

Foundations of Religious Inclusiveness in Muslim Thought*

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Abstract

Religious diversity is an indisputable reality of the world. The question of how we can explain this diversity is significant and one that people are trying to answer today as they did in the past. In this respect, religious inclusiveness is one of the attempts to explain religious diversity in the world, as are religious exclusiveness and religious pluralism. Inclusiveness claims that, on the one hand, the source of Divine Reality is only in one religion but, on the other hand, that salvation is possible for some people in other religions. Religious inclusiveness is not the mainstream of Islamic tradition, but that does not mean it is entirely unfamiliar to Islamic thought. When we look at Islamic theology, philosophy and mysticism, we can see the different approaches that evoke religious inclusiveness. This essay tries to find traces of the inclusivity with reference to different Islamic figures; namely al-Māturīdī and al-Ghazālī in Islamic theology (Kalam), Ibn ‘Arabi and Mawlānā Rūmī in Islamic mysticism (sufism), and Fazlur Rahman and Al-Faruqī in contemporary Islamic thought.

Introduction

Religious diversity is an issue that may not be easily comprehended. When we think about it, we have to take into consideration the differences of religions as well as God’s justice and mercy. What is Divine Reality? Which religion or religions will be able to provide the way to salvation? In the past, whilst people who had different beliefs hadn’t the opportunity to meet closely with one another, today’s world, which is like a global village, gives people this opportunity. Moreover, new epistemological and philosophical theories provide a basis for new approaches.¹

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This reality of the world naturally raises some questions about the religious other.

Today, when we attempt to think or talk about religious diversity, we employ the tripartite classification known as exclusiveness, inclusiveness and pluralism (or universalism). It is generally accepted that Alan Race was the first person to make this conceptual classification² but we need not use this classification when we think and talk about religious diversity.³ In the past, theologians and philosophers in different traditions wrote about this issue without using those terms, but these classifications can facilitate and offer common ground for discussion notwithstanding different religious traditions.

When we compare religious inclusiveness with exclusiveness and pluralism, we should accept that inclusiveness is a more complicated concept to describe.⁴ Although exclusiveness claims that there is only one reality and one vehicle to salvation, pluralism asserts that all religions have the same value for attaining salvation. In this context, how can we describe the inclusivity paradigm? If we use philosophical language, inclusivity claims that there is a particular way to salvation ontologically but this situation may not be obligatory epistemologically. It emphasises that even though the source of divine reality and salvation is a particular religion, some people in other religions should be able to reach salvation because they are good individuals whom God loves.

In the Catholic world, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is significant for Christian inclusiveness.⁵ At the end of the Council a document about the religious other (*Nostra Aetate*) stated the possibility of salvation for some people in other religions. It can therefore be accepted as an indication that the classical exclusivist paradigm⁶ had started to change in the Catholic world. Apart from that, as a Catholic, theologian Karl Rahner's concept of "Anonymous Christian"⁷ and, as an evangelical, Christian thinker, Clark H. Pinnock's concept of "Messianic Believer"⁸ are very inspiring concepts for Christian inclusiveness.⁹ It is possible to say that the main claim of inclusiveness in Christianity is that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are always present and active in other religions. However, the possibility of some people's salvation in other religions is about the activity of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, not about the value of other religions.

Traces of inclusiveness can be seen in the Islamic tradition too, even

though that it is not a mainstream approach to the religious other. The distinctive quality of Islamic inclusiveness is to stress the superiority of the Prophet Muhammad's message and the supremacy of divine mercy. In Islamic inclusiveness, however, religious others are generally Christians and Jews in that they were the first people Muslims met in Mecca and Medina in addition to polytheists. The Qur'an mentions those religious groups in its different verses. The concept of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*)¹⁰ has a special importance in Islamic inclusiveness.¹¹ This concept is used for Christians and Jews in the Qur'an. The People of the Book have special value amongst religious others because Allah praised¹² as well as criticised¹³ some of them in the Qur'an. In this case, according to Islamic inclusiveness, if salvation is possible for people other than Muslims, the leading candidates are some of the People of the Book.

The contested question in this issue is whether God might forgive one who had not been properly exposed to Islam or the opportunity to learn about it.¹⁴ In this regard, it is possible to mention two different inclusivity approaches in Islamic tradition; limited inclusiveness and liberal inclusiveness. The former argues that, even if there is no consensus on how exactly they will be judged amongst non-Muslims, only the unreached may be saved. This idea is based on "We not punish until [He has] sent a messenger" (Qur'an, 17:15). Limited inclusivity rejects the claim made by exclusivists that the category of the unreached religious others no longer exists in modern times. On the other hand, the latter's main claim that the category of sincere non-Muslims includes individuals who have been exposed to the message in its true form yet remain unconvinced. The discussion amongst inclusionists revolves around the question of what qualifies as a sincere response to the Islamic message upon encountering it. For limited inclusionists the answer is simple; conversion to Islam. For others the answer is either conversion or active investigation of the content of the message. For liberal inclusionists, if the message were never seen to be a possible source of divine guidance, it would make little sense to speak of a sincere response.¹⁵ In Islamic traditions, whilst some theologians represent the former, some mystics (*sufi*) represent the latter.

The traces of inclusivity can be seen in different Islamic perspectives. These perspectives have their own distinctive epistemologies. Furthermore, they have distinctive aspects of Islamic inclusiveness. As the main figures of this essay, al-Ghazālī and al-Māturīdī are significant theologians in Islamic theology (*kalam*), whereas Ibn Arabi and Rūmī are notable mystics

in Islamic mysticism (sufism). Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman and al-Faruqi have been respected thinkers in contemporary Islamic thought. All of them had their own specific approaches that can be evaluated as Islamic inclusiveness.

When we look at the traces of contemporary Islamic non-exclusivist thought more broadly, we can see the influence of two main Islamic perspectives; modern interpretations of Islamic theology (Sunni and Shi'ah) and Islamic mysticism (sufism). Fazlur Rahman,¹⁶ al-Faruqi,¹⁷ Farid Esack¹⁸ and Abdulaziz Sachedina,¹⁹ as opposed to sufi tradition, generally argue that a message of non-exclusiveness is derived directly from a straightforward, non-esoteric approach to the Qur'an. On the other hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr,²⁰ Frithjof Schuon,²¹ Reza Shah-Kazemi²² and William Chittick²³ explicitly championed the model of such sufis as Ibn 'Arabī. Furthermore, Muhammad Legenhausen, from a Shia'h perspective, deserves special attention. He employs the concept of "degree pluralism" that acknowledges degrees of truth in other religions and the possibility of religious others achieving salvation.²⁴

One should be aware of criticism that states some concepts are produced in modern western Christian thought and, therefore, are not equivalent to the concepts within Islamic tradition. We should focus on the content of the concepts, rather than the content itself. Inclusivity ideas are independent from modern conceptual classifications about religious diversity, such as exclusiveness, inclusiveness and pluralism. The writings of six different figures from three different perspectives in Islamic thought have been selected. Criticism implies that an essay cannot be enough to discuss inclusivity views of the six figures in Islamic thought.²⁵ The basic purpose in this essay is not to discuss the inclusivity views of a specific figure in detail – that may be the subject of another essay – but just generally to try to show the traces of inclusivity in Islamic thought.

Traces of religious inclusiveness in Islamic theology (kalam)

Al-Māturīdī and Religious Inclusiveness

Ebu Mansur Muhammad al-Māturīdī (d.333/944), who attracted attention with his opinions on issues of religious diversity, is one of the notable theologians who represent the moderation of Sunni Islamic theology²⁶ but he has remained in the shadow of al-Ash'ari, the main representative of Sunni Islamic theology. Al-Māturīdī is neglected in English²⁷ and Arabic

theological literature.²⁸ Nevertheless, his importance requires an evaluation of his approaches about religious diversity.

