual challenges that may come up at any time as we can see in the efforts of the pluralists – Muslim and non-Muslims, as well.

Al Tafsīr al Lughawi - Linguistic Approach to *Tafsīr*

In my view, whatever can be said in favor of or against the two earlier discussed typologies of *tafsīr* will have similar effects on *tafsīr al lughawī* since language is indispensable for any of these approaches. Language is the medium by which all *mufassirun* assert their interpretative authority. Thus, knowledge of the Arabic language has been advocated as a requirement for commentary and interpretation. Going back to Ibn Abbas, the linguistic aspect has been recognized and emphasized as an important interpretative tool.[172] Here I will explore at least three dimensions of this question.

Firstly, the Qur'an affirms itself as an Arabic text stating in several verses that it has been revealed as (qur' ānan 'arabiyan) "Arabic Qur'an"[173] and (*bi lisanin arabiyin mubin*) in plain Arabic, or according to the standard usage of Arabic, etc.[174] Despite this fact, the Book contains a few, if not many, Islamic concepts that defy the Arab's simple understanding of their

[172] Andrew Rippin, "Lexicographical Text and the Qur'an" in *Approaches*..., p. 158 ff.

[173] Qur'an 12:2

[174] Qur'an 26:195; 44:58

language. Examples occur even in well-known concepts such a *salat, zakat, hajj*, etc. which have now acquired specialized meanings as well as several other Islamic terminologies that acquired new meanings after the revelation of the Qur'an. The result is that even during the Prophetic period the Muslims had a need for clarification of certain terms used in the Qur'an, because the terminologies now carry new Islamic meanings. Hamzah provides some examples from literature of concepts, ideas and phraseologies requiring clarifications to include the term *zulm* which has been used both for ordinary wrongdoing and for the major sin of ascribing partners to God, *shirk*. Aisha's question regarding the meaning of: "His account will be made simple" and Ibn Abbas' effort to understand the meaning of the word "*fattara*", etc. are also cited in literature.[175] One example often mentioned in Arabic grammar works was the question by a Bedouin about the meaning of Qur'an chapter 9, verse 3.[176]

Secondly, early *tafsīr* works were linguistic based, serving as an aid for understanding difficult or rare words of the Qur'an. They also provide explanations for words that may have had their origins in other languages before entering into the Arabic lexicography. Thus, they came in the form of

[175] Feras Hamzah, "Tafsīr and Unlocking the Historical Qur'an: Back to Basics?" in *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Quranic Exegesis (2ND / 8TH – 9th/15TH* C.) (London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), Karen Bauer, ed., p 22-3.

[176] See the views of tafsir masters which also include detail grammatical analysis of the sentence structure of Q.9:3 at: http://www.quran7m.com/searchResults/009003.html

a lexicographical companion to the study of the Quran. Such efforts came under the subjects of *Gharib al Qur'an, Mufradat al Qur'an* and *Ma'ani al Qur'an* and served as a precursor to the full-fledged *tafsīr* works that appeared later in the development of the discipline of *tafsīr*.[177] If this was the case in the early period, as existing literature suggests, it would be expected that later generations of the Arabs and non-Arab Muslims would more likely have a greater need for linguistic help for Qur'an interpretation.

Thirdly, classical *tafsīr* scholars such as Tabari from the traditional school, Zamakhshari from the scholars of *ra'y*, etc., all treat *tafsīr* as a linguistic endeavor in significant ways. They recognize that there is a minimum *tafsīr*- ability available to anyone who understands the Arabic language. In this respect, the ancient and the linguistically more competent are in a better situation. They are more capable to understand the Qur'an based on their knowledge of its language of revelation. For this reason, the early Muslims who were original Arabs – even as there may exist different levels of linguistic mastery- could claim better competence in this field, or have it claimed for them. Nevertheless, there could still be different levels of mastery of the language among people, Arabs or non-Arabs at any given time.

An implication of this question - particularly for religious pluralism -

[177] Andrew Rippin, "Lexicographical Text and the Qur'an" in *Approaches*, p. 158.

concerns the debate over the linguistic and the technical meanings of concepts such as *islam*, *shari'ah*, *din* etc., as we can see in the works of the pluralists, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The pluralists, such as Lumbard and Askari, etc. want to limit the technical meanings of the terms, *muslim, mu'min*, etc. They are seeking to free these concepts from the limitations imposed by traditional scholars so that these attributes can be applied equally to everyone who believes in God,
particularly 'the people of the book'. This, in fact, constitutes a significant portion of the debate of Islam and religious pluralism that remains unresolved and problematic.

Wansbrough's typology of *tafsīr*

John Edward Wansbrough (1928 – 2002) was an American historian and an orientalist, who taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He is said to belong to the 'revisionist school',[178] a group of western orientalists who casts doubt on the authenticity of early Islamic narratives by seeking to apply what is called "the historical-critical method"[179] to Qur'an study, without much success. Wansbrough's contribution to Quran study continues to have impact on the development of *tafsīr* in Western scholarship and his legacy is being continued through contemporary scholars

[178] Feras Hamzah, op. cit., p.22-3. This is how Hamzah refers to him in this work.

[179] David R Law, *The Historical-Critical Method – A guide for the Perplexed*, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., New York, 2012.

such as Andrew Rippin, d. 2012.

In his *Principles of Exegesis*, Wansbrough states, "I propose here to experiment with two criteria of classification, the one stylistic, the functional, which seem to me to be mutually corroborative in producing the following exegetical typology: Haggadic; Halachic; Masoretic; Rhetorical; Allegorical …".[180] He claims that there is a relationship between biblical study and *tafsīr* exegesis and proceeds to introduce terminologies and concepts such as haggadic, halakhic, Masoretic that remain current and functional in Western *tafsīr* scholarship.

Wansbrough is known to have studied the *tafsīr* of Zamakhshari, although there has been no conclusive evidence that he studied the entire work, according to Hamzah.[181] Apparently, he does not recognize narration as an authoritative resource for interpretation. His student Andrew Ripin too continued with this approach by attacking the *asbāb al nuzūl* narratives and considering them fictitious, a question that will be discussed further in this work, since its relevant for the *asbāb al nuzūl* of Q49:13 / especially in the section on the occasions of revelation of Q.49:13.

Generic Study of *Tafsīr* in Contemporary Scholarship

Another *tafsīr* subfield that is related to this work is the study of tafsīr

[180] John Wansbrouh, *Principles of Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 119.

[181] Ferras Hamzah, op. cit., p 22-23

as a genre. According to Karen Bauer *et al*., the study of *tafsīr* as a *genre* involves "the study of context, genre, constraints and hermeneutics ... because *tafsīr* represents not the one true understanding of the Qur'an, but rather a certain type of understanding, and certain type of knowledge about the Muslim holy Book."[182]

Bauer and his colleagues suggest that we can explore the aims of the *mufassirun* through a careful reading of their prefaces:

> In their introductions (i.e. *muqaddimahs*), exegetes state their aim and discuss their methods of interpretation and in doing so they explain, what for them, constitute the appropriate sources through which the words of the Quran are mediated, thereby exposing the general aims of the genre.[183]

This point is particularly relevant to classical *tafsīr* as we can see in Tabari, Zamakhshari and many others. In some of these works, the prefaces often contain nutshell information on the approach, the justifications, etc. for the tafsīr work. Some contains elaborate discussions of important theoretical and methodological questions, as exemplified in McCaullif's accounts on Tabari and Ibn Kathir in her essay, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The views of Tabari and Ibn Kathir."[184]

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[182] Karen Bauer, ed., *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Quranic Exegesis (2ND / 8TH – 9th/15TH C.)* (London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), p 1.

[183] Karen Bauer, *op.cit,* p.1.

[184] Jane D. McAulliffe, *op.cit,* p. 46-62.

I see their viewpoints as having immediate relevance for this study on the Qur'an and the discourses of religious pluralism especially with respect to how the meanings of tafsīr are generated and mediated and how the personality of a commentator / *mufassir* becomes infused with his meaning-generating efforts. It could be understood from their statements that, by using a variety of mechanisms, tools and resources, including but not limited to the text of the Qur'an itself, Prophetic *tafsīr*, *tafsīr* of the Companions, philology, philosophy, etc., interpreters are able to mold and remold meanings, in an open field where meanings continue to be constantly tested and contested. This point reminds me of two terminologies I became familiar with in Dr. Swidler's seminars. These terms being "exegesis" and "eisegesis", with the former sometime defined as taking meaning from the text and the latter as infusing meaning into the text. As far as I knew then, exegesis was good and appropriate for the scriptures while eisegesis was thought to be bad. Now, I look at this differently. Neither of the two methodologies is necessarily bad by itself. As a matter of fact, both are happening at any time that we attempt exegesis. What can be bad therefore are the purposes and motives for which eisegesis is used. Anyone familiar with the sociology of knowledge should not have a problem with this because it arises from personal and social influences on an interpreter and as part of the subjective-objective elements of interpretation. Borrowing

from Ibn Taymiyah's previously discussed view on the two types of reason-based interpretation as being either good or bad (mamdūh / madhmūm), eisegesis too could be acceptable and praise-worthy, if it relies on some evidence and is not used to contradict an established principle of the Shari'ah. It would be bad and unacceptable if used without support in sound scholarship.

Al Tafsīr al Mawḍūʿī - Theme-based Approach to Interpretation

Al tafsīr al mawḍūʿī is a modern development in Quran exegesis. Generally, it could be described as topic or theme-based approach to interpretation.[185] Started by a group of Azharite scholars in the Department of Quran Studies, this new genre aims at developing new hermeneutics that focuses on comprehensive study of specific themes or terminologies in the Qur'an. Scholars involved in this new field hope that studying all the occurrences of a terminology could help us gain a deeper dimension of the Quranic usage of the particular term. One of the leading scholars of *tafsīr mawḍūʿī*, Abdullah Saeed, defines it as 'the study of a particular topic in the

[185] Rotraud Wielandt "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary" in Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, ed. Jane McAuliffe (vol. 2 E-1) pp 125- 140; see p. 138 specifically for a discussion of various definitions of tafsīr mawdu'i).

light of all relevant verses throughout the Book'.[186]

Another scholar in this field, Ahmad Zahrani, states that *tafsīr mawḍūʿī involves*

"selecting all the Qur'anic verses that have a common theme for study regardless of where those verses occur in the Quran, collecting all of them and studying them together comprehensively".[187] These scholars seek to connect their work with an age long *tafsīr* tradition by asserting that their work is an extension of, or derives from, the major approach that emphasizes interpreting the Quran by the Qur'an, known as *al tafsīr bi al ma'thur* or *tafsi*r al Qur'an bi al Qur'an. Thus, they consider specialized *tafsīr* works such as commentaries on the legal rulings of the Qur'an (*tafsīr al aḥkām*) and commentary on the inimitability of the Qur'an *Iʿjāz* al Qur'an, etc. as forerunners in that these works also follow a thematic order.

Saeed mentions as a major objective of *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* that it aims at "presenting the comprehensive message of the Qur'an in a format accessible to all enquirers".[188] This conceptualization calls to question how the new

[186] Abdullah Saeed. *Interpreting the Quran – Towards a Contemporary Approach*. Routledge London and New York, 2006 (electronic copy). See also Rotraud Wielandt "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary" in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (vol. 2 E-1) pp 125- 140; p 138 specifically presents and discusses various definitions of *tafsīr* mawdu'I by different scholars.

[187] Ahmad Zahrani, *al tafsīr al madhooee lil Quran al Karim wa namadhij minh* (Islamic University: Madinah, n. d.), p 11. See also, Abdul Qadir Muhammad *Mansoor, Mawsu'at 'Ulum al Qur'an* (Allepo: dar al qalam al 'arabi, 2002), p 148 and *al muqadimat al asasiyah fi 'ulum al* Qur'an (Leeds, UK: Markaz al buhuth al Islamiyah, 2001), P 389.

[188] Abdullah Saeed. Interpreting the Quran – Towards a Contemporary Approach. Routledge London and New York, 2006 (electronic copy); see also Wielandt, op. cit.

methodology is different from the past practice in *tafsīr*. In my view, what is needed is a limited scope of activity that can be more easily achieved and one that builds on the existing tradition rather than duplicates it. So, if they mean by their statement that they would provide a full coverage of some selected topics, it probably would have been more attainable than to attempt to cover the entire message of the Qur'an. To aim for providing a comprehensive coverage of the entire message of the Qur'an will be much more difficult, because this is what all or most existing commentaries claim to be doing, but the scope of the Qur'anic meanings continues to be larger than their projects. So, there will be need for them to redefine and narrow down their scope.

1-) Critique of the Procedures for *al tafsīr al mawḍūʿī*

Saeed states regarding the procedures for analyzing Qur'anic topics, Select a theme that is present in the Quranic text, identifying relevant term(s) upon which to base a search for passages that are relevant to this theme. The most encompassing term forms the title of the research. Care should be taken not to impose foreign concepts such as "democracy", but rather to seek Quranic expressions such as *shura* and allow the Qur'an to speak for itself.[189]

[189] Abdullah Saeed. *Interpreting the Quran – Towards a Contemporary Approach*. Routledge London and New York, 2006 (electronic copy); see also a discussion of this in Wielandt, op cit.

The questions arising from the above statement by Saeed are: How does the Qur'an address diversity and multiplicity of religions, religious pluralism, in a manner still in keeping with its unique religious worldview? Is there a particular Qur'anic terminology or a theme to be considered for religious pluralism for example? What are the boundaries between the polemical and the dialogical aspects of the Qur'anic interfaith discourse and what term or terms would guide us to that? Is religious pluralism a Quranic terminology so we can find out how many times and occasions it occurs in the Qur'an? Is there an equivalent term for religious pluralism in the Qur'an? These questions need answers that I don't see their study providing.

Saeed also suggests that in addition to searching for related terms we should look for opposites and antonyms. In his words,

> After searching for a particular word (such as *'ilm* for 'knowledge'), a researcher must draw upon experience with the Quranic text to perform related searches that pertain to the theme without the word itself being present. One example would be to search for the antonyms (such as *jahl*, 'ignorance').[190]

The example provided above with the pair or the binary of '*ilm/jahl* (knowledge/ignorance) is indicative of the problematic nature of their suggestion. When we look closely into Quranic usage, we could hardly find any instance where *jahl* is used as a direct opposite of *'ilm*. *Jahl* is often used in the Qur'an to connote obstinacy, stubborn denial of truth or acting

[190] Saeed, op. cit.

contrarily by someone who may have knowledge. If someone who is supposed to know acts ignorantly, they will be considered as not having the right knowledge, in that case, a *jahil*.[191]

Another of their suggestions regarding Mecca and Medina revelations goes as follows:

> After gathering relevant verses, categorize them as far as possible in order of revelation, at least in terms of Meccan or Medinan. Consult works of traditional commentary to determine the meaning of the individual verses, and to be fully aware of relevant details such as Prophetic explanations, contexts of revelation,abrogation, and relation to other verses (e.g. general vs. specific) as explained by previous authorities.[192]

While the above may be a useful step, it is important to also realize that certain topics cannot be brought under one terminology, even as we take advantage of the inflectional nature of the Arabic language. For example, looking for an equivalent Quranic terminology for pluralism is ruled out for several reasons. First, because pluralism is a foreign language. Second, the terminologies that are subsumed under the discourse of interfaith and Muslim relations with other religions are many and different, and oftentimes they do not share common roots.