Al-Māturīdī spent his whole life in Samarqand,²⁹ far from the central regions – such as Basra and Baghdad – of the Islamic World in that time. When we look at the circumstances in which al-Māturīdī lived, we see that he had the challenges of two overall dimensions: First is the vindication of the total teaching of Islam against potential external attacks of all sorts of dualism, namely, Persian Manicheism, Daysanism and Marcionism, the Hellenistic philosophical legacy summed up in the word Dahriyya (the alleged head of which was Aristotle), as well as those of Judaism and Christianity and second, the consolidation of the Islamic doctrine internally that had been already severely shaken by the diametrical oppositions of brutal traditionalism of the anthropomorphists and dry rationalism of the Mu'tazilites.³⁰ These religious and intellectual varieties unsurprisingly influenced his approaches regarding religious diversity.

Al-Māturīdī's considerations about the religious other are, however, centred on Christians and Jews. According to him, the essence of divine religions is tawhid (oneness)³¹. It is the unique common ground that is valid all the time for believers in God. It means that all divine religions can be valid with the principle of tawhid today. Notwithstanding different religious traditions, there is only one religion, the religion of tawhid. Divine religions, which are revealed by God, have two main properties. First is un-changeability and second is changeability. The principle of tawhid is an unchangeable essential in the messages of all prophets, but some religious laws in the messages of the prophets (*shari'ah*) are changeable, dependent on time and place.³²

People who live in different cultural environments have different traditions, speak different languages and have different beliefs, thoughts and comprehensions. According to al-Māturīdī, this situation is the result or mystery of divine wisdom. On this point, an analogy al-Māturīdī uses can help us to understand why there are different religions, whereas there is one God. Although the same pure water (rain) drops on the land, the properties of water are shaped by the land. Because the land in the world has different compositions, it influences the colour and the content of water. Like water affected by land, messages of God come to the world through prophets, who are affected by different cultures and traditions. To al-Māturīdī, the essence of religion is sent to different people who live in different traditional

environments. Some of them try to understand this essence of religion and finally reach true faith and salvation. On the other hand, some of them wander from the essence of religion and become superstitious. The essence of water is invariable but its colour is variable.³³

In al-Māturīdī's opinion, it cannot be ignored that there is a close relationship between being a member of a religion and the religion of one's family. Al-Māturīdī pointed out that family or community most probably determines which religion someone will follow.³⁴ A person grows up in a religious environment and this environment substantially determines his religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. It is difficult to say that beliefs, attitudes and behaviour are conscious choices.³⁵ Consequently, this close relationship should not be overlooked.

There is no question that the Torah and the Gospel have been distorted by people after Moses and Jesus. Distorting (*tahrif*) means changing the essential meaning of the revelation of God by redefining the words that are used. In this sense, that the content of the Torah and the Gospel is inconsistent with the Qur'an must not be a surprise in that there has been distortion or changing of them. The Qur'an is the only scripture in which there is no distortion. The scriptures the Qur'an approves are not the scriptures Christians and Jews have now.³⁶

The main question is whether the Qur'an has overridden (*nash*) such other scriptures as the Gospels and the Torah since being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. General acceptance in Islamic tradition is that the Qur'an has overridden the other scriptures, but how should we understand the concept of overridden? This issue is not the main subject of this essay because we cannot say that those other scriptures have been totally distorted, but Muslims must presume that they are at least partially distorted. If there has been no distortion in the Torah and the Gospel, why has God sent the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an? This doesn't mean that all the meaning of those scriptures is invalid. When we compare the Qur'an to other scriptures, we can see common meaning, but the Qur'an includes all revelations from God.

Although the Qur'an has a different language and form, al-Māturīdī thought it has the same meaning as other scriptures before they were distorted. The similarity is a theological obligation because they are scriptures having the same source and purpose. The Qur'an comprises the same common divine

laws as the Torah and the Gospel and also contains some new divine laws that are not in the other scriptures. Consequently, those scriptures maintain continuity with one another. This is not continuity with their old identities but, rather, continuity with new language and manner. It means that Islam contains the genuine main principles of other religious traditions. If we use philosophical terminology, Islam has a characteristic that is partially inclusive and cumulative.

To sum up, al-Māturīdī had a reference to Islam that included other religious traditions before it. This Islamic inclusiveness does not totally ignore other religious traditions in terms of their accuracy. It is therefore in disagreement with exclusiveness. On the other hand, in that this does not accept that other religious traditions can be a way to salvation by themselves, it does disagree with pluralism. As a result, it can be said that al-Māturīdī's attitude to the religious other has an inclusive character.

Al-Ghazālī and religious inclusiveness

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is one of the significant theologians who contributed to traditional Sunni Islamic thought. When the exclusivist character of traditional Sunni Islamic thought is taken into consideration, al-Ghazālī's approaches about the religious other are remarkable. He claimed that there are three groups of people in varied situations. Each group has varied circumstances in terms of reaching the revelation of God:

“In fact, I would say that, God willing, most of Christians of Byzantium and Turks of this age will be covered by God's mercy. I am referring here to those who reside in the far regions of Byzantium and Anatolia who have not come in contact with the message of Islam. These people fall into three categories: First group are those who never heard so much as the name of Muhammad. These people are excused. Second group are those who lived in lands adjacent to the lands of Islam and had contact with Muslims, therefore, who knew Prophet Muhammad's name, character and miracles he wrought. These are the blasphemous unbelievers. Third group are those who fall between these two poles. These people knew the name Prophet Muhammad but nothing of his character and attributes. Instead, all they heard since childhood was that some arch-liar and deceiver called “Al-Muqaffa”³⁷ falsely claimed that God sent him (a prophet) and then

challenged people to disprove his claim. This group, in my opinion, is like the first group. Even though they heard his name, they heard the opposite of what his true attributes were. This does not provide enough incentive to compel them to investigate (his true status)”.³⁸

As can be seen in above quotation, al-Ghazālī dwelt on the conditions of responsibility. In such conditions, can other religious communities be acknowledged as the people - the third group, those who were never properly exposed to the message - to whom God’s message or invitation had reached? He thought that the religious responsibility of a community depended on some conditions coming true for them. The most significant aspect of those conditions is that the community has to be informed about the real identity of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an. Therefore, to al-Ghazālī, some Rums (Christians of Byzantium) and Turks who had lived remote from Islamic lands and not known the real identity of the Prophet Muhammad were not religiously responsible. It was expected that the people who had heard the Prophet Muhammad’s invitation think about and research it. If they didn’t ask for information about that invitation because of keenness about the world and forgetting the afterlife, they were religiously responsible (i.e. not excused). When a religious invitation reached people who believed in God and lived in other religious communities, they were required to research it but, if they started to research it and died in the process, they were not responsible and could hope for God’s grace.³⁹ Al-Ghazālī fundamentally said that people who live in varied cultural environments and had different conditions could not be judged or evaluated in the same way because those differences substantially determined or at least influenced their perceptions about the religious other. In his opinion, one must not advocate the exclusivist paradigm without fair assessment about their conditions.