In other words, there are no categorical terminologies used in the Qur'an for religious pluralism but concepts that are understood from the Qur'an's

[191] https://lexicon.quranic-research.net/data/05_j/169_jhl.html Accessed 3/7/2021

[192] Several of these scholars including Saeed, Wieland and other Arab scholars all conceptualize the subject in his manner.

general orientation and its overall message to convey this meaning.

In past and contemporary studies, the most used terms in the discourse of religious pluralism include, as examples, concepts such as *munāzarat*, *muqāranat al ady* ān, *ta'addud al ady* ān, *hiwār al adyān* and *al tasāmuh* (polemics/debate/dialectics, comparative religions, interfaith or interreligious dialogue, religious tolerance, etc.). Strictly speaking, these terminologies are not found in the Qur'an. This is why it becomes necessary for us to look for dynamic equivalence(s) for religious pluralism wherever it can be found within the corpus of Qur'anic literature. This is the only way this purpose can be adequately fulfilled. Rather than insist on a Quranic word, we should be open to explore new concepts and terminologies that have evolved over time in the development of theories of Muslim interfaith relations and religious pluralism. *Tasāmuh* (religious tolerance, so called) emerged from this and is not a Qur'anic terminology *per se.* Al ta'āruf - like al tasāmuh- signaled in Qur'an 49:13 seems to me to be possibly another terminology that can be applied to the discourse of religious pluralism.

Going back to other beneficial aspects of their suggestions, we can consider the advice that materials should be gathered and classified into general rubrics such as Meccan or Madinan and that researchers should pay attention to occasions of revelation or context of revelation. This is crucial for any serious exegetical effort. However, it should be borne in mind that assumptions about what subjects will yield to the Meccan / Madinah

corpuses are sometimes arbitrary and non-definitive. Although with respect to Quran chapter 49, this has been established as a Madinah revelation consistent with the view that most issues of elaborate social conducts are enunciated in the Madinah period. Overall, their theory does offer some insights and can prove to be more beneficial as it becomes better scrutinized.

Asbāb al Nuzūl and it's Implications for the Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13 and for the Discourses on Religious Pluralism

Exploring *asbāb al nuzūl* (SBN) becomes necessary to answer the question as to how Quran 49:13 may not be limited by the narratives on race relations it has been associated with and how it can be more broadly applied to the discourse of religious pluralism. The challenge is to discover what may be there in the interpretation arena, both in theory and practice, that enables us to make the transition from a race focused difference underlying many commentaries on this verse to another type of difference that operates in a similar way- i.e., the religious difference. How those narratives have been understood and applied in some tafsīr works can be helpful for answering this question.

Sometimes referred to as SBN in this work, *a*sbāb al nuzūl is an integral part of *tafsīr* literature. It has been variously translated as "occasions of revelation", "revelatory backgrounds", "context of revelation"

and "causes of revelation".[193] Ayoub appears to be more consistent in using occasion of revelation in his works.

As a technical field, classical and contemporary scholars such as al Zarkashi, Ayoub, Phillips and von Denver, define SBN as "the science that investigates the occasions,
circumstances, persons and events surrounding the revelation of the Qur'an."[194] SBN does not investigate the entire Quran, but the part of it believed to have been revealed in response to certain circumstances, incidents, or about certain individuals in the period of revelation. Therefore, events that occurred before or after the period of revelation do not fall under the scope of its investigation. Nevertheless, SBN might have retrospective effects when later events share a resemblance with past occasions.

The word *sabab* (pl. *asbāb*) has been used for causality and occasionality[195] and occurs in the Qur'an with meanings and significations such as follows:

[193] Von Denfer, op. cit., p.90; Phillips, op. cit., p. 193.

[194] Badr al din Muhamad al Zarkashi, *al Burhan fi 'ulum al Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al turath, 1957), vol., 1 p. 23; Ayoub, op. cit., pp 4 and 32; Bilal Phillips, *Usool at-tafseer: methodology of Qur'anic explanation (*Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic publishing House (IIPH), 2005), p. 193; Ahmad Von Denver, *'Ulum al Qur'an (An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), p. 90.

[195] Lane's definitions include: a rope, tie of affection, accord and a thing of any kind by which one reaches or gains access to another thing; a rope or means by which by which one reaches or gains access to water; a means by which a thing is brought about, etc. Edward Lane, Arabic – English Lexicon, William and Norgate, London 1863: Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane (tyndalearchive.com)

Qur'an 2: 166- means of support or connecting (being cut off).

Qur'an 18: 84- a way to accomplish one's goal, the means or the tool that facilitates attaining a particular goal.

Qur'an 22:15 - a ladder to climb up, a rope or any means of ascending to the sky. Qur'an 38:10 and 40: 37 - ways of access or pathways to the heavens.

As shown above, *sabab (sing.) and asbāb* (pl.) both have been used in a number of Quran verses with a range of meanings such as "means of support or means of connecting (Qur'an 2:166)", "something that facilitates the attainment of something else, a tool for accomplishing a goal" as in Qur'an 18:84, "ladder to climb up with, access or means of ascending (22:15)", etc. In most cases, it generally indicates the means of achieving something or attaining a particular goal without which it will have been impossible or very difficult to achieve. Therefore, a connection may be established between the linguistic meanings of the term and the actual role of SBN in Qur'an interpretation. The point I am trying to make here is that, when properly conceived and applied, SBN can offer a lot of opportunities for scholars to explore the meaning of the Qur'an from broader perspectives and can facilitate better understanding of its message. Since arriving at correct interpretation and deeper meaning becomes the goal of the *mufassir*, SBN comes handy where it is available. Some illustrations may be apropos in this connection:

1 "You are to me like the back of my mother".

One of the verses that best illustrate the significance of *asbāb al nuzūl* in Quran interpretation is Qur'an 58:2, known as the verse of *zih*ār: "You are to me like the back of my mother".

According to sources, the verse was revealed concerning the case of one who likens the back of his wife to that of his mother, *zih*ār an idiomatic expression used by pre–Islamic Arabs for intent to divorce, talāq.[196] In the pre-Quranic era when an Arab man makes a statement like this to his wife, it is considered a divorce writ. It is narrated that an incident of this occurred during the time of the Prophet which involved a man and his wife among the Companions of Prophet Muhammad. Wahidi states that the lady was Khawlat bnt Thaʿlabat and her husband who made the statement was Aws ibn al Samit.[197] It is said that upon hearing the statement from her husband, Khawlat went to the Prophet to complain and that while she was there the verse of chapter 58:2 was revealed: "Those among you who make their wives unlawful to themselves through zihār - by saying to them: "You are like my mother's back." They cannot be their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave birth to them."[198]

[196] See a brief discussion of the origin of *zihar* in *Taysir al Rahman al Rahim fi IIkhtisar Tafsir al Qur'an al Azim* by Muhammad bn Riyadh al Athari, (Rushd: Riyadh), vol 2, p 969.
[197] Ali Ibn Ahmad al Wahidi, Asbab al nuzul, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), p 147

[198] Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc, NY, 2008.

Thus, the verse nullifies the effect of the utterance by stating that divorce does not occur by the mere statement. This is true not only for this couple but all other cases of the type. Annulment by this verse of the effect of the statement goes beyond this incident because the language of the verse is general even though it was revealed concerning this occasion. In the following, I will illustrate with a few more examples how *asbāb* may be related to the subject of this inquiry.

2 – 'To Allah belong the east and the west' (Qur'an 2:115)

Another example of asbāb al nuzūl (SBN) consists in a report on the revelation of Qur'an 2:115: 'To Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces, there is the Face of Allah.).[199] Wahidi narrates that the verse was revealed while the prophet was on a journey in order to make it permissible for him and his followers to pray facing the direction of their travel.[200] If this verse is understood at its face value, it could mean that Muslims do not need to face the direction of the *Qiblah* whenever they pray. But as reports indicate, it is a concession granted to travelers to pray toward any direction their journey might take them whether riding on the back of a camel, in a motor cade, on train or airplane. Ibn Kathir states that this is limited to the non-obligatory prayers or

[199] Yusuf Ali, op cit.

[200] Ali Ibn Ahmad al Wahidi, *Asbab al nuzul*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), p 73

the voluntary Sunnah prayers only.[201] The SBN enables us to see that the original command for Muslims to pray to the direction of the House of God remains in place while this may be an exception for travelers. As we would see further, reported SBN of Qur'an 49:13 too could point us in different directions as to how to understand and apply the directive: *li ta`ārafū* (that you may know one another) in different contexts and situations.

3- "Eat and drink whatever you like"! (Quran 5:93) Quran 5:93 states:

> There is not upon those who believe and do righteousness [any] blame concerning what they have eaten [in the past] if they [now] fear Allah and believe and do righteous deeds, and then fear Allah and believe, and then fear Allah and do good; and Allah loves the doers of good.[202]

SBN helps clarify the correct understanding and application of this verse. According to Wahidi, the verse was revealed to console those who were worried about their fellow Muslim who had died in the period before intoxicants were prohibited.[203] Their brethren who witnessed the prohibition had a concern about the fate of their fellow Muslims who had died while still consuming intoxicants and before they could abandon it and repent. How could the fact that they passed in that state impact their belief? The verse answers this question by affirming that there was no sin upon them; they would not be held accountable for what they did in the period

[201] www.recitequr'an.com/tafsīr/en.Ibn-Kathir/2:115.
[202] www.recitequr'an.com/tafsīr/en.Ibn-Kathir/5:93 (accessed 8/13/2021).

[203] Wahidi, op. cit., p 73

before the prohibition. The *sabab* al nuzūl helps to clarify the possible misunderstanding that could arise from the apparent meaning of the verse, i.e., that it is permissible for believers to eat and drink whatever they like.

4- Qur'an 6:82 and 31:13

The next example is of particular importance for the discourse of religious pluralism as a type of SBN that helps to distinguish between the linguistic definition of a Qur'anic expression and its new Islamic meaning. It consists in the use of the Arabic word *zulm* which could be used either for wrongdoing or acting oppressively, considered as a minor sin, as in Qur'an 6:82 or for associating a partner with God, i.e., *shirk* or polytheism, as in Qur'an 31:13: "Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with iniquity (zulm), those are they who shall have the security and they are those who go aright"

> "And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice"."[204]

Concerning the verse of Quran 6:82, it is said that the Companions of the Prophet had asked, `O Allah's Messenger! Who among us did not commit *zulm* against himself?' He said, it is not what you understood from it. Did you not hear what the righteous servant (Luqman) said, "O my son! Join not in

[204] http://www.recitequran.com

worship others with Allah. Verily, *shirk* is a great *zulm* (wrong) indeed (31:13).[205] Therefore, the word *zulm* here in Q.6: 82 refers to the same as in 31;13.

As earlier discussed in the section on tafsīr al lughawī, certain Qur'anic words and expressions take on new meanings and connotations while still retaining a vestige of, or a portion of their original meaning in Arabic usage thereby providing multiple choice of meanings that could be appropriated for various reasons in different situations. The above examples emphasize the relevance of SBN for Islamic rulings in general and for Qur'an interpretation, in particular. It shows that the value of SBN cannot be restricted to haggadic story telling cases only as suggested by Andrew Rippin and those scholars who deny the positive role of asbāb al nuzūl for Qur'an interpretation and contextual understanding of its message.

Andrew Rippin (d.2016) vs. Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328) on *asbāb* al nuzūl

In his *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (2001), Professor Ripin claims that many reports of *asbāb* are inauthentic or conjectural.[206] He further asserts that SBN only serves to provide a narrative for Qur'an interpretation. His assertions obscure an important point about SBN in *tafsīr* scholarship and reveal his inattentiveness to the views of the traditional

[205] www.recitequr'an.com/tafsīr/en.Ibn-Kathir/6:28; Wahidi, p 73

[206] Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Routledge, 2001), pp. XV11; 12.

scholars about the nature of SBN reports. The fact is that traditional Islamic scholarship had recognized problems with conceptualizing *asbāb* and had been cautious about it. About seven centuries before Ripin, Ibn Taymiyah had offered a critical theory of SBN.

According to Ibn Taymiyah, "the statement that this verse was revealed for this reason or in this case usually could mean one of two things: that this event happened and a portion of the Qur'an was revealed in response to it, or it could mean that this case is covered by this same revelation or verse though it may not have been specifically revealed for that."[207] So a statement of SBN could serve as *tafsīr* rather than a report of the actual circumstance, or actual occasion. This also could be one way to make sense of what Ahmad von Denver means by "definitive" and "probable" categories of SBN.[208]

That SBN is mainly haggadic, i.e., story–telling as claimed by Rippin, seems to be unsupported by a careful analysis of the views of traditional scholars, especially the more scholarly ones among them. Rather, it has been shown that SBN functions in both haggadic and halakhic (legal) matters and can have a decisive role in a legal or jurisprudential matter, such as the permissibility of prayer by a traveler in the direction of their journey, riding

[207] Ahmad ibn Taymiyah, *Muqaddimah…*, (Birmingham, UK: al Hidayah Publishing & Distribution. 1993), p 22.

[208] Von Denffer, op. cit., p 92.

on the back of an animal or in an aircraft- that is not haggadic in nature. It also can play a decisive role in determining the meanings of certain Quranic terms as shown in the above-mentioned examples.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed several conceptual and analytical frameworks used by Qur'an interpreters in their *tafsīr* activities. Narrations, linguistic and textual analyses, use of reason, rationality, or philosophy, etc., all have been stressed in various degrees by scholars of every orientation. All of this in different ways impacts pluralist interpretation. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the various genres of *tafsīr* discussed in this chapter, contribute to the pluralist debate in particular ways. The duality of many Qur'an terminologies that allow them to be interpreted sometime linguistically and sometime technically provide both challenges and opportunities for broader perspectives on both sides of the argument. A problem as well as an opportunity arise from the role of *asbāb al nuzūl* as to whether and how they can be applied to new situations sharing a resemblance with those originally reported. It appears that many tafsīr scholars take hints from asbāb that help them analyze other situations that they consider relevant for their various discourses, as will be further explored in this work from classical and contemporary works.

CHAPTER 5

QUR'AN 49 (*SŪRAT AL HUJURĀT*): CHAPTER OF THE CHAMBERS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT

This chapter engages with overall context of Qur'an 49 with a special focus on the various narrations on the occasions of revelation of the opening verses1-3, and verse 13 which are more cogent for my overall argument in this dissertation. Also, the chapter considers the views of some Qur'an commentators particularly Ibn Kathir and Mawdudi on those narrations and how they apply those reports to matters that were important for them during their times. Finally, I will also discuss in this chapter an Islamic legal theory, known as qa'idat al 'āmm wa al khāṣ (Principle of the general and the particular), its role and implications for applying Qur'an 49:13 to the discourse of religious pluralism.

1-) Qur'an 49 as a Medinat Revelation

Qur'an Chapter 49 derives its title from the word *al hujurā*t (pl. of *hujrat*), meaning bedrooms or chambers.[209] This refers to the dwelling apartments of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. It was reported that one day an incident occurred when some Bedouin Arabs yelled out to the Prophet from outside of his house saying: "O Muhammad! Come out." in an

[209] The Private Apartments' according to Mohammed Pickthal, *The Glorious Qur'an Translation*. Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2009.

impolite and disrespectful manner.[210] Verse number four, where the word *hujurat* occurs in the *surah*, specifically refers to this incident.