Al-Ghazālī, who didn’t entirely support the exclusivist position about the religious other, also opposed exclusivity within Islam. To him, as with theological principles in other faiths, it didn’t make sense to judge different opinions within Islam as being heretical. A sect of Islam judges that another sect is heretical and accuses it of misunderstanding the message of Prophet Muhammad. For example, Ash’arites accuse Mu’tazilites of being heretical because Mu’tazilites reject the belief that God will be seen in heaven and also have different opinions about omnipotent and omniscient features of God. On the other hand, Mu’tazilites accuse Ash’arites of being heretical,

because Ash'arites attribute certain features to God, an attempt that is the opposite of the principle of tawhid; no feature can be attributed to God.⁴⁰

According to al-Ghazālī, a human being has some distinctive properties; intrinsic, sensual, imaginary, rational, etc. The fact that any person thinks about and accepts the invitation of the Prophet Muhammad with regard to any one of these properties doesn't mean that he misunderstands God's message. No one should be accused of heresy when he tries to understand the invitation of Muhammad and the Qur'an by those different human properties. It is meaningless for Muslims who believe in the same God to accuse one another of heresy. In response to al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), who claimed that any Muslim who departs from Ash'arite orthodoxy risks not being counted amongst the believers, al-Ghazālī argued that true unbelief consists in rejecting one of the three fundamental principles; belief in one God, the Prophet and the hereafter or refusing to accept secondary doctrines derived from prophetic reports that are diffuse and congruent (*mutawātir*). According to this standard, rationalists within and without Ash'arism, traditionalists and Twelver Shi'ites could all be considered true Muslims, even if some of their views are problematic.⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, however, didn't tolerate the *falāsifa*, the philosophers of the Islamic intellectual heritage, such as al-Farābī and especially Ibn Sīnā because he considered that they denied essential tenets.⁴²

Some criticisms about al-Ghazālī's opinions can be mentioned in the context of the religious other. One of these criticisms is about the situations of people who hadn't the opportunity to meet the real face of Islam. Adnan Aslan contends that al-Ghazālī excused all those people in other religious traditions, whether they believed or not within their own religion, whether they were moral people or not, because it is impossible for members of the great religious traditions – so long as they cannot meet the real face of Islam – to realise that their own religion was partly corrupted. Therefore, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Shintoist must fulfil the religious or moral principles of their own religions for salvation.⁴³ To Aslan, the great world religious traditions, namely Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism have, like Islam, a long history and their own deep theological and moral principles and original prayer styles that indicate a divine source. Muslims claim that all of those religious traditions were partly distorted or changed by their members, notwithstanding the fact that they have some genuine beliefs, but these distortions are known only by Muslims, who cannot ignore this reality.

There are two important points on this issue. First, only Muslims can perceive that change and distortion. It is not possible for people who are members of other religions to be aware of this reality. Second, because the members of other religions cannot perceive these distortions, they may not have any responsibility.⁴⁴

Two things must be distinguished from each other about this issue. A religion that has entirely authentic principles of belief is different from the vehicle leading to salvation. The compulsory condition of salvation is not just to believe the real or original religion. To Aslan, people must believe in Islam for salvation when they are not satisfied with their own religion or when Islam is accessible for them in their religious and cultural environment. Unless such a situation becomes reality, people's responsibility is merely to live according to the theological and moral principles of their religion. This may be the way of salvation.⁴⁵

There seems to be obligatory correlation between salvation and morality. The structure of this morality, which leads to salvation, is not universal but local. This morality includes good behaviour and rituals in a religion. If some behaviour not in accordance with universal moral principles is a requirement in a religion, the members of that religion are not responsible and this situation must not be an obstacle to their salvation. On this point, a religious subjectivism comes into play. In this situation, the most important issue is the uniqueness of Islam. If we accept some religions to be the way of salvation, though they are not sources of Divine Reality, how do we assess the uniqueness of Islam? The answer to this question is not easy.

Those who have carefully examined al-Ghazālī's corpus might notice what at least appear to be discrepancies between his book, *Faysal at-Tafriqa*, and some of his other works. This is because his views evolved over time and he wrote for different audiences and had to negotiate between competing considerations. It is, therefore, important to stress that *Faysal at-Tafriqa* is a mature work; its case for optimism is clearly laid out and we have no evidence that al-Ghazālī ever abandoned the soteriological outlook presented therein.⁴⁶

It can be said that al-Ghazālī pointed to the inaccuracy of religious exclusiveness directed at people in other religious traditions as well as in some exclusivist perspectives of Islamic thought. The content of al-Ghazālī's approach – notwithstanding the fact that he didn't use such

concepts as exclusiveness, inclusiveness and pluralism – indicates that he had an inclusivity attitude. Islam is the main centre of divine salvation; however, some sincere people in other faiths can reach that salvation in particular conditions.

Traces of religious inclusiveness in Islamic mysticism (sufism)

In Islamic tradition, Islamic mystics (*sufis*) and theologians (*mutakallims*) have different epistemological backgrounds. Whilst the theologians claim that to know God is possible only with rational interpretation of the Qur'an and sunna, for many sufis to know God is regarding God's mercy and compassion⁴⁷ This separation in their epistemology didn't prevent at least some of them reaching parallel conclusions about religious diversity.

Ibn 'Arabī and religious inclusiveness

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1239) was one of the most eminent mystics in Islamic mysticism (*sufism*). The question, "How can we evaluate the religious diversity in this world?" was crucial for Ibn 'Arabī. He therefore dealt with the ontological roots of religious diversity. To him, there was a circle in this issue. William Chittick underscores this circle, which Ibn 'Arabī underlined, unequivocally: "The revealed religions are diverse only because of the diversity of divine relationship; the divine relationship[s] are diverse only because of diversity of states; the states are diverse only because of diversity of times; the times are only because of diversity of movements; the movements are diverse only because of diversity of attentiveness; the attentiveness are (sic) diverse only because of diversity of the goals; the goals are diverse only because of diversity of self-disclosures; the self-disclosures are diverse only because of diversity of revealed religions."⁴⁸ For Ibn 'Arabī, religious diversity was basically an inevitable reality in this world.

Ibn 'Arabī employed two special concepts, *mutlaq* and *mutaqad* while he was evaluating the religious other.⁴⁹ In his view there was, on the one hand, *mutlaq* (nomenon) God and, on the other hand, *mutaqad* (phenomenon) God. For example, while a Muslim is praying, God is in his imagination is the phenomenon God. This God's name and character are changeable depending on the imagination of the person. In other words, the phenomenon God can fit into the heart or imagination of people, whereas the noumenon God never fits into the heart or imagination of people⁵⁰

because the noumenon God cannot exactly be comprehended and described by people. The departure point of Ibn ‘Arabī in this issue is very distinctive. Chittick, summarises Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach in this context: “Religion appears among human beings because the Real as Guide desires to bring about human wholeness and felicity. But manifestations of the Guide can never embrace the total truth – the real as such, which lies beyond expression and form. Hence each religion has its own specific mode of expression that is necessarily different from other modes of expression.”⁵¹

Ibn ‘Arabī, who had a different perception about God in the context of religious diversity, also employed a distinctive language that can be interpreted in a different manner about the religious other. Sometimes this language can be seen as contradictory in itself. The following quotations are examples of this contradiction.

“In Muslim countries, it is not given permission to Christians to build churches and monasteries, or renew or repair them when ruined. It is also unacceptable to hinder people who want to be Muslim. Christians must respect Muslims. For example, when a Muslim comes into a congress they have to stand up. Furthermore, they must not wear clothes like Muslims, must not use Muslim’s names and titles, must not ride a horse, must not gird oneself (sic) with a sword, must not write Arabic statements in signatures, must not trade wine, must not exhibit their crucifix[es] in any way, must not bury their dead in the Muslim cemetery, must not ring church bells loudly and must prefer low tone conservation (sic) during rituals.”⁵²

“People can just know God finitely, not infinitely. Hence, they can constitute their beliefs in accordance with that finite information. Therefore, that any member of a religious tradition insults any member of another religious tradition is not about information, but is about ignorance.”⁵³

It is possible to judge from the first quotation above that Ibn ‘Arabī had an exclusivist attitude. By contrast, the second quotation indicates that he didn’t have an exclusivist attitude about the religious other. What is the reason for the contradiction in his statements? The answer to this question may be hidden in his life experience. He heard and witnessed the unjust actions of Christians towards Muslims in Andalusia⁵⁴ in part of his life. This

reality may be the reason for his exclusivist statements about Christians, but that exclusivist statement changes on a recurring basis. In general, Ibn ‘Arabī, considered that religious exclusiveness stemmed from ignorance.⁵⁵ Although he made different or even contradictory statements regarding religious diversity, what can be said about the relationship between Ibn ‘Arabī and inclusivity in particular? It is not difficult to see that some of his statements evoke religious inclusiveness. He used an inspiring analogy when he evaluated religious diversity:

“All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their hidden (sic) is like the abrogation of other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad’s revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as existence of the light of stars is actualised. This explains why we have been required in our *all-inclusive* religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions.”⁵⁶

As seen in the quotation, Ibn ‘Arabī accepted that all divine religions are like the light but, when we compare the lights of religions, the light of Islam is like the light of the sun; the light of other religions is like the light of a star. When the light of the sun starts to shine, the other lights disappear, but that the light of stars has disappeared does not mean they have lost their presence. In this context, to underscore the uniqueness of Islam and the superiority of the Prophet Muhammad over all other prophets is not to deny the universal validity of revelation or the necessity of revelations appearing in particular expressions.⁵⁷ In other words, when Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, other religions lost their validity, but they didn’t lose their presence. It is therefore unacceptable that those other divine religions be evaluated as entirely untrue or mere superstition.

According to Ibn ‘Arabī the Qur’an contains the Gospel and the Torah and, therefore, Islam encompasses Christianity and Judaism. Muslims should follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad as set down in guidance that was given exclusively to him, that is the Qur’an. It leads to the specific form of mercy and felicity that God singled out for the followers of Islam.⁵⁸ Ibn Arabi said:

“The Muslim chooses the path of Muhammad and leaves aside the other paths, even though he acknowledges them and has faith in them. However, he doesn’t make himself a servant except through the path of Muhammad. He traces the attributes of all paths back to it because Muhammad’s message is all-inclusive. Hence the property of all the divine revelations has been transferred to [the] Qur’an. Its message embraces them, but they don’t embrace it.”⁵⁹

This consideration can be evaluated as being a form of religious inclusiveness but, in this context, a more critical question arises whether divine salvation is possible for people of other divine religions; Christianity and Judaism. He thought they have the possibility to be a means to salvation, but this situation doesn’t mean we can reach the judgment that all religions have the same value. Ibn ‘Arabī mentioned that there are two different paths for people:

“There are two paths to salvation. First, a person, who prays by guidance of sunna⁶⁰ and sees the authenticity of things, walks on a happiness way on which there is no trouble because this way is easy to walk – light, pure and unsoiled. Second, happiness can be reached in the second way, but there are difficulties – deserts, perils, predators and harmful serpents. Nobody can reach happiness without experiencing those threats”⁶¹

Ibn ‘Arabī held the theological truth of religions and their eschatological salvation to be different issues. When we look at the situation in terms of religious inclusiveness, we can see that he had a certain conviction that the salvation way of Islam has more special value than other religions’ ways. He did not, however, ignore that other religions can also provide a vehicle to salvation.

In this context, the following questions arise:

What kinds of people are inclusionist; what kinds of people are exclusivist and what kinds of people are pluralist?

According to Ibn Arabi, there are two groups of people in the world; ignorant and intellectual. Ignorant people are exclusivist. On the other hand, intellectual people may be either inclusionist or pluralist but that results in another question: How can the intellectual people be both inclusive and pluralist at the same time and which approach is more

convenient for them? He tried to reply to these questions using two concepts; *zāhir* (explicit) and *bāṭin* (implicit). Even though intellectual people are pluralist in their inner world, when they put their opinions into words, they are inclusionist.⁶² This interpretation implies his epistemological perspective.

All considerations about Ibn Arabi's perspective come to the conclusion that God's mercy cannot be restricted by people. When Ibn Arabi highlights God's mercy, as based on his inclusivity approaches, the question arises, "Who deserves Hell?" As the answer to this question Ibn 'Arabi held that the inhabitants of Hell are those who do not identify themselves as followers of Muḥammad but, rather, those who refuse to surrender to God after the truth has been made clear to them. These are the "guilty ones" (Qur'an, 36:59), who deserve their fate. Ibn 'Arabī identified these "people of the Fire who are its [true] inhabitants" as the arrogant (*mutakabbirūn*), who, like Pharaoh, claim to be divine; polytheists (*mushrikūn*), those who divest God of His attributes (*mu'aṭṭila*) and hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). Following this line of reasoning, it is noteworthy that the Qur'an speaks of unbelievers among pagans and People of the Book being damned only after having received "clear evidence" (Qur'an, 98:1–6).⁶³

How we should evaluate Ibn 'Arabi's approaches to religious diversity? Chittick contends that Ibn 'Arabī placed himself squarely in the mainstream of Islam by basing all his teachings upon the Qur'an and the Hadith.⁶⁴ Khalil argues that Ibn 'Arabī cannot be described as a universalist but, if one considers his belief that all of humanity will ultimately attain harmony and contentment, it is possible to describe him as a quasi-universalist.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Kazemi evaluates Ibn Arabi's approach in religious diversity as the shift from the position that says "Islam is the only true religion" to the position that says "Islam is the best religion." The first is based on a harsh rejection of all faiths but Islam, whereas the second is based on Ibn 'Arabī's principle: "We have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions."⁶⁶

Rumi and religious inclusiveness

Within the mystical tradition of Islam, another important figure is Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (d.672-1273).⁶⁷ Like Ibn 'Arabi, his discourses

include both inclusivist and pluralist properties from different perspectives. He⁶⁸ used a metaphor to explain his considerations. When we think about oil lamp and light, we realise that the wick of an oil lamp is changed at regular intervals, but the light is not changed in any way. He considered that the purposes of religion are not divergent from one another, although religions have different theologies. The following statements illustrate this:

“Although the ways are varied, the purposes of them are the same. Don’t you see how many different ways – to get to Kaaba – there are? Some of them get to Kaaba from Rum, some from Damascus, some from China and some of them from India and Yemen. If you just look at those ways, you can see dissimilarities are big and unlimited. But if you look at the purposes of them you can see that people’s hearts basically feel the same thing about Kaaba.”⁶⁹

In this context, the following questions come into play:

If religions have common purposes, what is the reason for these distinctions among them?

Is there any divine wisdom in these distinctions?

How should divine wisdom be understood?

Rūmī believed that we often cannot understand divine wisdom. That is, people can comprehend only a limited part of God. He tells a story to explain it as follows.

“Indians brought an elephant into a dark barn to show people. Some people came there to see it because they had never seen any elephant. But the barn was very dark and the people couldn’t see. So in the dark barn a person touched the elephant’s trunk and he said that it resembles a gutter. The other one touched its ear and he said that he felt a hand fan. Another one touched its leg and said that he felt a column. Another one touched its shoulder and he said that he felt a throne. So any person who touched a part of the elephant described it differently depending on which part he touched. Therefore, their descriptions were different from one another. If they had had a candle or lamp, their descriptions might

not be different. So the hands of people cannot describe the elephant as a whole.”⁷⁰

This elephant story, which is told in different versions in different cultures, indicates that God cannot be entirely described and grasped. Religions that try to describe and grasp God can just reach a part of the divine reality in limited form because sometimes their languages, traditions, customs, cultures, information and experiences can be obstacles to grasp Divine Reality as whole. The differences in description of the elephant in the story don't mean one is superior to another. In the same way, there is no reason for one religion's superiority over others. Rūmī especially underlined that God's divine wisdom has a reason; however, people may not comprehend this wisdom as a whole. To him, the presence of different religious traditions should be evaluated as a result of this divine wisdom. To interrogate this reality is therefore meaningless and redundant.⁷¹

When we take into consideration Rūmī's aforementioned opinions, is it possible to identify him as a religious pluralist in a contemporary sense? It is not easy to answer this question positively. When Rūmī's statements are evaluated with a pluralist view,⁷² the claim of Muslims that they have a universal revelation can be constrained.⁷³ On the one hand, he emphasised the common purpose and ground of religious traditions. On the other hand, he didn't ignore their differences. Inasmuch as he stated that he was a servant of Qur'an and follower (the soil of way) of the Prophet Muhammad, this indicates how valuable Islam was for him. Can we say that his statements evoke religious inclusiveness more than religious pluralism? Can some of Rūmī's other statements, which seem contradictory, be ignored? If we don't ignore those statements, how should we evaluate them? The division of explicit-implicit (*ẓāhir-bāṭin*) may help us to interpret them as in the statements of Ibn 'Arabi. When Rūmī evaluated the presence of varied religions in this world, we can say that, on the one hand he was pluralist in implicit meaning but, on the other hand, inclusivist in his explicit meaning.⁷⁴