The general theme of the chapter deals with public manners, civil relations and social etiquettes such that it has been known as the chapter of etiquette among some commentators. A contemporary Qur'an scholar and author of *Fī Zil*āl Sū*rat al aKhlāq* (In the Shade of the Chapter of Etiquettes), Abu Faris summarizes the major concern in the chapter as follows: "The chapter deals with important principles of public behavior and civil interactions such that some of the commentators have described it as the chapter of public etiquettes."[211] In this case, the *sūrah* is focused on three types of relationships. Firstly, it addresses (laid down) the guiding principles of interaction between Prophet Muhammad and his followers, establishing the respect due to him from the members of his community in their relationships and interactions with him. Secondly, it regulates the relationship among Muslims, laying down the code of conduct for their interactions as brothers in faith, a relationship that should be based solely on mutual respect, compassion and kindness. Thirdly, the theme crystalizes in the injunction on *al ta`āruf* (mutual acknowledgement and respect) among mankind in general based on their common origin. Thus, it provides the foundations upon which Muslim - non-Muslim interactions and

[210] Usually, a Quranic surah is named after a rare word, even or story, etc. discussed in it.

[211] Muhammad Abdulqadir Abu Faris*, Fi Zilal Surat al Akhlaq (*Amman: dar "Ammar Publishing House*,* 1992), p. 127.

relationships should be based and organized. For this reason, the chapter has also been described as a proclamation of brotherhood of mankind by other contemporary Quran commentators and scholars such as Bilal Philipps and Muhammad Asad, etc. For example, Bilal Phillips notes the gradual shift in the address from "fellowship of the believers to the universal brotherhood of all humans".[212]

The significance of tracing the time of the revelation of the chapter lies in the fact that the formation of the Islamic *Ummah* went through two distinct periods: the early period in Mecca when the Muslims were weak and oppressed and the later time in Madinah during which they established their own state. Evidence for the revelation of this chapter during the Medinah period comes from both historical and contextual aspects of the *surah*. More relevant here is the contextual and the thematic. The point here is that questions about civic responsibility, public ethic or interfaith relations as a major Quranic theme, though have a basis in the Meccan period, did not receive elaborate treatment until during the later period in Madinah. This is logical, especially with respect to interreligious relations, since it was in Madinah where the Muslims first encountered the reality of living with the non-Muslim religious Others and when addressing the principles of co-existence with members of other faiths became inevitable or unavoidable as

[212] Philips, *Tafseer*, p. 108.

a socio-political necessity.

As Engineer observes on this subject, "In Madina there was considerable presence of the Jews and the pagan Arabs of other tribes. There did exist a religious other…. a real threat: the real other was tribal and religious at the same time."[213] It is important to note here how Engineer ties the religious and tribal other together like the two faces of the same coin. So, it appears that for the Muslims at the time, in many cases, the religious other was a component of both the religious and the tribal other. As a result of this, perhaps, we can begin to view the terms such as *qabīlah*, *sha'b* as constitutive of or comprised in layers or levels of identities beyond the abstract definitions. If we can view these terms as not being religious-neutral, this will help us to better understand them in the context of inter-religious / inter- tribal relations.

Asbāb al Nuzūl of Qur'an 49:1, 2 & 3

Qur'an 49 may be called a chapter of many occasions or many asbāb. Several narrations of revelatory backgrounds have been reported about many verses of this *surah* in the book of al Wahidi. These include especially the opening three verses and verse thirteen, the main subject of this work. The following are some of the key points of Wahid's revelatory background reports:

A- A Disagreement between the Caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar

[213] Engineer, *On Developing* … op. cit., p 149.

Concerning verses 1-2, Wahid reports that these were revealed as a result of a disagreement between Abu Bakr and Umar, the two leading Companions, when Prophet Muhammad consulted with them about appointing a leader for the tribe of Tamim who had sent a delegation to the Prophet requesting him to do so. It is said that Abu Bakr suggested al *Qa`aqā' ibn Ma`a bad* while Umar thought that al Aqra' ibn Hābis was more suited for the position. Abu Bakr seems to be upset by this. He said, 'You just wanted to oppose me'. They debated the mater raising their voice in the presence (assembly) of the Messenger of God. It is said that the verse was revealed regarding this event to call attention to this improper act".[214]

B- A second report by Wahidi attributes the occasion of the verses to a Companion of the Prophet called Thabit Ibn Qays Ibn Shimaz. It is reported that he was "loud and hard of hearing.

When he spoke with a person, he always raised his voice." [215] A third narration in the book of Wahid attributes the revelation of these verses to one instance of an uncivilized behavior of some Bedouin Arabs with Prophet Muhammad:

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[214] Ali Ibn Ahmad al Wahidi, *Asbab al nuzul*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), p 142-3. See also *Sahih al Bukhari*, vol. 5; Book 59; Hadith 653, known as 'Hadith Ikhtilaf al Umarayn', i.e., report concerning a disagreement between the two Umars, i.e., Abu Bakr and Umar. Arabic linguistic usage normally refers to two people with the name of the more popular one (Hadith 368, Bukhari, vol. 6, book 60).

[215] Wahidi, p 139.

> Some people went to see the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, and found him in his private apartment, so they started calling him: 'O Muhammad! O Muhammad!' Allah exalted is He, then revealed (Lo! those who call thee from behind the private apartments, most of them have no sense. [216]

These narrations and other similar ones found their way into many commentaries where they were used to stress different matters relating to the subject. In some cases, the commentators expound the scope of perception to include other matters important for their tafsīrs**.** As examples of how the commentators use these narrations to discuss specific issues that matter to them, thereby extending the scope of interpretation, I will briefly discuss here two instances from tafsīr Ibn kathir's *tafsīr al Qur'an al 'azim* and from Mawdudi's *al tafhīm*.

1)- Ibn Kathir's Views

A Sunni scholar of hadith, *tafsir*, history etc., Isma'il bn Umar ibn Kathir, d. 1373 is the author of the celebrated *Tafsīr al Qur' ān al 'Azīm also* known as *T*afsīr *ibn Kathir* and the historical work, *al bidāyah wa al nih*āyah (*The Beginning and the End*.)[217] His tafsīr follows the methodology of the ma'thur school. He was a Shafi' scholar and a student of Ibn Taymiyah. His *tafsir* is considered one of the most authoritative Sunni commentaries at the present.

[216] Wahidi, p 139

[217] Ibn Kathir, *The Beginning and the End*., op. cit.

Ibn Kathir's narration on the opening verses of Chapter 49 consists in the Hadith of the delegation of the companion Mu`ādh Ibn Jabal to Yemen by Prophet Muhammad, known as the Hadith of Mu`ādh:

> Harith ibn Amr narrated: Some men among the companions of Mu`ādh said that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, sent him to Yemen and said: "How will you judge?" Mu`ādh said, "I will judge according to what is in the Book of Allah." The Prophet said: 'What if it is not in the Book of Allah?' Mu`ādh said, "Then with the tradition (Sunnah) of the Messenger of Allah." The Prophet again said: What if it is not in the tradition of the Messenger of Allah?
> Mu`ādh said, "Then I will strive to form an opinion (ijtihad)." The Prophet said: Praise is due to Allah who has made suitable the messenger of the Messenger of Allah.[218]

He then comments as follows:

> In this narration, the order of allegiance for Muslims in religious and legal matters is the same, as in all other matters: in successive order, the Book of God and the Sunnah of His messenger take precedence over personal opinion of an Islamic scholar. Based on this, a scholar's opinion may come only after looking for meaning inside the Book itself, in the Sunnah and associated tradition.[219]

As a scholar concerned with authority of the text, Ibn Kathir's commentary here is consistent with his definition of *tafsīr* and its how to do. It is curious that he has not said that the hadith is the *sabab* for the verse, but he obviously has made a connection between the two, i.e., Quran 49:1-2 and the Hadith of Mu`ādh. At the time Ibn Kathir was writing his *tafsīr*, the question about the authority of the Hadith versus a scholar's opinion was

[218] Hani al Hajj, ed., Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn kathir (Cairo: Tawfiqiyah) n.d., vol 3, p 396.

[219] Ibid., p 397

subject of intellectual debate among traditional scholars, the philosophers and the scholars of ra'y. His teacher, Ibn Taymiyah had just produced his famous work on reason and revelation *Dar' ta ʿārudh al `aql wa al naql*, which aimed at discouraging personal opinions in the fundamentals of religion.[220] But as I have shown in the previous chapter, their opposition to reason is not total and unbounded; it is in fact methodologically limited. Thus, we could say that Ibn kathir's application of the verse to this raging issue may have been influenced by the social condition of scholarship at the time. We will see another example of this approach in the next work by Mawdudi.

2-) Maududi's Views:

Islamic scholar-activist, journalist, Qur'an commentator and a prolific writer, Abu A'la Maududi (d. 1997)[221] can be cited as example of a modernist Qur'an commentator who has considered the question raised in the opening verses of Quran 49 more broadly by referencing it for contemporary issues of the day. In his commentary on the opening verses of *al-Hujurat*, in *Tafhim al Qur'an* [222], Mawdudi goes beyond what is categorically mentioned in the

[220] See Ibn Taymiyah on Reason and Revelation: A Story of Dar' ta'arud al 'aql wa al naql by Carl Sherif El- Tobgui (Brill: 2019) p 78 ff.

[221] An Anthology of Quranic commentaries, eds, Feras Hamzah and Sajjad Rizvi with Farhan Mayer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) vol. 1, p. 51.

[222] *Tafhim al Qur'an* first published in 1942 and is being widely read both in English and Urdu.

verses or the asbāb narrations to state that the verses apply to people's private and public lives and to people in position of authority. "They cannot legislate by their personal opinion. Legislations must be based on the law of Allah, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Allah's messenger. The scholar's own opinion can only come after that" [223] - an example of the interaction of text and method. Using the intertextuality method, he views a relationship between the opening verses of Qur'an 49 and Qur'an 33:36 in that they both require a Muslims not to have a personal opinion on any matter until he / she has first found out about God's and His Apostle's instructions regarding the matter. "The Muslims are discouraged from resolving their own maters by themselves but rather to ask or look for guidance from Allah and His messenger in doing so." Similar to Ibn Kathir's situation, Mawdudi too, at the time he wrote his commentary, was involved in the struggle to write the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and so his words, "they cannot legislate by themselves", etc. resonate with what was going on at the time. Like Ibn kathir, he will be more interested in applying the verse to the legislative process that was going on in his country as an example of the dynamic interplay of text and method in both cases. These two models provide additional support for applying Qur'an 49:13 to the discourse of

[223] Abu A'la Maududi, The Meaning of the Qur'an trns. Abdul Aziz Kamal (Lahore-Pakistan: Islamic Publications Ltd., vol. xiii, 2nd edition, 1988), p. 88-9.

religious pluralism and will be explored further in the next chapter.

Ibn Kathir will be more likely to apply the verse to the issue of the authority of the text than to the question of the dispute between Abu Bakr and Umar probably because, in his time, personal opinion – a phrase used sometimes in reference to philosophy- was a much widely contested issue. This was an era in which philosophical musings were sometimes promoted over the authority of the religious text. Also, maybe, Ibn Kathir does not consider Wahid's narration as authentic enough or as having interpretative authority on the verse. So, he does not have to use it in either case

Asbāb al Nuzūl or Occasions of Revelation of Qur'an 49:13

Most of Wahidi's reports on occasions of the revelation of Qur'an 49:13 is concerned with racial prejudice or race-based discriminations. Here are three narrations from the book of Wahidi:

1- The narration of Ibn Abi Mulaykah on the authority of Ibn Abbas mentions that a companion called Thabit Ibn Qays made a racially derogatory remark about an anonymous companion in an assembly with the Apostle of God. It is said that the Prophet overheard him and questioned him about it:

> This was revealed about Thabit ibn Qays when he made a remark about the man who did not stand up for him or let him sit where he wanted: 'What the son of so-and-so [referring to his mother]!' The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, said: 'Who mentioned that woman?' Thabit stood up and said, 'I did, O Messenger of Allah!' The Messenger of Allah said to him: 'Look at the faces of those present'. And when he looked, he asked him: 'What do you see?' He said: 'I see white,

red and black people'. The Prophet said: 'Well, you are not better than any of them unless it be through the fear of God and good conduct)'. Allah, the Exalted then revealed this verse.[224]

A second narration in Wahidi's book on the authority of Muqatil specifically mentions Bilal as the subject of a racist attack or treatment by some of the Quraysh aristocrats:

> Muqatil narrates that Bilal climbed on top of the Ka'bah (the House of God) to proclaim the call to prayer (adhan) on the day of the conquest of Mecca. This made some of the nobles of the Quraysh angry and some of them secretly made some racist remarks about Bilal. 'Atta' ibn Usayd, one of the nobles of Quraysh, said: ' Thank God my father did not witness a day like this'. Harith ibn Hisham, another Meccan dignitary said, 'Did Muhammad not find any other caller to prayer except this black raven?' Abu Sufyan, on the other hand, said: 'I am not going to make any comment; I am afraid that the Lord of heaven will divulge what I say![225]

A third narration of Yazid Ibn Shajarah states that the Prophet visited a slave boy who was sick and later died. It is said that the Prophet was personally involved in his burial arrangements and that his action was viewed by some as showing preference for the boy over the nobles among his companions.[226]

My concern with these narrations is not to validate or invalidate them; rather it is to explore what the commentators make out of it. Investigation about the authenticity of the reports has been conducted by

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[224] Ali ibn Ahmad al Wahidi, *Asbab al Nuzul*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Royal Aal al Bayt Instituet of Islamic Thought, 2008) p. 142.

[225] Muqatil, (a tabi'i) - generation after the Companions, was a student of Ibn Abbas and one of the early
tafsir masters. He died in the year 150 H.

[226] Wahidi op. cit., p. 142.

scholars of Hadith, *tafsir* and 'ulum al Qur'an, such as for examples Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti in his *Itqan* and a contemporary scholar Muqbil Ibn Hadiy in his *al Sahih al Musnad,* etc. The question for my work is whether the import of those reports can be applied to other types of human differences, especially the religious difference and whether scholars past or present have done something similar in traditional and contemporary scholarships.

Mawdudi's Views in *al Tafhim*

Mawdudi views Qur'an 49:13 as having a universal appeal. He states that it was revealed generally to "safeguard the Muslim community against social evils that are widespread among humankind."[227] He argues, "The great evil that has always been causing universal disruption in the world is prejudice due to race, color, language, country, and nationality".[228] He does not mention religion. Why would Mawdudi not include religion as one of the causes when in fact, at the time he was writing his *tafsīr*, his country, Pakistan, had just experienced a separation that was based on problems in which difference of religion played a great role?

As the pluralists contend, religion plays a role similar to race and color in the expressions of human difference and discrimination. According

[227] Wahid, op. cit., 143. Wahidi attributes the long narration to Ibn Abi Mulaykah.

[228] Abu l 'Ala Mawdudi http://www.englishtafsir.com/Quran/49/index.htmlhttp: http//www.quranwebsite.com/read/tafheemul quranenglish.html

to Swidler, religion or what we understand to be an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly is involved in most conflicts in the world. Because our religion is so comprehensive, so all-inclusive, it is the most fundamental area in which the Other is likely to be different and hence possibly seen as most threatening.[229]

Mawdudi goes further to provide a litany of examples of conflicts that have their roots in race, color and nationality. Then he states, "The Jews on this very basis regarded the Children of Israel as the chosen."[230] But he still could not straightforwardly acknowledge the connection between the role of race and religion in those conflicts. By citing the Jewish example, Mawdudi should have been aware that he has introduced religion into the conflict since nationality and religion are inseparable in the Jewish experience. As will be shown further in this work, some of the *mufassirun* in the classical period have been inspired by the verse to reflect on the nature of race-based difference and to see some affinity between that and other categories of difference, especially religious based difference

[229] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an age of global dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p. 146.