When we try to comment on the statements of sufis generally, the first question that we face is: What is their attitude about the religious other? If we state it with modern conceptions: Are they exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist? It can only be possible to rationalise the statements of Islamic mystics, which sometimes seem contradictory, if the distinction between explicit format and implicit format of religious discourse is taken into

consideration. The majority of Islamic mystic thinkers seem to be inclusivist at the level of intelligence but pluralist at the level of wisdom about the religious other. One might say that they are wise-men rather than intellectuals. They are close to a perception, which is to agree with inclusiveness and indicates pluralism that is not severe in terms of epistemology. Their pluralistic perception is the reflection more of the mystical experience than the rational and agnostic ground that frequently is seen in the modern philosophy of religion.⁷⁵

When the Islamic mystical tradition (*sufism*) is investigated, it can be seen that there are inclusivity interpretations or even pluralistic interpretations outside the exclusivist stance of Islamic tradition. The epistemology of Islamic mysticism is different from other Islamic traditions. Mysticism in Islam cannot be described as just a mystical aspect of philosophy; it is a response to the need of any person's soul and based on Islam. It is easier to say that mysticism can be a common ground between religions when we consider their different epistemological perceptions. In Islamic mysticism, Ibn 'Arabi and Rūmī were meritorious sufis and had distinct approaches to the religious other.

Fazlur Rahman and religious inclusiveness

Fazlur Rahman (d.1988) was one of the modern Islamic thinkers. His opinions do not reconcile with classical Islamic tradition on some issues. His approach to the source of divine scriptures is remarkable and this approach can give us some clues about his attitude to the religious other. He believed that divine scriptures – the Gospel and the Torah – originate from one source, namely “the Mother of the Books” (Qur'an, 43:4) and the “Hidden Book” (Qur'an, 56:78). According to him, to believe that those scriptures are some parts of the “Mother of the Books” is compulsory for believers. The Qur'an states this reality:

“I have believed all revelations (scriptures) sent from the Book (by God)” (Qur'an, 42:15).

Rahman claimed that the concept of the Mother of the Books, which is used in the Qur'an, is not the specific name of any scripture; it has a general meaning, which includes all divine scriptures. The Islamic community (*ummah*) believes other divine scriptures are revelations of God; however, they expect that the People of the Book should believe the Qur'an as

revelation of God. The Qur'an emphasises that it is revealed as clear or obvious Arabic, (Qur'an, 16:103; 26:195; 39:28) but this is not evidence for an exclusivist position in that its correctness is not dependent on any one language.⁷⁶

The main question is how the concept of Islam should be understood because the Qur'an says: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam." (Qur'an, 3:19) Is Islam the name of the latest and legitimate religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad or the common name of divine religions that God revealed to all prophets? If the first approach is accepted, the concept of Islam cannot be common ground among divine religions but, if we accept the second approach, that concept can be the main common ground. The concept of the Mother of the Book that Rahman employed has analogous meaning with the concept of Islam, which can be accepted as the common name of religions God revealed. In that respect, it gives us clues to religious inclusiveness.

This raises another question about the position of Islam in the face of Christianity and Judaism. The manner of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the mother of the Books can be evaluated variously. In this context, Fazlur Rahman dealt with statements of T. Nöldeke and F. Schwally⁷⁷ about the relation of the Prophet Muhammad with the People of the Book. According to Nöldeke-Schwally, "In Medina, Christians and especially Jews did not want to accept Muhammad as a prophet." As a result, Muhammad tried to connect with the Prophet Abraham directly. By this way, Muhammad hoped to separate the relationship between the Prophet Abraham and the People of the Book. Furthermore, when the Prophet Muhammad was in Mecca he believed that the message revealed to him was the same message revealed to other prophets. Initially, Muslims were facing toward the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem when they prayed. Later, Muhammad changed the place (*qiblah*) to which Muslims directed from there to the Ka'aba in Mecca. Moreover, he wanted Muslims to visit the Ka'aba at least once in their lives. According to Nöldeke-Schwally, this change meant that the Prophet Muhammad wanted Islam to be nationalised or Arabised.⁷⁸

Rahman thought that the approaches of Nöldeke-Schwally could be seriously challenged. He did not accept Nöldeke-Schwally's assertion that the Qur'an initially approved that the message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets was the same but Islam was later nationalised. In Rahman's opinion, this situation was about the process of

revelation. Furthermore, the fact that the Prophet Muhammad attached his new message to the Prophet Abraham does not mean he ignored the Prophets Jesus and Moses. Additionally, to change qiblah from al-Aqsa to the Ka'aba was unrelated to the nationalisation of Islam.⁷⁹

Moreover, Rahman touched on an assertion widespread among western orientalist; that in Mecca, although the Prophet Muhammad believed that his message was analogous with the messages of Jesus and Moses, in Medina, when Jews rejected Muhammad as messenger of God, the Prophet started to imply that the community of Islam was totally different from that of Christians and Jews. Rahman said that this assertion was meaningless.⁸⁰

According to Rahman, the Qur'an indicates that some Christians and Jews approved the new message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and encouraged him in the struggle with polytheists in Mecca but he accepted that there is no historic information about the People of the Book. What the Qur'an indicates is evidence that there were Christians living in those regions. In the Qur'an, the People of the Book, who are described as the people who have information and as the people who were given science and wisdom, serve as witnesses to the accuracy of the message of Muhammad. Even when he was despondent in the face of the severe offences and torments of the polytheists, the Qur'an encouraged him to take support from the People of the Book (Qur'an, 10:94).⁸¹

The divine invitation of every single prophet is like a division between two river basins. To Rahman, this invitation divides the people into two groups. The first group is on the genuine way; the second is on the wrong way. In the Qur'an, this concept is called *ahzap*, which means separation from truth. It is used to indicate sectarian divisions in Christianity (Qur'an, 19:37), which damaged the originality of older divine revelations. It is used generally for people – especially the People of the Book – who changed the original message and became separated into different groups. (Qur'an, 10:19; 45:17; 2:13; 3:9; 92:4) After a long time passed with these religious separations, the originality of the revelation disappeared. The Qur'an warns Muslims about religious division, which brings about damage to the originality of revelation.⁸²

Islam can be described partly in relation to Christianity and Judaism. At this point, some questions come out: What can we say about the influences of Christianity and Judaism on the process of formation of Islamic tradition? Is

Islam the result of a new revelation process, which is totally independent of Christianity and Judaism? According to Rahman, to claim that Islam is a religion formed as the result of the influences of Christianity and Judaism is entirely meaningless,⁸³ although it is true that the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims communicated with Christians and Jews.

Moreover, some of their beliefs are approved by Islam, but it does not mean that Islam is entirely the result of this influence. Islam originated and flourished in the Arabic tradition and environment.⁸⁴

Notwithstanding the source of divine religions being the same, why are there different assertions about divine reality? This question was the expression of an important theological problem for the Prophet Muhammad. God dwelt on this issue in the process of revelation of the Qur'an. Initially mankind was in unity but, after the process of revelation started, divisions amongst people evolved. Rahman held that the revelation of God to the prophets is the reason for division amongst people and will remain a divine mystery.⁸⁵ If God had wanted unity for people, it would not have been difficult for Him to combine all people under the same faith umbrella. "And if Allah willed, He could have made them [of] one religion, but He admits whom He wills into His mercy." (Qur'an, 42:8).

The question "How should we evaluate divine salvation?" is another issue Fazlur Rahman addressed. He pointed out an example of the exclusivist attitude of the People of the Book in the Qur'an: "None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian. That is [merely] their wishful thinking. Say, 'Produce your proof, if you should be truthful.'" (Qur'an, 2:111) The Qur'an objects to the exclusivist stance of some of the People of the Book. Divine salvation is not the monopoly of a religious community. Anybody God describes as a good and moral person is a candidate for salvation. No religious community should ever claim that it alone offers the way of salvation. The Qur'an opposes the idea of privilege about salvation and accepts the possibility of salvation for some good Christians, Jews and Sabeans.⁸⁶

There are some verses in the Qur'an that state salvation is possible for some Christians, Jews and Sabeans who believe in God and the Afterlife (Qur'an, 5:69; 2:62). Rahman considered that some verses are misunderstood by most explicators of the Qur'an.⁸⁷ The meaning in the verses is obvious:⁸⁸ Any person who believes in God and the Afterlife can achieve divine

salvation. Furthermore, the Qur'an, in response to the claim of Christians and Jews that salvation is just for themselves, states that this assertion is their delusion. Whoever believes in God and tries to be a good person will get rewards from God (Qur'an 2:111-112). Fazlur Rahman preferred not to highlight God's mercy rather than His justice, but he held God to be both merciful and just.⁸⁹

When we look at the Qur'an we can see different descriptions about the People of the Book. How can we explain these differences? In Rahman's opinion, this situation could be explained with the reality that the Prophet Muhammad met many different People of the Book at different times and in different places and situations. These experiences are reflected within the Qur'an, for the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad in a process that took twenty-three years. These verses are the product of this extended process. When the verses are commented upon, those different situations should be taken into consideration.

Even if we try to comment on the verses about the People of the Book in the Qur'an, we see the Trinity as the most fundamental issue between Muslims and Christians. Rahman believed that Christians misunderstood the conception of God's Spirit in the context of the Trinity. This concept is stated in the Qur'an with a special meaning. It is about the first human and prophet, Adam (Qur'an 15:29; 38:72). Tawhid should therefore be the common ground of Muslims and the People of the Book (Qur'an 3:64). Christians have been silent about this invitation since the revelation of the Qur'an. It is possible to believe today that there is a common ground, but there are some responsibilities for both the People of the Book and Muslims. The responsibility of Muslims is to accept only the Qur'an and not subsequent traditions. The responsibility of Christianity is to embrace a real belief of tawhid.⁹⁰

When we look at the approaches of Fazlur Rahman in regard to the religious other, we can see that he emphasised one essential point: The members of different religions should recognise that God has sent different revelations from the same source. Inasmuch as God clearly stated the conditions for religious salvation in the Qur'an, nobody has the right to restrict or extend those conditions.

Al-Faruqi and religious inclusiveness

Another important figure in contemporary Islamic thought is Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi (d.1986) whose approach partly implies inclusivity about the religious other. He identified a common ground that religious traditions share but, when al-Faruqi stated his opinions about the religious other, he didn't employ such modern concepts as exclusiveness, inclusiveness and pluralism. Hardly any theologians, philosophers or mystics in the tradition of Islamic thought have used this modern classification.

The Islamic mission (*da'wah*) and the relationship between mission and religious relativism are the main subjects on which al-Faruqi dwelt. To him, mission was crucial for religious traditions because it is the reason or motive for their existence. To ignore the religious invitation means that we think there may be some defects in our beliefs. Either it is not necessary to take our beliefs seriously or they are totally relative beliefs that are only convenient for us.⁹¹ Relativism is not an appropriate approach for religious beliefs because all religions have serious claims about life, death, past, present and future, the world, creation, morality, happiness and truth. We cannot use relative statements while talking about the main principles of religion. The most important power of many religions is their universalism.⁹² In this context he believed the claims of Islam to be rational. Furthermore, Islam is the last message of God.

How should we understand the Islamic mission? Al-Faruqi pointed out such verses about the Islamic mission in the Qur'an as:

“There shall be no compulsion in acceptance of the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in taghut⁹³ and believes in Allah has grasped the trustworthiest handhold with no break in it and Allah is Hearing and Knowing” (Qur'an, 2:256; 18:29; 39:41).

According to Rahman, Islamic mission doesn't mean compulsion.⁹⁴ It is just an invitation in which free will is necessary. When a person believes in God under pressure, it is meaningless. The Muslim's responsibility is just to tell the truth and try to persuade those being addressed. If they are not persuaded, there is nothing to do.⁹⁵

In the process of mission, there is no responsibility for the inviter regarding outcome, for God says in the Qur'an:

“Not upon the Messenger is [responsibility] except [for] notification...” (Qur'an, 5:99); “Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills and He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided.” (Qur'an, 28:56).

According to al-Faruqi, the Islamic mission is based not on sentiment but on reason. The rational methods of mission should be preferred in the process. People who are invited to Islam should judge carefully and objectively after evaluating the various arguments from different sources. Al-Faruqi believed the Islamic mission to be a critical function of intelligence. Islam is not – or should not be – a dogmatic religion.

It is open to new arguments and new alternatives. The missionary of Islam is not a messenger of a system of authoritarianism. He is a person who tries to understand the revelation, explains it to other people and knows that this process is dynamic and rational. He should be confident about his faith, but that doesn't mean that he should ignore other invitations. Such a manner would bring about intellectual stagnation. People in different religious traditions must always be open to new ideas. It is an indicator of self-confidence.⁹⁶

Al-Faruqi's opinions about how the Islamic mission should be construed are important but the more important issue for this essay is to try to understand al-Faruqi's perspective about the religious other. How does al-Faruqi interpret the People of the Book? In other words, how do the People of the Book have a meaning and value for Islam? To him, the fact that Islam attributes value to Jesus with the Gospel and Moses with the Torah means that Islam has accepted their religious value. Islam doesn't see Christianity and Judaism as religions that should be tolerated, but accepts them as valid religions that God had sent before Islam. Moreover, their validities are not about culture, civilisation and socio-political circumstances. This approval has a religious meaning. Islam accepts that the People of the Book are fellows of Muslims, but this doesn't mean Islam gave up the claim of uniqueness. In clarifying God's revelations before Islam, no religion states that believing in other religions is an obligation.⁹⁷ These statements indicate that Islam has a character that includes some other divine religions, including Christianity and Judaism. This is religious inclusiveness.

The question of whether Islam is entirely different from other divine religions has a critical importance for al-Faruqi's perspective. He held that Islam doesn't have a structure totally independent and disconnected from other religions. Instead, it basically is affirmative of the same divine reality that Judaism and Christianity had manifested before Islam. On this point he brought to the agenda the concept of hanif,⁹⁸ an expression of the common essence that Islam, Christianity and Judaism share.⁹⁹ Any person who accepts this common essence is named hanif but this concept should properly be understood. Al-Faruqi opposed the idea that there is an analogy between the concepts of hanif and "the anonymous Christian"¹⁰⁰ of Karl Rahner because, to him, hanif was not a concept of a theologian who was influenced by the ideas of the Church about God's mercy but, rather, a concept of the Qur'an.¹⁰¹

Al-Faruqi's claim that divine religions have the same essence grounded in the concept of hanif revealed a classic question: What is the reason for religious diversity if God sent the same essential divine message to different prophets throughout history? He tried to answer this question, thinking that all prophets' messages have two main parts. First is tawhid, which means to accept that God is unique. Second is morality, which means simply to do good things and avoid doing bad things. In other words, it is to try to be a good person. Apart from these two parts, every revelation was shaped partly depending on where and when revealed. Such privatisation is not the essence of revelation.¹⁰²

Furthermore, al-Faruqi emphasised that some people haven't accepted the revelation of God. What is the reason for this refutation? To him, first, some people want to ignore such divine principles as generosity, sacrifice and solidarity (*zakah*). Second, the revelation, which supports a regular social life, requires that the governors comply with the law but this situation is not good for the governors who want to rule the community with an arbitrary hand and don't want to comply with the rule of law. Third, the revelation reminds people that they are impotent creations, but human beings are arrogant. Fourth, the revelation aims for people to control their desires or passions, but people find this demand difficult. Fifth, the revelation has been changed or distorted when its content hasn't been protected. Finally, when the revelation reached different cultures, languages and nationalities, some changes became inevitable. Al-Faruqi considered some of these to be the reasons for the distortions of the original revelation. These realities must

be evaluated as to why God has sent new prophets and religions throughout history. Perhaps God wanted to establish the divine message in the hearts and minds of people time and again.¹⁰³

Al-Faruqi held that the concept of hanif could be the common ground for all divine messages. Furthermore, he believed that Islam has an essence that includes the source and principles of all divine religions sent before Islam. In that respect, it may be asserted that his approach indicates inclusiveness. Al-Faruqi did not, however, approve the pluralist position because he attached a special meaning to the Islamic mission. Finally, he opposed religious relativism because he thought that it undermines the main principles of religious belief.