[230] Abu l 'Ala Mawdudi http://www.englishtafsir.com/Quran/49/index.htmlhttp: http//www.quranwebsite.com/read/tafheemul quranenglish.html

Quran 49:13 and the principle of *al `ām wa al khāss* (the general and the particular)

Another important subject I would like to explore for relating Qur'an 49:13 to the discourse of religious pluralism is the Islamic legal theory or the principle of generalization and specification: qā'idat al *'āmm wa al khāṣs*.[231] This has been a subject of interest to various groups of scholars including the jurists, Qur'an commentators, etc. In this respect, Von Denver notes there is a direct connection between *asbāb* and the theory of the specific and the general. In his words, "When one knows about *asbāb al nuzūl*, it is still to be decided whether the revelation has a specific implication for the particular occasion it was connected with, or whether it is of general implication and needs to be applied by all Muslims at all times".[232]

In a recent work, another scholar in the field, Abdul Wahhab Khallaf states as follows concerning this principle:

> When a general statement is made in the *Shari'ah* about a certain matter, it will be understood as having general applicability even if it was made upon a certain incident or event. Thus, any general statement that comes in response to a question or an incident, shall be understood and interpreted as generally applicable; it will not be restricted to the specific instance because the rule applies to all similar occasions. Otherwise, the law will become limited. It makes no sense to limit a law to its occasion. Therefore, to limit a piece of legislation or injunction of the Sharīʿah only to the particular event, occasion or situation when it was legislated will

[231] See Zarkashi, al *Burhan*, vol.1 p.32.

[232] Von Denver, op. cit., p.100.

not make sense.[233]

What this means for my work is that the *asbāb* are not necessarily the only thing that matters for the application of Qur'an 49:13 to a new phenomenon such as the developing theory of religious pluralism. The language of Qur'an 49:13 is an example of a general statement that needs not be encumbered necessarily by the occasions or people who may have been involved in it initially. The nature of the instruction or address in Qur'an 49:13 is direct and general and need not be constrained by the circumstances of the revelation. Even if we grant that the occasions, as related in Wahidi's book, support or favor a racial interpretation, we can see also that the commentators over generations have applied the verse to other related matters as will be shown in the examples of several tafsir works of diverse orientations. Further analysis of this will be coming in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The above has been concerned with the broader context of Qur'an 49:13 and some of the issues related to its application to the religious pluralism discourse. I examined here specifically the role of *asbab al nuzul*, the theory of the general and the specific and influence of these on the

[233] Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *'Ilm usul al fiqh* (Riyadh: maktabat al rushd, 2010), p 186.

scholars' understanding and application of relevant verses to matters of their day. In the next chapter, I will further this by analyzing religious pluralism issues raised in selected classical commentaries on Qur'an 49:13.

CHAPTER 6

QUR'AN 49:13 IN THE CLASSICAL *TAFSĪRS*

This chapter investigates the more comprehensive classical *tafsir* works for pluralist interpretations of Qur'an 49:13. It focuses on religious pluralism discourses on the verse in a group selection of classical *tafsīr* works. Specifically, I will analyze several opinions of Qur'an exegetes that have impact on religious pluralism in a wide spectrum of *tafasīr* ranging from narration-based (ma'thūr), reason-based or rationalist as well as works from the Sufi and Shi'ite schools of thought. Starting with the most popular of the classical commentaries at the present time, arguably, the *tafsir of Ibn Kathir* which has previously been mentioned in another context in this work, I will cover the following other 10 works:

Ibn Kathir's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Following is an analysis of the major points made by Ibn Kathir *in his Tafasīr al Qur'ān al ʿAzīm:*

> This is a declaration from the creator of humankind that they all have been created from a male and a female, Adam and Eve. Therefore, they all share the same honor of coming from the same source and having the same origin. God, thereafter, made them into nations, tribes, clans and families so that they may know, interact and learn about one another. After being of the same origin, they fall into distant cousins and into much distant relatives or acquaintances until they could hardly recognize one another…[234]

[234] Isma'il Ibn Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al Qur'an al 'Azim* (Beirut Lebanon: Dar al Andalus, 1966), p 387.

Firstly, according to Ibn Kathir, equality of the biological origin of humans (*al tasāwī fi al bashariyah*) necessitates the equality of the dignity common to all of humans. In making this statement, Ibn Kathir may be alluding to other verses that address the matter of collective human dignity. One example is the verse of Qur'an 17:71 where God states that He has honored the children of Adam and has elevated their status among His creatures. It can be understood that this honor is not conditioned upon their religious beliefs or their social statuses, etc., so that they lose it if they don't follow a particular religion. In another verse, God said that He has created Adam, the progenitor of humans by His own hands, an honor which He commanded the angels to acknowledge by saluting Adam and cursed Satan for his disobedience – Qur'an 38:75.[235]

This honor is affirmed for all humans as the Prophet stated in this connection in his Farewell Message, "All people are of Adam like the teeth of a comb. No excellence for the Arabs over non- Arabs; no excellence for white skinned over red skinned people." [236] These texts are viewed by many scholars as being religious neutral which is what Ibn Kathir's view here appears to affirm. Thus, a perspective that may suggest that Qur'an 49:13 may be used only in reference to race relation or that it does not apply to religious or other differences of similar nature can be challenged by Ibn

[235] http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura38-aya75.html

[236] https://www.lastprophet.info/farewell-address-

Kathir's above interpretation. This can be stressed further by perceptions in the works of Engineer, Asani, Asad[237], Phillips and others who have taken a universalist approach in their interpretation of this verse including some of the traditional scholars discussed here. The contrary has been shown not to represent the collective view of traditional scholars in their tafsīr works as will be further discussed here.

Secondly, Ibn Kathir's commentary on the verse - i.e., that humans become acquaintances after having come from the same origin- reminds us of Hick's idea about the similarity between religions and family roots. Hick once compares the variations and differences in the religions to that of the human family. Like the humans, religions were once the same at the beginning – say monotheism or natural religion. But as the religions grow and proliferate, they share less and less in common until they become so different and could hardly recognize one another.[238] In the account concerning the diversity of religions cited in Ibn kathir's commentary on another verse, Qur'an 2:213, religion was originally monotheistic for Adam and for several generations of his offspring. By the time of Noah, it had become pluralistic, widely apart and different from one another. [239] This

[237] Muhammad Asad, op. cit., Vol 9, p 206.

[238] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, (Yale University Press; Second edition, 2005) P. 3-5.

[239] Isma'il Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al Qur'an al 'azim,* op. cit., (vol. 1, p. 569) on Qur'an 2:213.

appears to be an early Muslim theory of religious pluralism. According to the Qur'an, the reasons why religions become diverse and pluralistic are, in themselves, diverse as they are sometimes attributed to preordainment by God and sometimes to certain human actions such as a desire to want to be different, being able to choose freely and the oppression of one group by another (baghy): Q. 11:118 and 2:213.

Other verses attribute the cause of religious pluralism to widespread oppression of one group of humans by another or transgression against others as being the reason why people become different in their religious views and beliefs while other verses uphold that differences of faith and belief systems are a fact of human life. Some Qur'an verses specifically mention various individual religions such as the Judaic, the Christian, the Sabian and the Zoroastrian religions and declare that the truly believing among their followers will receive salvation
(Qur'an 2:62). This multiple approach to probable causes of religious diversity - I believe- is yet to have been fully studied because the Muslim pluralists keep repeating certain verses and paying less attention to others that could have helped to produce a more balance view on the subject. Thus, it could be said that the different religions arise as a factor of God's will, human action(s) and as a fact of life. Whatever it could have been, a reality is established that people will be pluralistic in their belief systems, but such a difference will not deprive them of their human dignity and nor of

being treated with respect. Nor should it result in their religion being disparaged because this is disapproved by other Qur'an verses too. People will be entitled to their choice of religion, respected, and the Muslims will need to extend al *ta'āruf* to them. Thus, the injunction in Qur'an 49:13: "that you may know one another" is an important way to deal with the differences arising from the variety of our nationalities, race, colors, and of course, religions.

Based on the above, Ibn Kathir very likely holds the view that difference of religions cannot be the reason for a religious community to disparage the religious Other or to refuse to engage in reasonable give and take with the religious Other in socio-economic spheres. He probably would also not see religious differences as standing in the way of having peaceful or even friendly relationships with people of other faiths.

Many of the Qur'an verses that speak about religious diversity or difference of religions and about those who have chosen for themselves a faith other than the Islamic faith often include an encouragement for the Muslims to seek friendly relationships with the others and to engage with them in humanly beneficial pursuits as long as they are not displaying hostilities or belligerence toward the Muslim or as long as both sides want to be friendly with one another. On some occasions, the Muslims are encouraged to compete with the religious Other in performing magnanimous acts, as we see in Qur'an 5:48; 60:8, etc. So, Qur'an 49:13

reinforces verses of this type. Although religion is not overtly mentioned in it, it is implied, according to many contemporary and classical Qur'an scholars. This perhaps is the reason why a number of Muslim pluralists would often cite the verse along with other verses in their hypotheses on religious pluralism from the Qur'an standpoint.

On the question about "the most honorable to God among you being the most pious", Ibn Kathir narrates the following Hadith:

> Some people asked the Prophet, 'Who is the most honorable among people? He replied, "The most honorable among them with Allah is the one who has the most *taqwa*." They said, We did not ask you about this.' He said, "Then the most honorable person was Yusuf, Allah's Prophet, the son of Allah's Prophet, the son of Allah's khalil (friend)." They said, 'We did not ask you about this.' He said, "Then you want to ask me about Arab lineage?" They said, 'Yes.' He said, "Those among you who were best in *Jahiliyah*, are the best among you in Islam, if they attain religious understanding.[240]

It appears that the hadith upholds the view that honorable people and people of integrity could be found among the pre-Islamic Arabia and that good people may exist in any of the religions and cultures as the pluralists, including the Muslim pluralists have suggested. This is probably one reason why the Qur'an enjoins the Muslims to interact kindly and magnanimously with people of other religions who are not seeking to hurt them or who are not belligerent to the Muslim authority simply because of their religion as discussed above. As for the members of the Abrahamic

[240] Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, *al Misbah al Munir fi tahdhib tafsir Ibn* Kathir (Abrigded, Vol. 9) Darussalam, 2003, p.208.

religions of the Judaic and the Christian, they are specifically acknowledged as "people of the book" and as having a special relationship with the Muslims. This concept of the People of the Book has been extended to cover practically all or most of the religious and cultural others that the Muslims encountered in their early history. The prophetic statement, "ʿāmilūhum muʿā malata ahl al kitāb" is often cited in this respect.

1) Ibn Kathir's Concept of *Shu'ūb* and *Qabā'il*

Knowing Ibn Kathir as a *nassab*, a genealogist, an historian-ethnographer, and a specialist in the science of hadith, we can say that he is applying his knowledge in these fields to the interpretation of this verse. According to Ibn Kathir, *qabilah* "tribe" represents a combination of clans and families in a wide area or location.[241] He defines *sha'b* similarly. Thus, the difference between *qabiah* and *sha'b* in his formulation is not immediately clear since the largest group in the traditional Arab society was the *qabilah* and the word *sha'b* was rarely used.

As a scholar of Hadith and one of the leaders of the maʿth ūr school of tafsīr, Ibn Kathir narrated several hadiths to explain the phrase: *shuʿuban wa qabaʿil*.[242] Two of these narrations further help us to answer a religious pluralism question: can there be good in non-Muslims that the Muslims may

[241] Isma'iil ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al Qur'an al Azim* (Beirut: Dar al Andaalus, 1966) vol. 6, p 387-9.

need to acknowledge even as they differ from us religiously? Put differently, can *al karam* wherein derives the phrase *akramakum* (the more noble, or the more honorable) or *al* taqwa wherein derives *atqaakum (*the more pious or the more God-conscious*)* as well as any characteristics and behaviors that lead to that, be found in non-Muslims? One of these narrations is the Hadith of "the best of you in the pre-Islamic days are the best of you in Islam." In this hadith, the Prophet was asked about who is the noblest person? His final answer was that the nobler or more honorable were those who possessed noble characters in the pre- Islamic time and who combined that with a good understanding of their Islamic duties. He did not say that there were no good people in the pre-Islamic time. Rather, he said that adding the noble characteristics they possessed in that age to their understanding of Islam complemented their honor.

Looking into Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Quran 49:13 and related discourses in his *tafsir* with the lens of religious pluralism enables us to see his arguments in favor of religious pluralism discourse that may have been obscured by the general attitude to traditional Islamic theological works. As I have shown in the above discussion, some of the points directly or indirectly help us to see how his work relates to the subject of this enquiry. This theme will be discussed further in other classical works that follow.

Qurtubi's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

He is the Cordovan scholar Abu Abdallah Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al Qurtubi, (d. 671 H/1273 CE), a *tafsir* master and a jurist in Andalusia (Muslim Spain). His tafsīr, *al Jami'u li ahkam al Qur'an, [243] is* an extensive work dealing with the legal and the jurisprudential aspects of the Qur'an interpretation.

The work explores several viewpoints on Qur'an 49:13 but I will limit my discussion to specific points.

"Your Lord is one and your father is the same": Sermon on the Mount!

A report from Qurtubi's tafsīr can be related to a motif common to the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam - image of their prophet delivering the grand address in the public square. Two such addresses have been mentioned in respect of Prophet Muhammad, the one is the well-known Farewell Address earlier mentioned and another was the address he delivered upon his triumphal return to Mecca. In both cases, the Prophet spoke about the way of Islam with respect to treatment of the Other. This latter one is cited by Qurtubi as follows:

Tirmidhi narrates on the authority of Ibn Umar that the messenger of God

[243] Aisha Bewley has produced a translation of one volume of this tafsir in English. *Tafsir al Qurtubi:*
Classical Commentary of the Holy Qur'an Translated by Aisha Bewley, Dar al Taqaw, 2003. I like Al- Gurj's translation of the title as "Compendium of Qur'anic Decrees", 'Introduction', p ix. For more on his biography, see: https://www.darultahqiq.com/tafsir-al-qurtubi-one-volume-in-english/

> stated on the day of his victorious entry in Makkah: O people! Verily, God has forbidden for you the conducts of the days of ignorance which consist in boasting with your ancestry, your lineage and your material status, and looking down upon the less privileged members of the society. Henceforth, men are only of two kinds: the fortunate ones and the unfortunate ones – the fortunate are the ones who believe in God and act righteously.[244]

Firstly, this narration may be applied to the issue of religious discrimination because those who believe that they alone hold the saving truth may act toward the others boastfully or arrogantly, thereby treating them like less privileged members of human society, or the unlucky ones who are headed for hell fire. This is analogical to what Remundo describes as "religious hubris". As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the attitude of the exclusivists, exclusivists think of themselves as being privileged to save those others who will otherwise be doomed.

However, a statement that classifies people into two groups of the fortunate and the unfortunate if taken *prima facie* is discouraging for religious pluralism. But when it is understood in the light of *al ta'āruf* in Qur'an 49:13, it becomes less discriminatory against those people and allows for positive relationships that Muslims are expected to have with them. *Ta'āruf* encourages the flow of positive energy that may translate into having good relationships with everyone.

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244 https://archive.org/stream/TafseerEQurtubiArabicalJameAlAhkamAlQuran/TafseerEQurtubiVol.19#page/n409/

Secondly, Qurtubi's interpretation of the phrase: *lita'ārafū* makes a point about God being the one who has created the desire in humans to want to know about one another and to stay in positive relationships. He states that based on this verse, there is a recognition of the need for *al tawāsul*[245] (i.e., positive interaction and being connected) among people. Thus, we can see that *al tawāsul* (connecting with the others) that Qurtubi advocates in this commentary is synonymous to *al ta'āruf* in that the two share the same or similar imports. One can even go further to suggest that many of those Qur'an verses in the context of interreligious relations use similar phraseology deriving mostly from *al tasābuq (healthy competition)* and al *taʿāwun (cooperation)*, etc., all concerned with mutual respect and cooperation. This can also be counterpoised by other phraseologies discouraging religious animosity and unnecessary disputations, including becoming judgmental about the Other and quarrelling over religious differences. In view of the instruction of Qur'an 49:13, this form of relationship based on mutual respect is to be extended from males to females and *vice versa*, from one tribe to another and from nations to nations. In fact, it is to be practiced among the entire human family with all the differences and varieties of cultures and religions it entails. Unlike

245 https://archive.org/stream/TafseerEQurtubiArabicalJameAlAhkamAlQuran/TafseerEQurtubiVol.19#page/ n413/mode/2up; https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura49-aya13.html#qortobi

Engineer who looks at Qur'an verses like this (49:13) and proclaims them to be an indication that God Himself created religious pluralism, and for that reason, it must be respected, Qurtubi does not go this far in his tafsīr of this verse. Nevertheless, what he has said is enough for understanding the relevance of the verse for the discourses on religious pluralism.

Qurtubi further states:

> God then made humans into families, near and distant cousins, in-laws and relatives as he stated elsewhere in the Qur'an: "And it is He Who has created man from water, and has appointed for him kindred by blood, and kindred by marriage (Qur'an 25:54)." He further created in them, based on these relationships, the desire to want to know and connect with one another.[246]

So, *al tawāsul*, with similar meaning as *al ta'āruf*, being connected and being in positive relationships with one another too, is created by God for a wisdom that He alone knows and comprehends best. This will be the closest position to the view of those Pluralists. Though expressed differently, there seems to be a shared objective behind this – i.e., respect for difference of all kinds.

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246 https://archive.org/stream/TafseerEQurtubiArabicalJameAlAhkamAlQuran/TafseerEQurtubiVol.19#page/ n413/mode/2up

On the meaning of the Qur'anic word *shu`ūb (*plr. of *sha`b),* Qurtubi makes another point seemingly innocuous but of a serious implication for interreligious relations, religious pluralism and how we understand the social categories mentioned in the verse such as tribe and nation in the context of religious pluralism discourse.

According to Qurtubi, *sha`b* belongs to a linguistic category known as *adhdhad*—words that can be used for two opposite meanings, i.e., (to combine and to separate, to conjoin and disjoin) conjoining and disjoining, combining and separating.[247] In this sense, *sha'b* may mean people who are bound together by the same origin as well as people who have come together from diverse or disparate origins and backgrounds, i.e., a nation-state, a nation or a commonwealth.[248] Lane, for example, states that it signifies collection or union and also separation, division or disunion. He goes on to say that sha'b can also be used for "a nation, people, race or family of mankind". The significations here both from Qurtubi and Lane! enable us to relate the meaning of this term to the concept of *Ummah* in the Madinah Constitution as discussed both in the works of Engineer and Faruqi, as well.[249] The *Ummah* as defined there embraces Muslims and non-Muslims

[247] https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura49-aya13.html#qortobi

[248] Lane, op. cit. Lane says it signifies collection or division, union, separation, or disunion, etc.

[249] Engineer, p. 156; Isma'il Raji Al Faruqi, Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture and World Order, (IIIT, 2012), p 79-80.

among followers of the Abrahamic faiths. Reading Engineer carefully, one could see that he is suggesting that the tribal Other and the religious Other overlap in the concept of *Ummah* according to the terms of the *Mithaq*.[250] He said that the Prophet attempted to integrate Jews belonging to various tribes and pagan Arabs belonging to various tribes into a composite political community through what was known as *Mithaq al Madinah* (Pact of Madina). He claims that the *Mithaq* describes these people as *ummah wahidah*. In Faruqi's essay, he too states that the Covenant of Madinah recognized and established the Jews as another *Ummah,* on equal par with the Muslim *Ummah*. The Christians too were given a similar status and later, per Faruqi's thesis, "the Persian Zoroastrians, the Indian Hindus and the Buddhist were included in the Islamic State as *Ummahs* on par with other *Ummah*s of Muslims, Jews, and Christians…[251]

Although religion is not foregrounded in the phrase (shu'uban wa qabaail) in Qur'an 49:13, it is, at the same time, not outright excluded. Thus, if a relationship can be established between *ummah* as used in the Madinah Constitution and the meaning of sha'b as suggested in Qurtubi's postulation it will lend further credence to the views of those scholars -some of whom are cited above- who have mentioned Qur'an 49:13 in their discourses on religious pluralism. As we could see in some of these works there is an

[250] Engineer, *On developing theology of peace in Islam*. p. 156

[251] Faruqi, op. cit. p. 81

intellectual assumption that the tribal Other and the religious Other overlap in the definition of *ummah* and that sha'b embraces other categories according to the terms of the *Mithaq*. This provides an umbrella for juxtaposing the tribal Other with the religious other in those theses.

1-) The Shu'ubiyah:

Qurtubi also takes the opportunity in his tafsir of Qur'an 49:13 to discuss his views about the *Shu'ubiyah*, a movement deriving its name from the term *sha'b* spearheaded by groups of non-Arab minorities in the Abbasid dynasty. The historian, Phillip Hitti, states that the movement was concerned about the equality of all the peoples in the Abbasid society and that it had a hidden religious dimension among minorities, especially those of Persian descents.[252] The important point of his thesis is that a movement emerged under this nomenclature derived from sh'ab that included in its fold Arabs of lower tribal statuses, clients-mawali, some of whom might belong to religious backgrounds different from that of the Arab elites. Qurtubi describes this movement in his *tafsir* sometimes as a movement of groups opposed to the privileged position of the Arabs, and sometimes as a movement of heretical groups, *zindiqs*. [253] The Shu'ubites are against the

[252] Phillip K Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (Macmillan, London, 1937), p 402, 405 and 431.

[253] *Ibid*., pp, 359, 431; The online Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions 1997 defines zindiqs as 'as heretics, whose teaching endangers the community.

view that the Arabs deserve greater honor or respect, or that they are more noble than the non- Arabs.[254]

What if this movement was just an advocacy group or just demanding justice and equality for the underprivileged members of society? Using a religious language to attack them as Qurtubi has done here would be a powerful tool for undermining its role in Abbasid society. We can compare this to the characterization of the Native Indians as animists or atheists by the white Christian who emerged as the rulers of the land or their depiction as people opposed to the ascendance of the white people. Or it may be likened to the plight of African American Muslims who are choosing a religion other than the religion of the white elites as part of the tools for protesting real or perceived oppression by the society. Based on what the pluralists like Swidler, Engineer, etc. have said, concerning religion being a most threatening aspect of difference, attacking a minority group in religious language can be more devastating and can obscure the real meaning of their expression of difference. As someone who suffered religious persecution by Euro-nationalists who ejected the Muslims from Spain, using similar evocation, Qurtubi should have realized the possible implication of his statement. As I could see, a similar occurrence happened in the situation of the Muslims in Spain before the inquisition and the Muslims in India before

[254] https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura49-aya13.html#qortobi

the partition. All these instances of expression of difference that are tied to both race and religion pose serious challenges for the understanding and application of al taʿāruf espoused in Qur'an 49:13 which can be overcome or ameliorated if *al taʿāruf* can be extended across the boundaries of race and religion. Thus, the suggestion by those scholars that the import of Qur'an 49:13 may be extended across those/ religious lines become apropos.

Tabari's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

He is Muhammad Ibn Jarir al Tabari, died (310H) 923.[255] His tafsīr, *jami' al bayan* is the first extant major work in the development of the discipline of *tafsir*.[256] It is considered the archetype of the *ma'thur* tafsīr as well as the most famous and best studied in western and traditional Islamic scholarship.[257]

The interpretation of Qur'an 49:13 according to Tabari is:

> We began your creation, each of you, from the seminal discharges of a man and a woman[273]. Then We made you relatives. Some of you become close relatives and others distant relatives. These relations of yours are not honor or dishonor by itself so that you can use it as a tool to disgrace others for not having ancestors like the ones you have.[258]

[255] Franz Rosenthal, *The History of Tabari* (State University of New York Press), 1989, vol.1, P10.

[256] See Mahmood Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol.1, p 3.

[257] *An Anthology of Quranic Commentaries*, eds, Feras Hamzah *et al*, (2008) vol. 1, p. 28-9.

[258] Ibn Jarir al Tabari, *Jami' al bayan an ta'wil 'ay al Qur'an* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al Fikr, n.d.,), vol. 26, p 138-40.

It seems that Tabari grasps the meaning of (Qur'an 49:13) in a global perspective that includes people of all faiths and cultural persuasions in the scope of its addressees. In as much as they are part of the human family, the religion that anyone or group chooses to follow will not exclude them from being accorded the opportunity for al ta'āruf.

This statement by Tabari emphasizing respect for everyone regardless of their tribe or religion as a member of the human family is supported by his commentary on (Quran 60:8), a similar verse enjoying kind treatment of relatives from other faiths, in this respect, the polytheists of Makkah even as they were still in control. As David Dakake points out concerning Tabari's interpretation of Qur'an 60:8, Tabari does not see the command for kind treatment of the other as being hindered by their belonging to a religion other than Islam. For him, kind and compassionate treatment cannot be based upon the Other being Muslims. In fact, he criticizes the contrary opinion, stating that the view by some scholars that this is not the case "makes no sense".[259]

Here Tabari strongly affirms that the Qur'an enjoins kind and fair treatment of the Other even if they are not Muslims and opposes a contrary view vehemently. It may be noted that the instruction in Qur'an 60:8 primarily refers to the idolaters of Mecca who were persecuting the

[259] David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant Islam" in: J Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition* (World Wisdom, 2009), p. 9.

Muslims. Yet the Qur'an distinguishes between those who were waging wars against the Muslims from the rest of the folk. If this was applied in respect of the polytheists, it would nonetheless be applicable to people of other religions. Thus, it would be inconceivable on this basis to not apply *al ta'aruf* to all people of the different faiths or even to the faithless.

Zamakhshari's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibn ʿUmar al Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) was a leader of the rationalist Mu'tazilite group. His tafsīr, simply referred to as *al Kashshāf* [260] is considered another landmark in the opinion of many scholars. Just as al Tabari's *tafsir* is held as the best representative work of the *ma'thur* school so also is *al Kashshaf* considered the quintessential tafsīr work from the *ra'y* school led by the Mu'tazilites.[261] According to Lane, Ayoub and McCauliff, this is a widely-held position both in traditional Islamic and western scholarships.[262] In spite the copious criticisms from the scholars of Hadith, Zamakhashari is still widely acknowledged in Sunni circles as a distinguished scholar in many important fields such as grammar, logic, Arabic rhetoric. As McAullif notes, Zamakhsahri's 'reputation for exegesis

[260] Andrew Lane, *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'an Commentary – The Kashaaf of Jar Allah al Zamakhshari (D.538/1144)* (Brill Texts and Studies on the Qur'an), p xx-xi.

[261] I*bid.*.

[262] Mahmood Ayoub, op cit, p.5; Jane McAullife, Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, vol. 2, p 115.

rests not so much on his Mu'tazilism as on his qualities as a grammarian and a linguist.[263]

On the verse in focus, Zamakhshari comments that God is saying, in other words, that: "We have created each one of you from a father and a mother; so, you are the same in the manner of your coming to the world. Therefore, there is no reason for any of you to think that she or he is better than the other in pedigree or family background."[264]

Surprisingly, despite being a scholar of the rationalist school, Zamakhashari does not apply his commentary to religious issues. Instead, he applies it to something else of interest to him, i.e., the issue of lineage forgery. He thinks that the phrase *lita'arafu (that you may know one another),* addresses the issue of lineage forgery or ancestry tree falsification, as we probably have it now, which was practiced most probably in traditional Arab society. According to Zamakhshari, "that you may know one another", means, "that you know how you are related to one another."[265]

It means that the wisdom behind making you into nations, tribes, etc., is for you to learn the lineage of one another. Therefore, it will be unacceptable to claim a lineage you do not belong to or to disclaim your

[263] Andrew Lane, *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'an Commentary – The Kashaaf of Jar Allah al Zamakhshari (D.538/1144)* (Brill Texts and Studies on the Qur'an), p xx-xi.
[264] Muhammad Ibn Umar al Zamakhshari, *al Kashshaaf* (Lebanon: Dar al Kitab al Arabi, 1947), vol.4, p. 374-5.

[265] Op. cit. p 375

lineage."[266] Then, God guides them to how they can be entitled to greater honor with Him through *taqwa*. It is like asking the question, why can't people boast of their lineage? The answer is: because the more honorable among you is the one who has more God consciousness.

It may be said that Zamakhshari's commentary provides an example of how scholars can sometime deploy Qur'anic verses to address issues of interest to them or their audience without necessarily indulging in a blameworthy use of personal opinion. It also says something about scholars of the rationalist school as being less desirous to apply verses like this positively to religious diversity. The rationalists are not necessarily pluralists. Sometimes, they can show themselves to be very exclusivist and unfriendly with those who differ from them as we see in the story of the Inquisition earlier mentioned in this work. In this example, Zamakhshari's academic interest in ancestry study prevails over other considerations.

Alusi's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Muhammad Shihab al din al Alusi (d. 1854) is the author of *Ruh al Ma'ani fi Tafsr al Qur'an al ʿAzim wa al Sab' al Mathaāni.*[267] According to the *Anthology of Quranic Commentaries*, Alusi's work was influenced by the

[266] *bid.*

[267] See a detail biography of Alusi in *An Anthology of Quranic commentaries*, eds, Feras Hamzah and Sajjad Rizvi with Farhan Mayer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) vol. 1, p 47-8; see also www.islamweb.net

thoughts of both the Abbasid philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d.1037) and the Andalusian metaphysic Ibn Arabi (d. 1240).[268] Thus, his *tafsir* has been viewed as a synthesis of the traditionalist-rationalist and Sufi methodologies.

Alusi's emphasis on the brotherhood of all humans makes his commentary on the verse particularly interesting for the discourse of religious pluralism. He thinks that Qur'an 49:13 is a statement of affirmation on the brotherhood of all humans.[269] He notes that even if we assume that the verse comes primarily in the context of the brotherhood of the believers, (lākinna wajha taqrīrihī li al 'ukhuwwat al 'ammah zāhirun), it is still evident that it is about general fraternity of all. [270] Thus Quran 49:13 is independent in its meaning and in its focus on the brotherhood of all people. Alusi seems to suggest that although the preceding verses are addressed to the believers, verse thirteen transcends this to embrace believers and non-believers by being addressed to all humans.