Conclusion

Certain traditional Islamic theologians posit inclusivity about the religious other. One of them was al-Māturīdī, the first representative of Islamic inclusiveness. He emphasised that Islam, Christianity and Judaism are basically products of the same source; Islam, as the last religion revealed by God, includes Christianity with the Gospels and Judaism with the Torah. Unless the People of the Book reject the principle of tawhid, we cannot say they won't be able to achieve salvation. As the second example of the inclusivity perspective in Islamic thought, al-Ghazālī, pointed out that there are three groups of people. The first group are those who don't have any information about Islam. They are excused. The second group are those who, despite receiving proper information about Islam, haven't believed in God and haven't done good deeds. They are not excused. The third group are those who have information about Islam but haven't met its real face. They, like the first group, are excused. Consequently, within these groups only the second group is not excused owing to responsibility. According to al-Ghazālī, the most important thing for religious responsibility is to have proper information about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

Ibn Arabi and Rūmī are two striking figures of Islamic mysticism (sufism) who approved inclusivity of the religious other. Ibn Arabi used the sun-star metaphor to explain his views. When Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, other religions lost their validity or primary positions, but not necessarily their presence. It is therefore unacceptable that those other religions be evaluated as entirely untrue or superstition. Rūmī, however, employed a different metaphor to explain religious diversity. When we

think about the oil lamp and light, Rūmī said we realise that the wick of the oil lamp is changed at regular intervals but light is never changed. He considered that the purposes of religion are not distinct from one another, although they have different theologies. We can see some discrepancies in Ibn Arabi and Rūmī's statements about the religious other. The reason for it is that they had different epistemology and their life experiences influenced their points of view.

Fazlur Rahman and al-Faruqī are two examples chosen about Islamic inclusiveness in contemporary Islamic thought. In Rahman's perspective about the religious other, the concept of the Mother of the Book is very significant because it implies that divine religions have the same source. Islam is the last product of this same source. Salvation is not just the end we can get by being a member of any religion. We have to have some qualifications to attain it. Therefore, notwithstanding Islam being the primary source of salvation, the other sources may be alternative vehicles to salvation. Al-Faruqī highlights the concept of hanif, which for al-Faruqī could be the common ground for divine religions. Everybody who has this common essence can achieve salvation. The concepts of the common essence such as hanif and the Mother of the Books can give a general answer for religious diversity, but that doesn't mean it can answer all the questions about religious diversity.

This article has tried to show that the tradition of Islamic thought is not a monopolistic tradition regarding the religious other. Although religious inclusiveness is not the mainstream in Islamic thought, we can find traces of it in different Islamic perspectives. It is not possible, however, to find those traces explicitly expressed in such terms as inclusiveness, exclusiveness and pluralism as used in modern western thought. Religious inclusiveness claims that the source of Divine Reality is only one religion ontologically, but that salvation is possible for some people in other religions. Inasmuch as Islamic inclusiveness claims Islam to be the only source of divine reality, religious relativism, which is denoted by pluralism, is meaningless. Nonetheless, God praises some of the People of the Book in the Qur'an. This praise indicates that divine salvation may be possible for some people outside of Islam. When we think about religious diversity we have to take into consideration God's mercy and fairness. The crucial point of this issue is whether people can meet the Divine Reality in its real meaning. The most appropriate way to understand this complicated issue is not to discuss which

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religion is the centre of Divine Reality, but to discuss which qualities of people deserve divine salvation or God's grace.

Notes

¹ Jerome Gellman, “Religious Diversity and the Epistemic Justification of Religious Belief” *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no.3 (1993): 345–64; David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004); John Pittard, “Religious Disagreement”, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-disa/>, (Accessed March 10, 2016).

² Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), 10-70.

³ Gavin D’Costa, “The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions”, *Religious Studies* 32, (1996): 223-232.

⁴ It is possible to mention a number of versions of religious inclusiveness. See, Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72-100.

⁵ “Vatican II: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”, ed. J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, *Christianity and Other Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2001), 39-43.

⁶ “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*” (Outside the Church there is no salvation). This statement has been a motto of the Catholic Church throughout centuries.

⁷ Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. John Hick, Brian Hebblethwaite, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 19-39; Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation* (Oxford: The Centre for Culture, Technology and Values, 2009).

⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, “An Inclusivist View,” in *More One Way: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm, Timothy R. Phillips, (Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 107; Pinnock, *A Wideness in God Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997).

⁹ Some other inclusivity philosophers and theologians are Gavin D. Costa, Raimundo Panikkar, Marissuai Dhavamony, Y.M. Congar, Bede Griffiths and Hans Küng.

¹⁰ It is a concept used in the Qur’an for Christians, who have the Gospel and Jews, who have the Torah. The Qur’an evaluates the People of the Book differently from polytheists. Although it’s believed they partly changed or distorted the original

Gospel and Torah, it is accepted that those scriptures, like the Qur'an, are from God.

¹¹ Mustafa Çakmak, *Dinsel Kapsayıcılık* (İstanbul: İZ Yayıncılık, 2014), 171.

¹² Qur'an, 3:110; 3:199; 4:162; 3:113-114; 3:75.

¹³ Qur'an, 3:75; 3:110; 5:81; 2:109; 4:44; 3:70-73.

¹⁴ Yasir Qadhi, "The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?" in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111.

¹⁵ Mohammad Hasan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11-12.

¹⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

¹⁷ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataulloh Siddiqui, (Islamic Foundation Publishing, 2007).

¹⁸ Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberalism, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 1997).

¹⁹ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'an and Other Religions" in *the Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. J.McAuliffe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 291-309.

²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Religion and Religions." in *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, ed. M. S. Umar, (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy, 2008), 59–81.

²¹ See, Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (2nd ed), trans. P. Townsend. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993).

²² Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The other in the Light of One: The Universality of Qur'an and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006).

²³ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

²⁴ Muhammad Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," in *496-The Islamic Quarterly: Vol 60, No. 4*

Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace, ed. R. Boase, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2005), 66-70.

²⁵ M. Hasan Khalil, discusses the same issue with reference four central figures, who are representatives of different shades of Inclusiveness: Al- Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Taymiyya, and Rashīd Riḍā, in his book, *Islam and the Fate of Others* (2012).

²⁶ Al-Māturīdī underscores that the Qur’an is not a time-frozen message, but rather a current and flowing divine word that is moving in and with time. That is to say, al-Māturīdī holds human reason not only able to receive the Qur’an, but also positively respond to its message. Consequently, how the verses of Qur’an should be commentated has critical importance. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilat al-Qur’an*, (The comments on Qur’an) Istanbul: TSMK, the Part of Medina, The number of Manuscript: 180.

²⁷ There are only two books about him: Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A study of Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Māturīdī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic and Civilization, 1995); Ulrich Rudolph, *Islamic History and Civilization, Volume 100: Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, translated by Rodrigo Adem, Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2015). Neither Ceric nor Rudolph specifically focuses on this issue in their books.

²⁸ As reasons of this neglect, Rudolph says: “Al-Māturīdī did not live in Iraq or another central region of the Islamic world, but carried out his scholarly activity in Samarqand. Ideas from other regions reached that area, but local intellectual developments did not interest anyone further to the west, even in Baghdad. As a consequence, al-Māturīdī was initially unknown, and his influence was restricted for a long time to Samarqand and his Transoxanian homeland.” (Ulrich, *Islamic History and Civilization*, 2); Additionally, Mustafa Ceric mentions four factors regarding this neglect. (Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 54-57).