Furthermore, he thinks that Qur'an 49:13 encapsulates the ethical injunctions addressed in the chapter as a whole and provides the rationale for their extension to benefit the entire mankind and for this to serve as principles (a principle) for Muslim-Muslim and Muslim non-Muslim interactions. So, for him, it would mean that brotherhood of humans can be

[268] *Ibid.*
[269] Altafsir.com; (https://www.alro7.net/ayaq.php?langg=arabic&sourid=49&aya=13 https://islamweb.net

[270] *Ibid*.

a sufficient reason for the prohibition of backbiting, offensive name-calling and mockery of one another, etc. that are disapproved in the preceding verses. In other words, Alusi's interpretation may imply that everything mentioned in the previous verses that are prohibited for the Muslims to do to one another also becomes prohibited for them to do to any human being by the authority of Qur'an 49:13. If we accept this reasoning, it would lead to recognizing the rights of members of all the various religions to treat one another as they would one of their own. This would be a new phenomenon in religious pluralism. But in his discussion of the terms "shuʿūban wa qabāīl", Alusi states that *shuʿūb* may be used to refer to the Yemenite Arabs of the South, the Qahtanites and not for the northern Arabs, the Adnanites, thereby reviving the Adnanites / Qahtanites superior / inferior complexes, knowingly or otherwise and compromising his above liberal or libertarian view. He further asserts that shuʿūb is appropriate to be used for the Magus and all those people including the Jews who have a low opinion of the Arabs:[271]

> It is also said that the *shuʿūb* are the *mawalis*, (clients) and the *qabāīl* are the Arabs. It is said that *shuʿūb* are the city men who do not trace or attach themselves to their ancestors or whose ancestors are unknown as different from *qabāīl*, people who usually are easily traced back to their ancestors…[272]

[271] Altafsir.com; https://islamweb.net/ar/library/index.php?page=bookcontents&idfrom=4517&idto=4535&bk_no=201&I D=4549

[272] Ibid.

The derogatory tone in this usage should not be lost to the reader. He tends to apply sha'b to certain groups of Arabs who are considered inferior to others for having weak ancestral lineage, like the *mawalis* and the Bedouins, the Southern Arabs, etc. From the point of view of religious pluralism discourse, this statement by this author underscores the reason and the rationale for extending the injunction on mutual respect and positive affirmation of one another to all peoples and to all religions. It shows that discrimination by one group of people against another does not become eliminated or ceases to exist just by people belonging to the same religion, or even the same nationality or race as some will claim to be more authentic or original than others. If this is the case, then *al ta'āruf* is as much needed among people of the same religion belonging to different racial backgrounds as it is required among people of different religions with the same or different racial backgrounds. The real meaning of religious pluralism therefore is respect for human dignity and their freedom of conscience. But it may be that Alusi is only reporting the views of others, and this is not necessarily what he thinks about this matter.

Razi's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Umar al Razi (d. 606 H 1209 CE) has been described as 'the most significant Sunni theologians of the medieval period'.[273] He was an Ash'arite theologian, a leading Mu'tazilite and a philosopher. The title of his encyclopedic tafsīr is

mafatih al ghayb (Keys to the Unseen), also known as *al* tafsīr *al kabir*.

Per Razi's reflections on Qur'an 49:13, People prefer their co – religionists to others. He thinks that men are only of two categories: religious people and non-believers. Thus, for him, belief and disbelief are the two most distinguishing factors of human differences and so they are the two areas where prejudice is most likely to occur among people.

1-) Religious Peoples' Preference for Their Co-religious Others

It seems also that Razi doesn't see racial or tribal difference as major as religious difference despite the obvious reference to this in the verse. He comments thus:

> Any religious person knows that those who belong to the same faith as you are better in your eyes and closer to your heart than those who are different or who belong to a religion different from your own even if that person comes from a wealthier or more noble family. If this is true, then it will be true that a follower of the true religion who is also well grounded in it will behave the same way. [274]

[273] Ayoub, *op.cit*. p. 37; Commentators and Their Commentaries, p 29-30.

[274] Muhammad Ibn 'Umar, al Razi, Tafsir *al Kabir* (Lebanon: Dar al Fikr), 1985, vol.27, p. 136-140.

Does his statement mean that kind treatment of everyone cannot be possible in the face of religious differences? Is this what Razi is teaching? I think his statement is meant to caution against discrimination based on difference of religions that he perceives as the most consequential aspect of the human difference. His statement is also intuitive because it links the underlying issue in this verse clearly with religion. It is unlikely that Razi views difference of religion as an accidental fact of life as the pluralists see it. Nevertheless, his idea brings about a recognition of the fact that discrimination does occur among people based on religious factors and that the verse addresses this also. So, it may not be said that the religious difference is outside of the purview of Qur'an 49:13, in the light of Razi's above commentary and in any case, al *taʿāruf* is desired at all levels of the difference. Unlike some other *mufassirun*, Razi has widened the scope of perception on this verse to clearly include religion.

Biqāʿi's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

He is Abu al Hasan Ibrahim ibn Umar al Biqāʿī born in 1406 in the district of Biqa in Syria.He died in 1480.[275] Educated in Damascus, he became a specialist in grammar, *sarf*, *fiqh* etc. Biqāʿī seems to have been

[275] See online: al Biqa'I and Islahi: A comparative study of tafsir methodology by Israr Ahmad Khan of IIUM, Malaysia (Intellectual Discourse, 2003, vol. 11, no.2, 183-207 (accessed Oct 10, 2020)

influenced by the thought of Ibn Arabi or very likely he was his disciple, as one of his works, *Tanbihu al Ghabiyy Ila Takfir Ibn Arabi*, was written in defense of Ibn Arabi. His *tafsir, Nazm al durar fi tanasub al āyāt wa al suwar*, is considered a unique work about al *tanāsub*, coherence, suggests interest in cohesiveness of Quran verses and chapters.

On Qur'an 49:13, Biqa'ī comments as follows:

> We in our majesty and power created you and brought you from nonexistence to existence upon what you are in size, figure and color as well as who you are belonging to different tribes and nations that exist in uncountable varieties... We determined who you are and who you will be, including some of you being believers and others, disbelievers. [276]

The pluralists' accident of birth theory line has been crossed here. The pluralists think that you are a Muslim because you were born in Saudi Arabia or a Christian because you were born in Rome or a Hindu because you were born in India.[277] In their opinion, our society has a decisive role in the type of religion we follow with their view that our religion is accidental upon where we were born. If we can turn this around, as Biqā'ī seems to do, we could say that God destined you to be born in India, for example, so you can be a Hindu. But what about Muslims and Christians born in India?

In Biqāʿī's *tafsīr*, creation "from a male and a female (min *dhakarin wa untha*) acquires a new meaning. He interprets *dhakar* as resolve and

[276] https://al-maktaba.org/book/9098/9513#p3; http://tafsir.com (accessed Oct 15,2021).

[277] See for example, John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, (the Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1982.) p. 61.

power and *untha* as weakness or tenderness. So, according to him, these elements are what is meant by *dhakar* and *untha* (a man and a woman) and not the physiological state of being a male or a female. But he does not go further to consider whether resolve and power are characteristics found in males alone and weakness and gentleness specific with women. He leaves that for us. His hypothesis reminds us about the role that *al ta'ā*ruf can play in men and women perception of one another. It brings into focus the fact that males and females are mentioned first in the verse but the most attention has shifted to nations and tribes making it looks as if the problem affects those latter categories only.

Qushayri's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Died 465 C.E., his name is Abdul Karim ibn Huzan al Qushayri. He was a famous Sufi master and author of *Tafsir Lata'if al Isharat* (*Subtleties of the Allusions*) and *al Risalat* (T*he Epistle)* on Sufism. Qushayri and his disciples hold that meanings of the Quran cannot be reduced to one definitive interpretation.[278] His statement in this commentary, that he intends only to mention new and non-repetitive remarks concerning the allusions of each *surah*, chapter, suggests that his *tafsir* is not a full blown one; but one probably addressing what may be missing in other commentaries, based on

[278] http://tafsir.com. I have shown earlier on how Ayoub incorporates this idea of *isharat* into his definitions of tafsīr / ta'wīl.

his Sufi understanding.[279] Qushayri's work represents the Sufi approach and is listed as an example of *tafsir* Ahl al Sunnah al Sufiyah. His commentary on Qur'an 49:13 helps us to answer the question about: "verily, the most honorable among you are the most pious or most God conscious", the last segment of Quran 49:13 in a manner consistent with the thought of the pluralists.

Qushayri defines *taqwa* as running away from or escaping the self, becoming freed from the desires of one's ego (*al taharuz min al nafsi wa atma `iha wa huz*ū*ziha*).[280] According to the man, the farther you're from your egoistic self, the closer you can be to God and the more honorable you will be.[281] This agrees with the pluralist definition of salvation as movement from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness, as in the above discourse. He further comments:

> Your common origin is dust, semen, blood cloth; so, what are you boasting about? Is it about your actions that are insincere or your heart that is filled with egotism or your deeds that are treacherous at most? The one who deserves honor among you is the one who can rid himself of egoism and self-centeredness[282] - movement from self- centeredness to reality-centeredness!

[279] Available English version of this tafsir does not present anything whereas the original Arabic (found on al tafsir.com) does present the material from which I have gathered his ideas on the *tafsīr* of Quran 49:13.
[280] http://tafsir.com

[281] http://tafsir.com

[282] http://tafsir.com

Further regarding Qushayri's interpretation, two points are germane to the discourse about religious pluralism and Sufi interpretation. The first one is concerned with the view among some pluralists that the Sufis of Islam are more likely to represent Islam's acceptance of religious pluralism.[283] Pluralists like Hick and Engineer have copiously referred to the teachings of Ibn Arabi, Rumi and others as providing support for a pluralist interpretation of religions.

Hick acknowledges Ibn Arabi as a great teacher of religious pluralism in the pre-Enlightenment period and he freely adopts philosophical statements from Rumi such as one that compares all religions to lamps in relation to the light of God. 'The light is one, but the lamps are many'. [284] Qushayri belongs to this tradition, this group of Sufi masters of Islam and his commentary here represents a pacesetter for the Sufi views on religious pluralism. The second point is about a common theme in religious pluralism discourses which describes the essence of being religious to consist in ridding oneself of egoism.[285] As earlier noted, Hick defines salvation as self-transformation and movement from self-centeredness to reality – centeredness; at the same time that Engineer claims that to be a religious

[283] See a new book titled *Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy*, eds. Clinton Bennett and Sarwar Alam, Quinoa Publishing Ltd Bristol, CT., 2017 on this subject.
[284] John Hick, *Rainbow*, *op. cit.,* p 36.

[285] Hick defines this somewhere as the death of the ego and claims that the teaching is found in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc. See *The Rainbow of Faiths,* p.17

person today is to be a pluralist and to be involved in social movement for reformation. This ideal or idea of self-transformation or self- annihilation – i.e., becoming dead to the self and alive only to God- as the essence of being religious is what Qusahyri seems to build his *tafsir* of this verse upon. To that extent, his *tafsir* coalesces with the pluralists' religious worldview.

Baqli's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

Died 1209, Ruzbihan al Baqli is the author of tafsīr *'Ara'is al-bayan*.[286] He wrote copiously on Sufi ecstasy and religious visions. His works include *Kahsf al Asrar* (*the Unveiling of Secrets*) and *Abhar al Ashiqin* (*Jasmine of the Lovers*), etc.

According to Baqli, the possessor of the knowledge of God, *al ʿārif bi Allah*, the gnostic, is allowed to be proud of himself or herself.[287] He thinks that the person more honorable with in the eyes of God is not the one with a nobler family but the gnostic or the one who has true consciousness of Him, one who knows God with *ma'rifat*. According to Lane, a possessor of *ma'rifat* is defined as one "skilled in divine things, possessing knowledge of God and of His kingdom, and of the way of dealing with Him".[288] *Al-muttaqi*, the God-conscious, per Baqli's commentary, is the one who knows that he is

[286] See Oxford Islamic Studies online; https://www.oxfordreference.com (accessed 1/30/2019)

[287] Tafsir.com

[288] Lane, op. cit.

created from dust so he would not boast about himself because all honor belongs to God and boastfulness is right only in respect to God. Thus, he defines *al at*qā in terms of *al `akram* as synonymous or interdependent concepts and says that this is truly to be found in someone who possesses *ma'rifa*t.[289] His interpretation, like that of Qushayri, deemphasizes the gender and social categories mentioned in the verse. Instead, it emphasizes an intrinsic attribute or characteristic in the individual's relationship with God and with the material world - their spirituality. His suggestion that the gnostic are entitled to have Pride remains questionable, nevertheless. What is noteworthy is that the pietistic or Sufi dimension here resonates in many of the world religious traditions and aligns with the religious pluralists' world view.

Shaʿarāwī's Interpretation of Qur'an 49:13

I might want to conclude this section with observations from a Muslim contemporary *mufassir*, Muhammad Mutawalli al Sha'rawi, died 1998.

Graduate of al Azhar and former Minister of Awqaf of Egypt, Muhammad Mutawalli al Sha'rawi was Professor of *Shari'ah* at Ummul-Qura University in Mecca and the host of the popular Friday afternoon TV

[289] There are debates and disagreements about what Gnosticism is about in religious literature. For a recent analysis of the concept, see *Gnosticism – New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowledge* by Stephan A Hoeller.

program, *Nur ala al Nur* ("Light upon Light"), that was aired on Saudi TV for a long time. [290] The title of al Sha'rawi's *tafsīr* is variously known as *khawatir al Sha'rawi* or *khawatir* or *khawatir Qur'aniyah* and he may have been the first to use this as title for a *tafsir* work. It is also known as *tafsir al Sha'rawi* according to documentation notes provided in *Makatbah Shamilah*.

Like many other Qur'an commentators, *mufassirun*, Sha'rawi notes that the verse is addressed to all mankind:

> It may be observed that the mode of address here (O mankind!) in Qur'an 49:13 is different from the previous two evocations in this *sūrah*. Before now, the verses have been addressed to the Muslims with the descriptive phrase 'O you who have believed'. But in the verse in focus God uses a descriptive that covers everyone since He is the One who created Muslims and non- Muslims, as well as all men and women.[291]

Accounting for 'nations' and 'tribes' Sha'arawi further states,

> God spreads humans into countless men and women. Those humans who spread over different parts of the world became nations and tribes. Thus, the Arabs constitute a nation, the Romans a nation, the Persians a nation and so on. Internally, each nation is divided into tribes, subtribes, clans and families**.[292]**

Sha'rawi's interpretation implies that Qur'an 49:13 and Qur'an 4:1 are related in that they both provide support and encouragement for *al*

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[290] Tarek Osman, *Preaching Islam- Egypt on the Brink* (Yale University Press, 2010), p.77. *www.independent.co.uk/.../obituary-sheikh-mohamed-mutwali-sharawi-1165880.htm*l

[291] http://waqfeya.com/book; http://shamela.ws/index.php/book/1083. It states that the work was published in 1997 in 20 volumes by Akhbar al Yawm Publishers and archived in 2012 and that it comprised in 15,449 (electronic) pages. See also http://www.elsharawy.com (accessed Jan 2018 through 2021)

[292] http://www.elsharawy.com (vrs. 11 -13) Accessed 1/10/2020)

ta`āruf* (mutual acknowledgement and respect of all people irrespective of their race or religion) In this sense, *al ta`āruf, kind and magnanimous consideration for one another, is required at all levels of the relationships among humans. Another possible inference from his statement is to think that Qur'an.49:13, as different from or rather than Qur'an 4:1, is urging *al ta'aruf* by saying: if you cannot cooperate based on a common faith or religion, you should be able to cooperate at least based on your common biological origin. In other words, whereas Qur'an 4:1 apparently is urging egalitarian treatment of one another by all humans on a narrower basis, (i.e., ties of kinship) the same is encouraged in Qur'an 49:13 on a more common or more general basis. I think this is where the spirit of religious pluralism lies in his commentary.

For Shaʿrāwi, the phrase *litaʿārafū* certainly entails a sense of an obligation or a necessity for humans, because their common interest lies in it. He points out that "the vicissitudes of life will actually require people to cooperate because they will need one another", adding also that 'this is because God has apportioned His grace, gifts and endowments, intellectual, physical and material, in varying proportions at various times to different peoples, nations and tribes'. He states further,

> This explains why the advanced nations of Europe and North America, for example, despite their wealth and advance technology, are still in need of the dwellers of the desert, the Arabs, for their petroleum resources and precious metals. These unequal endowments will make it necessary for people to work together to complement the needs or the deficiencies of

one another. [293]

Sha'arāwi's interpretation opens a new perspective of the verse based on socio- economic interdependence among nations, a materialist or globalist view. But it also underscores the interdependence of religions and cultures for global alliance. All of this is applicable in the context of "that you may know and respect one another" that is stressed in Qur'an 49:13.

Conclusion

This work explored Qur'an 49:13 for what it can contribute to the discourse of religious pluralism that will be different from much of what has been proposed in contemporary scholarship. It engaged with the views in some recent works about Qur'an 49:13 being applicable in the context of the religious pluralism discourses by investigating several traditional and contemporary sources. The work assumes that by centering *al ta'aruf (*mutual recognition and respect among nations and tribes), Qur'an 49:13 signals positive interactions among cultures and religions of all humans, based on their common origins. The encouragement for mutual acknowledgement and respect among different nations and tribes opens an opportunity for establishing a connection between the racial and the religious differences both as equal arenas for practicing *al ta'aruf*. Thus, *al ta'aruf* represents the platform for navigating

[293] http://www.elsharawy.com (vrs. 11 -13)

diversities and differences in human cultures and religious beliefs.

As presented in chapter one, religious pluralism has been a subject of intellectual curiosity for a long time as shown by the various conceptualizations of, and approaches to it by scholars across the religions. Thus, chapter one was devoted to analyzing the various perspectives on the concepts of religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism and religious pluralism as well as major disagreements among scholars. As it could be seen in the chapter, the various backgrounds of the scholars involved contributed to enrichment of the discourse field. While scholars like Alan Race, John Hick and Remundo Pannikar appeared to agree on common definitions of the concepts, others like … D'Costa, … Plantinga and Ian Markham held considerable disagreements as discussed in chapter one. The standard definitions of these concepts appeared to have settled around the ones provided by the likes of Hick, Race and Pannikar since these are the ones used mostly in the religious pluralism discourse. Nevertheless, the objections, observations and criticisms raised by other scholars like Gavin D'Costa, Ian Markham also received the attention they deserve in chapter one. Together, the views from both sides were welcome as challenges and opportunities for the discourses on religious pluralism in general and for the purposes of this work in particular. The chapter concluded with a broad outlie of the Qur'an's strategies and approaches for deconstructing religious exclusivism and alleviating its negative impact on inter religious relations. It

also discussed responses from Muslim scholars to the three-fold theory and offered suggestions as to what could have been done differently to account for a more distinctly Quran based conceptualization of religious pluralism.

Chapter two engaged with the views of three Muslim scholars on religious pluralism focusing on the Qur'an verses underlying their thought as well as their arguments and conclusions. This is the trio of Joseph Lumbard, Asghar Ali Engineer and Hasan Askari. As shown in my analysis of their theories, the efforts by the Muslim scholars to adapt the Qur'an to religious pluralism are not without its own problems. It focused on the Qur'an verses used by these scholars to build their theories as well as other modalities of their hypotheses.

Specifically, the chapter discussed some of the constraints and limitations in those formulations and how such studies at the *micro* level provided the impetus for this work to explore pluralist interpretations of Qur'an 49:13 in several tafsir works in the subsequent chapters.

As discussed in the chapter under reference, several Qur'an verses suggest pluralism, sometimes in the context of the polemics among the Abrahamic faith groups – Judaism, Christianity and Islam (2:62) or in the context of God manifesting Himself to the different faith communities and nations by sending prophets and messengers to them (16:36; 35: 28), and at other times, through the diversity in creation (30:22), etc. Those verses no doubt can serve as good premises for a theory of religious pluralism as we

can see in the works of those scholars. But, as I argued in this work, some of the verses also complicate the matter by raising other issues that might stand in the way of a comprehensive theory of religious pluralism. Qur'an 5:48, Hick's favored text, is a case in point. Thus, the merits of Q.49:13 over those others came to be focused here. The chapter also analyzed the views of these scholars in relation to the common opinion that traditional *tafsīr* works were not helpful for religious diversity and argued for reconsidering that opinion in the light of the evidence provided in this work. The overall position here is that, rather than being unhelpful, tradition offers beneficial hints for developing a balanced view on religious pluralism.

In chapter three I provided a brief account on traditional theories of *tafsīr* and some aspects of modern developments in the field that are necessary for situating my topic within the larger tradition of tafsīr scholarship. Important tafsīr genres were discussed with a view to drawing attention to their influence on the discourses on religious pluralism in general and in particular the pluralist interpretations of Qur'an 49:13. The *tafsīr* concepts discussed include (*al tafsīr bi al ma'thur*) narration-based tafsir, (*al tafsīr bi al ra'y*) reason-based interpretation (*al tafsir al lughawi*), language or linguistic approach to tafsir and (*tafsīr mawḍu`ī)* the theme-based approach, etc., drawing from both Islamic and western sources. The role and contributions of these various approaches to pluralist interpretations are also analyzed.Chapter four examined the context of

Quran 49:13 within the purview of *asbāb al nuzūl* and the various interpretative opinions on it in Qur'an commentaries over the ages.

Particular attention was paid to issues impacting pluralist interpretations. It explored specifically the interconnections of studies on Qur'an 49:13, works in the subfields of "occasions of revelation" (*asbāb al nuzūl*) and the legal theory of "the general and the particular" (al `āmm wa al khāṣṣ). It accounted for several of the interpretative tools that the commentators have relied upon for formulating opinions that aid the pluralists' interpretation.

It is further argued, evidentially, in this chapter as well as throughout the work that the traditional understanding of Qur'an 49:13 as a verse concerned only with the racial difference, suggested in the book of Wahidi and in some narration-based tafsīrs, failed to represent the wide range of interpretative views in scholarship on this subject.

Citing traditional tafsīr scholars who have applied Qur'an 49:13 in the broader context of religious differences and religious pluralism in chapter five, I analyzed various views and opinions related to the subject in their works. Thus, I argued further that evidence that Qur'an 49:13 is particularly suited for theories of religious pluralism discourse can be found in traditional scholarship and in classical tafsir works as well. The commentaries engaged here include the works of Ibn Kathir, Qurtubi, Tabari, Zamakhashari, Alusi, Razi, Biqa'i, Qushayri, Baqli and Sha'rawi. This shows

there is considerable support for a universal interpretation of the verse and for its application to the discourse of religious pluralism that can be traced in several important works of various orientations. This being the case, I concluded, hoping that this study would have contributed to the discourse of religious pluralism from a tafsīr based approach and in a manner that could open new horizons for further study in the field. I also hope this can be continued in future research on religious pluralism.

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APPENDIX

POSTCSRIT: ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Dialogue and religious pluralism appear to be coterminous because they share similar meanings and objectives. Alternatively, we may consider dialogue as a process and pluralism as a goal. At whatever level dialogue can be achieved, it is expected to promote religious pluralism and *vice versa*. The question now is: can there be religious pluralism without dialogue, or will dialogue have failed in its objectives if it does not lead to pluralism? Viewed from another angle, what is the minimum for the achievement of religious pluralism that dialogue can contribute?

These questions arise from the fact that most scholars of religious pluralism, if not all of them, begin or end their discussions with dialogue, which suggests there is an established relationship between the two. They seem to have linked dialogue with pluralism existentially. Thus, it is important to view the two like the two faces of the same coin. Dialogue is the other face by which pluralism may appear.

Dialogue has been defined as a 'conversation or exchange of ideas and opinions between two people or more with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement, etc.[294] Another definition describes dialogue as

[294] Theses definitions are found in American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (5th Edition, 2011) and Collins English Dictionary

'talking together especially when open and frank and aimed at seeking mutual understanding or harmony'[295]. As a verb, it is defined as: "to take part in a conversation or discussion to resolve a problem". According to Swidler, "Dialogue is conversation between persons with differing views resulting in participants learning from each other so that they can change and grow. We enter into dialogue primarily so that *we* can learn, change and grow, not so that we can force change on the other." [296] In what follows I will discuss the views of Eugen Kreider, Diana Eck and Leonard Swidler on this question.

Eugen Kreider's "Religious Pluralism, Dialogue and the Ethics of Social Influence"

Eugene C. Kreider was Professor Emeritus of Christian Education and Pastoral Care and Director of Graduate Studies at Lutheran Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. He received the Samuel Scheiners Human Relations Award for his work on Jewish Christian dialogue. His books include: I *want to be a teacher: A ten-session course for new church Schoolteachers* (Augburg Fortress, 1981) and *Study of Luther's Small Catechism*, *Leader's Guide*, 1991. He died in 2003 at the age of 71.[297] His above-mentioned article "Religious pluralism, dialogue and the ethics of

[295] *Ibid*

[296] Leonard Swidler, ed., *Death or Dialogue: (*Philadelphia, 1990), P 59.

[297] Pioneer Press, twincities.com/ obituaries, accessed April 2016.

social influence" was published in the *Cultic Studies Journal*.[298]

Kreider's reflections on the interrelationship of religious pluralism and dialogue center on three aspects: (1) common areas of interest for both religious pluralism and dialogue, (ii) their common objectives and goals and (iii) the mutual interdependency of the duo. All this together constitutes what I would like to describe as the dialogical field of religious pluralism in Kreider's thought. Three points are most relevant for my purposes in Kreider's above named essay, namely, (1) how dialogue helps us to assess the truth claims of other religions, (ii) how it helps us to appreciate the religious others 'commitments considering our own and lastly (iii) his emphasis on the interdependent relationship of religious pluralism and dialogue.

Firstly, Kreider states in his paper that "the appraisal of the truth-claims and religious exclusiveness represented in the differing religious experiences" is one important aspect of the discourse of religious pluralism dialogue.[299] Secondly, he claims that the most important objective of religious pluralism dialogue is that it "provides a way of understanding someone else's religious commitment". Thirdly, he asserts that

[298] Eugen Kreider, "Religious Pluralism, dialogue and the ethics of social influence" in *Cultic Studies Journal,* vol.2, No. 2, pages 329 – 339, 1985.

[299] Ibid.

"dialogue assumes that a vital religious pluralism is the matrix in which truth is sought, claimed, and translated into historically and culturally defined beliefs and patterns of life", among other points.[300] I will examine these three points briefly as follows:

1-) Appraisal of the truth-claims of the religions

Assessing the truth claim(s) of another religion can be best done by listening, feeling, and by empathizing with the faith community. It sometimes may require developing a sensibility like the one possessed by the followers of a religion to capture something of the religious truth of the other. If you are unable to grasp it because you cannot relate it to your own truth, you should at least respect it. Some pluralism scholars describe this as "non-judgmental inclusivism".[301] Hick says that it entails correct application of the Golden Rule, i.e., assessing others' religions with the same yardsticks as our own in his article titled, "On Conflicting Religious Truth Claims"[302]. Realistically speaking, someone may have

[300] Article accessed 2015 through 2016 at: http://www.icsahome.com/articles/religious-pluralism- dialogue--ethics-csj-2-2, p.1. (Also checked 2002)

[301] Hick uses this phrase in "On conflicting religious truth-claims" cited below.

[302] John Hick, "On conflicting religious truth-claims," *Religious Studies*, vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec. 1983), pp. 485 and 488. Although this paper is devoted to this matter, he has discussed this in other places in his works as well. Since this is a major issue in pluralism and dialogue, it is expected that pluralists will deal with it one way or another. See also John Hick, *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth-Claims* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

developed a negative feeling about the religion of the Other that may hinder their ability to relate to it positively. Sometimes, we may come to realize how distant the other religion is from our religious plausibility zone, so we are unable to make sense of it. As a result, we become prejudiced about it. Kreider thinks that religious pluralism dialogue can help alleviate this problem.

2-) Understanding someone else's religious commitment:

This is an important issue. Understanding it correctly can help us in evaluating the commitments of the followers of other religions vis –a vis our commitment to our own. Thus, it deserves the attention paid to it in Kreider's paper. Approaching this carefully can be a key to successful interfaith relations. Fortunately, the Qur'an provides guidance on this matter to help us understand and deal with it appropriately, as will be discussed here.

Due to their intense emotional attachment to their religion, some religious people may not be aware of there being a parity of religious commitments among followers of the different faiths. They may not realize that religious feelings are similar among people of the various religious communities; such that the way Christians feel about Jesus is like the way Hindus feel about Krishna, or a Buddhist about the Buddha. It is hard for some to accept that the way we feel about our religion is about the same as

others feel about their own religion too. The Qur'an alludes to this fact and to how disrespecting or disparaging other people's religions could precipitously result in their abusing and disrespecting our own religion and our sacred truths. It shows us an example of how this may play out in the real world of religious people. In this respect God says, "Do not revile those (beings) whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance. Thus, to every people We have caused their actions to seem fair (Qur'an 6:108)."[303]

In his commentary on this verse, the author of *Tafhim*, Abu al 'Ala Mawdudi states as follows:

> The Prophet (peace be on him) and his followers are admonished not to allow their proselytizing zeal to dominate them so that their polemics and controversial religious discussions either lead them to be offensive to the beliefs of non-Muslims or to abuse their religious leaders and deities. Far from bringing people closer to the Truth, such an attitude is likely to alienate them from it further.[304]

If this Qur'anic admonition is heeded, it can help us develop a genuine sensitivity toward other people's religious feelings and commitments. It should help to curb our proselyte enthusiasm. Even if we may not agree or accept their beliefs, we still need to respect their feelings. We will need to understand that as we stand at different angles from the truth everyone will

[303] Wahiduddin Khan, *The Qur'an*, GoodWord Books, 2020.

[304] Abul 'Ala Mawdudi, *Tafheem al Qur'an* (Q.6:108) at www.tafheem.net; islamicstudies.info, accessed January 20, 2021.

be entitled to respect because our religious feelings are similar across faith lines.

3-) Interconnection of Dialogue and Religious Pluralism

Kreider concludes his remarks on this subject by emphasizing the interconnection of dialogue and religious pluralism. He sates, "Dialogue assumes that a vital religious pluralism is the matrix in which truth is sought, claimed, and translated into historically and culturally defined beliefs and patterns of life." This last point by Kreider suggests that dialogue is the livewire of religious pluralism, or at least that it is at the center of this discourse. Dialogue provides religious pluralism with a platform for its expression and performance. This idea is further emphasized in the works of other religious pluralism scholars discussed below such as Diana Eck, etc.

Diana Eck: "What is Pluralism?"

Born July 5, 1945, Diana Eck is Harvard University Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies and director of Harvard Pluralism Project.[305] One of the best-known scholars of religious pluralism in America, she is the recipient of the National Humanities Medal and the National

[305] Diana Eck, "Curriculum Vitae" accessed October 2018 at: www.pluralism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/eck_cv.pdf; *pluralism.org/about/who-we-are/diana-eck/*

Endowment for the Humanities among others. The Pluralism Project is the culmination of her efforts to promote interfaith and intercultural understanding across America. Eck's works include: *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, 1997; A *New Religious America: How A "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, 2001 and a brochure titled: "What is Pluralism?" that may be considered as the quintessence of her views on the subject.

In that treatise, Eck mentions four key points bordering around her conception of religious pluralism and dialogue. That I will discuss in the following:

In "What is Pluralism?", Eck writes:

> The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. But what is pluralism? Here are four points to begin our thinking: First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the *energetic engagement with diversity*. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettoes with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.[306]

Firstly, Eck's assumes that religious diversity and religious pluralism are not the same.

Interesting as this may sound, it puts her at odds with other scholars who have theorized both as same. In this way, it disregards the fact that diversity

[306] Diana Eck's "What is Pluralism?" is a 1-page brochure and can be accessed at the Pluralism Project website: ***pluralism***.*org/what-is-****pluralism****/*

has been the other concept under which religious pluralism has been discussed in some major works - one example is Hick's *Diversity of Religious Experience*.[307] By doing this, Eck has created a theoretical schism between her conceptualization and those of others. But I could see that setting religious pluralism apart from religious diversity the way she has done can lead to a problem. It is like saying to the scholars who have privileged diversity: you are right but not quite so. Only our own terminology captures the full range of the idea' – inclusivism. She will be using the logic of inclusivism, a system that accepts something rather than denies it, but only as an inadequate representation of a kind. Thus, Eck's pluralism hypothesis becomes less pluralistic in its language.

Secondly, she indicates that diversity is given, and plurality is what we need to work to accomplish. Inversely, this would mean that where there is no diversity, there is no strong reason for religious pluralism. If this is correct, it would imply that religious pluralism needs not be pursued where there is no religious diversity, because pluralism has no good chance of succeeding in those areas – say for example, Saudi Arabia, the Vatican City, or pockets of communities in America that still retain overwhelming whiteness and Christianity. Also, if we take the reasoning further, Eck's statement may suggest that there will be a need to create (religious)

[307] Hick and others for example produced an important work in which these two terms are subsumed or used interchangeably.

diversity first where it does not exist for religious pluralism to take place, since we need the given to find the unknown.

Thirdly, Eck's next proposition regarding religious pluralism and religious tolerance also calls for further reflection. She states, "Pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another".

I agree with Professor Eck that religious pluralism and religious tolerance are not the same thing. However, in many of our societies, the recipe for moving forward from religious tolerance to religious pluralism has proved hard to achieve, as positive acknowledgment of one another requires more efforts particularly from the religious communities and their leadership. I believe this is what Qur'an 49/13 advocates that make it suitable for this effort. I suspect that if Eck had been aware of this verse, like many other pluralists, she probably would have offered her thoughts about it. Knowledge of one another often takes a negative dimension especially in the media and in the public pronouncements of many religious leaders, as well. It sometimes gets replaced with spreading ignorance and negativity about the religious others, confirming Eck's fears about the possible creation of religious ghettos. This problem could also occur at the level of ideas

among intellectuals and academics, making it a more daunting challenge to overcome. I could see that her plan for changing this condition has a resonance with “that you may know one another” and with the subject of this discourse.

Regarding religious pluralism and relativism, Eck again states as follows:

Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

Scholars of religious pluralism have had to deal with religious relativism as not being what religious pluralism is about, one way or another. As we see in the works of Swidler and Hick, for examples, they are afraid their call for religious pluralism might be misconstrued as attempt to blot out the theologies of the various religions. Pluralists confront religious relativism, perhaps most vehemently in Swidler’s works, by counterpoising relativism against absolutism, clearly rejecting both. He states in one of his works, “With the de-absolutized view of the truth of the meaning of things we come to face the specter of relativism, the opposite pole of absolutism. …Relativism, like so many "isms", is a negative term”.[308] Thus, Eck is not

[308] Eck, op cit.

alone in this encounter with relativism. Nevertheless, her views shed light on some dimensions of this problem.

Eck's fourth and final point is focused on the indispensability of dialogue for religious pluralism. She states,

"Fourth (and finally), pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism."

Here, Eck proclaims the central role of dialogue in the religious pluralism project. For her, dialogue becomes the fundamental instrument for the realization of religious pluralism and the unavoidable mechanism for its survival. This is where my work connects strongly with her thoughts and other similar thoughts cited in this work. According to Eck, dialogue is the language by which pluralism is expressed and performed. In Kreider's thought, it is the matrix of religious pluralism. Other scholars hold similar opinions regarding the relationship between religious pluralism and dialogue.

1-) Apophasis – done by denial!

Apophasis is a linguistic trope used often in Eck's analysis. It is defined as "a figure of speech which consists in the denial of a proposition

even as that same proposition is emphasized in the act of denial." [309] Apophasis characterizes most of what Professor Eck must say about her vision of religious pluralism. She insists on describing religious pluralism by what it is not rather than simply what it is. A grammatical clue in apophasis is the use of 'but', a thought reverser, as prefix to many of her above statements. This usually indicates movement from one conceptual level to another, supposedly higher or better. I hope she has not overused it and that this will not be misunderstood as denial of viable conceptual alternatives negated in those statements.

Leonard Swidler on Dialogue and Religious Pluralism

Born January 6, 1929, in Sioux City, IA, Leonard J. Swidler is Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is the co-founder and editor of *the Journal of Ecumenical Studies* and author of several works on religion and interreligious dialogue. Three of his works are particularly referenced here, in this study, namely, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue,* 2000, *Trialogue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (2007) and his Grand Valley paper, "Death or Dialogue:From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue" (1990).

[309] https://ifioque.com/figures-of-speech/trope/apophasis accessed June 5,2021

Backgrounds to Swidler's dialogue and religious pluralism theory will involve comparing- and contrasting- Swidler's views on this subject with those of other scholars in the field especially or particularly the duo of Hick and Firestone. At least three views can be traced in literature on this question from the works of the three scholars, Swidler, Hick and Firestone. Swidler thinks that religious pluralism and dialogue were made possible by the Enlightenment and that it would have been much more difficult or impossible prior to the Enlightenment for the reason he adduced. On the exact opposite is Hick's views. Hick stands on exact opposite side. He holds that dialogue and religious pluralism predate the Enlightenment. Not only that, but he also claims that the teaching of religious pluralism was more advanced and well developed in the 13th through 15tth century compared to any time later. At the middle of the road, there stands Firestone with the view that "polemic" practiced during the Abbasid period serves as important precursor for our modern understanding of religious pluralism and dialogue.

In *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue*, Swidler suggests that dialogue is a recent development in human history. Particularly, he posits dialogue as a post-enlightenment notion or an idea that was either unknown or impossible until the European Enlightenment.
This question is thoroughly dealt with in Chapter 11. I will examine these issues by bringing Swidler into dialogue with those of his two colleagues, John Hick and Reuven Firestone.

Some of the reasons why dialogue-religious pluralism was non-existent before Enlightenment, according to Swidler, was that people lived in isolated cultural and religious blocks, mostly.[310] Contacts with others among people, according to Swidler, were limited and possibly controlled. In addition to that, the period witnessed a dominance of one religion over an area as religion and nationality became interlocked with the homeland.[311]

On this note, Swidler may be referring, for example, to the bifurcation of the world by Muslim legists in the medieval time into the world of the Muslims and the world of the non- Muslims that was promoted then. In that age, the Muslims had constructed for themselves a bipolar view of the world In what was called the abode of Islam (*dar al Islam*) and the abode of the people at war with Islam (*dar al harb*) in their normative narrative, as noted by Arkoun,
Atay and others among the Muslim pluralists.[312] The implications of this have been widely discussed including in a recent book titled, *Jews,*

[310] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzez, eds., *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p 145-6.

[311] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzez, eds., *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p 146.

[312] Muhammad Arkoun, Rethinking *Islam*, trns. Robert D. Lee (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994),
p.16. See also, Rifat Atay, "Religious Pluralism and Islam: A Critical Examination of John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis" (Diss., 1999), p. 33. Other divisions include the abode of truce, *dar a l hudnah* and so on. Each has a certain implication for the Muslim relationships with the Other at the time. The important thing is that it was not necessarily a strictly bipolar world.

Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities by Jacob Lassner.

However, it is important as has also been noted that these terms (i.e., abode of Islam and abode of war) were not conceived or applied entirely literally. While it is true that the two camps have distinct features that can be contrasted with one another in terms of their religious and ideological underpinnings, they were not necessarily physically and economically at an all- out war with one another, nor that the two worlds lacked any relationships in the fields of commerce, culture and even politics.[313] Other categories existed in the Muslim history, as well, such as dar al mu'ahadah and dar la *hudnah* - abode of the people with whom the Muslims have entered into a treaty of peaceful coexistence or nations that generally were not belligerent to the Muslim rule. Each has its implication for the Muslim relationships with the Other at the time.

Regarding this issue about dialogue and religious pluralism in the pre-Enlightenment, Firestone has offered useful remarks in *Trialogue* about Judaism in the pre-Enlightenment period, of which three aspects are particularly germane to my discussion here. Firstly, he describes how Judaism handled the challenge of interreligious dialogue and religious

[313] Jacob Lassner, Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Paper. Pp. xviii, 312.

pluralism differently during the Roman and Muslim empires suggesting that things were much more difficult for the Jewish people in the Roman Empire than in the Abbasid era. Under the Romans, according to Firestone, the Jews "were afraid to even respond to call to dialogue out of fear it could have been a plot to obtain from them information that could be used to further persecute them". On the contrary, his account reveals a remarkable improvement in the conditions of the Jewish people during the reign of the Muslim rulers in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries.

Secondly, he points at a form dialogue that was known as "polemics" which flourished during the Abbasid dynasty. In his article, "Judaism in Dialogue….", he sates, "This came from the culture of open debate or polemic that was promoted by the Muslims rulers and Muslim elites of that age". He further remarks, 'The most famous is during the height of the Islamic achievement in the Middle Ages under the Abbasids Caliphate that was ruled from Baghdad, and the revival of the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain…' He argued that the form of interfaith exchange practiced during that time answered the questions about what really existed in the Muslim world at that time and served as a precursor for the modern development in the field. Firestone's ideas on this question can be gathered from two of his works.[314]

[314] Reuven Firestone, "Judaism in dialogue with other religions," in *Trialogue: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue, eds., Leonard Swider, Khalid Duran and Reuven Firestone (New London, CT.: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007)*, p. 85ff; Reuven Firestone's

He suggests it was as fruitful and had similar objectives as our dialogue. He states,

> It preserves some important information about the points or areas of concerns and conversations between those religions and their followers that can prove useful for us even in our time. Even the tradition of polemics constitutes a form of dialogue.[315]

A more positive picture is painted for this phenomenon in Hick's works where he states that the teaching of religious pluralism was more advanced in that period than in the modern time, such that, according to him, the west is just starting to catch up. He claims that it was much developed and widespread. Thus, it appears that the difference between these two major views of Firestone and Hick, may consist in that unlike Hick who attributed this phenomenon to some individual religious personalities such as Ibn Arabi, etc., Firestone account adds an official tone suggesting that it was promoted by the Abbasid government. With Firestone, it was an official teaching widely practiced within the Muslim empire. Both two accounts contrast with Swidler's view in *the Study.*

1-) Swidler's Aristotelian Notion of Truth

How the notion of truth was constructed in the period before Enlightenment was another reason why in Swidler's view dialogue could not

Who are the Real Chosen ones?

[315] Reuven Firestone, op. cit., p.87.

have taken place prior. He notes that the notion of truth was based on an either/or, absolutized manner - what he describes as Aristotelian definition of truth. Up until nineteenth century, according to Swidler, Western notion of truth was "absolute, static, monologic and exclusive". [316] This places a burden on religious pluralism scholars to define truth in nonexclusive terms and to align this with the concerns of religious pluralism. In this respect, Swidler is apt to propose something, and we may want to consider his views on this matter further. The new definition of truth proposed by Swidler views truth as relational rather than relative and limited by the factors of sociology of knowledge, by hermeneutics and the limit of language among others. Rather than being relative, truth is conceived as relational.

He states:

> My view and description of the object, or reality, will be true, but it will not include what someone on the other side of the circle perceives and describes, which will also be true. So, neither of our perceptions and descriptions of reality is total complete-"absolute" or "objective" in the sense of not in any way being dependent on a "subject" or a viewer. At the same time, however, it is also obvious that there is an "objective," doubtless "true" aspect to each perception and description, even though each is relational to the perceiver-"subject".[317]

So, the question here for the Muslims is: Is the Islamic truth defined absolutely exclusivist? In other words, when a Muslim says: 'I hold the truth',

[316] Leonard Swidler, "Death or Dialogue: From the age of monologue to the age of dialogue", Grand Valley Review, vol.6: Issue2, Article 16, Grand Valley State University, 1991, p. 151. Accessed from: www.http//scholarworks.gvr/vol16/iss2/16.
[317] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p. 149.

does that necessarily mean that the Jews, the Christians, etc. hold nothing but falsehood? It is not a simple thing to argue about whether the Muslim definition of truth was classicist in that era or at any other time.
Some of the reasons we can adduce to argue that it probably was not, include the fact that the Muslim believe that others share the Islamic truth at some fundamental level. These others are not necessarily anonymous Muslims, but as people who can be recognized as following an earlier formulation of the same Islamic truth. Can we say that if democracy was not practiced as it was done by the Greek, there is no democracy? Or can the British say that if democracy is not patterned on Parliamentary model, then it is entirely false?

I am inclined to think that the truth of Islam may be located in between the classicist Aristotelian and the relational, dialogical view. The relational-dialogical view employs strategies such as limits of language, hermeneutic, historicism, etc. for its construction. A pluralism theory or refutation of exclusivism that is based on these will likely be tolerable, or less offensive to the religious Other than one based on outright denial or total negation of the other religions' truth.

Historicism is another factor in Swidler's relational view of truth[318]. Like pluralism, historicism too has lent itself to various definitions. I believe

[318] Ibid., p. 153.

the definition that is applicable here is the one that holds that "historical awareness is crucial for adequate understanding in a particular field or in general" rather than the one which claims that each period of history has its own beliefs and values inapplicable to any other; so that nothing can be understood independently of its historical context.[319] This probably will not have much negative impact on
the truth of *Islam* which already is acknowledged to have been expressed in different times and climes over time. It turns out that historicism and relationality have something in common and they both are subsumed in the sociology of knowledge.[320] For example, Peter Berger and Mannheim, both scholars of sociology of knowledge state, "The principal thesis of the sociology of knowledge is that there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscure".[321]

There seems to be an important relationship between the sociologists' perception of historicism and Swidler's view of relationality in that both are concerned about the role that historical context plays in our understanding of reality rather than saying that a particular reality that occurred in the past

[319] Theses definitions are found in American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (5th Edition, 2011) and Collins English Dictionary.

[320] See Troeltsch, 1922, p. 102; see also "Relationality: A symposium hosted by the Postcolonial Studies Research Network, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand 18–20 November 2015, accessed 12/1/2021 at: https://relationality2015.com/

[321] Peter Berger, The *Social Construction of Reality: A treatise in the Sociology of knowledge;* Mannheim*, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*

can have no relevance outside of its historical context. Thus, we might end up with three notions of truth or we might end up having three views or definitions of truth: the classicist Aristotelian view of truth, the dialogical-relational view proposed in

Swidler's work and a diversified view of Islamic truth. Without attempting to resuscitate the story of the elephant and the three blind men already mediated by several of these theoreticians in different ways and models, it could be seen that dialogue remains an indispensable tool for navigating the intellectual landscape of religious pluralism.