²⁹ Today, this city is on the border of Uzbekistan.

³⁰ Ulrich Rudolph, “Hanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism”, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, (Oxford Handbook Online, 2014), 10.

³¹ ‘Tawhīd’, which is the main doctrine of Islam, means the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe. This is absolute monotheism.

³² Al-Māturīdī, *Kitabū’t Tevhīd*, (The book of Oneness), trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: İSAM Yayınları, 2005), 94-95; Hanifī Özcan, *Maturidi’de Dini*

Çoğulculuk (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1995), 77.

³³ Özcan, *Maturidi'de Dini Çoğulculuk*, 62.

³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, underscores the same relationship between religion and family too. (Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, ed. M. Bījū, (Damascus: Dār at-Taqwā, 1992), 29-32). Additionally, these statements partly can also indicate religious pluralism. John Hick shares the parallel perspective with Al-Māturīdī about this relationship; Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980); “A Pluralistic View, More than One Way?”, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

³⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitabü't Tevhid*, 291.

³⁶ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitabü't Tevhid*, 252.

³⁷ Ibn al- Muqaffā (d.756), a Persian to convert to Islam who rose to the office of secretary of state under the Ummeyyeds and was executed around the age thirty-six (most likely for political reasons) under the early Abbasid Governor of Basra, Sufyan B. Mu'awiya al-Muhallabi.

³⁸ Ebu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazālī, *Faysal at-Tafrīqa Bayna al-Islam wa az-Zandaqa*, (The decisive criterion for distinguishing Islam from Clandestine Apostasy) (Beirut: Mensuratu'l Daru'l Hikme, 1986), 105-106; Al-Ghazālī, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam*, trans. Sherman A. Jackson, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126.

³⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Faysal at-Tafrīqa*, 20-106; Al-Ghazālī, *On the Boundaries*, 124-130.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Faysal at-Tafrīqa*, 20-106; Al-Ghazālī, *On the Boundaries*, 93-96.

⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Faysal at-Tafrīqa*, 20-106; Al-Ghazālī, *On the Boundaries*, 104-107; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 105, 187-99.

⁴² Al-Ghazālī claims that Islamic Philosophers – especially the ideas of Ibn Sina (d.427/1037) – are heretical for three reasons. See Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press), 2002. 376-377.

⁴³ Adnan Aslan, “Dini Çoğulculuk Problemine Yeni bir Yaklaşım,” *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 4 (2000): 30; Additionally, see Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Richmond, England: Curzon, 1998).

⁴⁴ Aslan, “Dini Çoğulculuk Problemine Yeni bir Yaklaşım”, 22-24; see Qamar-ul Huda, “Knowledge of Allah and the Islamic View of Other Religions.” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 278–305.

⁴⁵ Aslan, “Dini Çoğulculuk Problemine Yeni bir Yaklaşım”, 30.

⁴⁶ Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others* 43; Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philisophical Theology*, 286.

⁴⁷ William C. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2005), 123.

⁴⁸ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 157.

⁴⁹ These conceptions bring to mind Immanuel Kant’s conception of noumenon-phenomenon.

⁵⁰ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fusulu’l Hikem*, (The Bezels of Wisdom) trans. Nuri Gençosman (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1992), 344-345.

⁵¹ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 174.

⁵² Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuhatu’l Mekkiyye IV*, (The Meccan Openings) (Beyrut, 1994), 195; Süleyman Uludağ, *Ibn ‘Arabi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995), 47-48.

⁵³ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fusulu’l Hikem*, 346.

⁵⁴ Andalusia (756-1031) was a state, known as Muslim Spain or Islamic Iberia, ruled by the Umayyad dynasty along with a part of North Africa. This state is very important for Islamic civilization in the history. Andalusia also has an important function in transporting Greek philosophy to Europe again. After Muslims lost power in Andalusia, they lived hard times. The experiences of these hard days partly might influence the ideas of Ibn Arabi.

⁵⁵ Cafer S. Yaran, *Bilgelik Peşinde: Din Felsefesi Yazıları* (Ankara: Araştırma Yayınları, 2002), 265.

⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futuhāt*, III, 153.

⁵⁷ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 125.

⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futuhāt*, III, 153-154.

⁵⁹ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futuhāt*, III, 410.

⁶⁰ *Sunna* is an Islamic concept that states the Prophet Muhammad’s discourses and deeds as examples for Muslims.

⁶¹ Ibn Arabi, *Futuhāt*, V.III, 418.

⁶² Yaran, *Bilgelik Peşinde*, 275.

⁶³ Ibn Arabi, *Futuhāt*, I:301-304; Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others*, 60.

⁶⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) XV.

⁶⁵ Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others*, 69.

⁶⁶ Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Beyond Polemics and Pluralism: The Universal Message of the Qur’an” in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2103), 98; F. Schuon highlights the same point too: “The Idea of ‘The Best’ in Religions,” in *his Christianity/Islam—Essays on Esoteric Ecumenism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1985), 151.

⁶⁷ For detailed information regarding his life and teachings, see Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2000), 271-418.

⁶⁸ In English Literature, even though he is referred to only as Rūmī in Turkish literature he is generally known as Mevlana (Mawlana).

⁶⁹ Mevlana, *Fihī Mafih*, trans. Meliha Ülker Tankahya, (İstanbul: M.E.G.S.B Yayınları, 1985), 152-153.

⁷⁰ Mevlana, *Mesnevi ve Şerhi III*, trans. A. Gölpınarlı (İstanbul: M.E.G.S.B. Yayınları, 1985), 168.

⁷¹ Yaran, *Bilgelik Peşinde*, 279.

⁷² Mahmut Aydın argues that for Rūmī, religion is a message, not an established system. Mahmut Aydın, “A Muslim Pluralist Jalaledin Rumi,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 232.

⁷³ Rıfat Atay, “Dinsel Çoğulculuk Açısından Farklı Mevlana Okumaları: Bir Çözümleme Denemesi,” *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no.16 (2006): 96.

⁷⁴ Yaran, *Bilgelik Peşinde*, 285.

⁷⁵ Yaran, *Bilgelik Peşinde*, 243.

⁷⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 163-164.

⁷⁷ Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurans*, (Facbuchferlag-Dresden, 2013).

⁷⁸ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 132-133.

⁷⁹ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 133.

⁸⁰ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 167.

⁸¹ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 150-161.

⁸² Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 164.

⁸³ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 162.

⁸⁴ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 1-29. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, “Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia” *Harvard Theological Review*, no.55 (1962): 269-280.

⁸⁵ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 164.

⁸⁶ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 165. The Qur'an, 5:69; 2:62.

⁸⁷ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 166.

⁸⁸ In the literature, there are different comments on what the Qur'an says about the religious other. For example, Yasir Qadhi argues, “No matter how politically correct or theologically generous or ethically pleasing such a reading may be, in the final analysis, it is a reading that simply does not emanate from the Qur'an but

rather from external judgments of how things ought to be.” (Qadhi, “The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?”, 117); On the other hand, Reza Shah Kazemi contends, “when we look at the Qur’an, it is precisely the literal meaning of dozens of verses that incontrovertibly uphold a universal perspective on religion.” (Kazemi, “Beyond Polemics and Pluralism: The Universal Message of the Qur’an”, 89); some other writers have stressed the universality of the message of the Qur’an but, in doing so, they have truncated and reduced the message of the Qur’an in conformity with the pluralist model. (Farid Esack, *Qur’ān, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997) and Hasan Askari, “Within and Beyond the Experience of Religious Diversity,” in *The Experience of Religious Diversity*, ed. J. Hick and H. Askari (Aldershot: Gower Press, 1985); Additionally see, Cafer Sadık Yaran, “Non-Exclusivist Attitudes Toward the Other Religions in recent Turkish Theology and Philosophy of Religion” in *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations Between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Şinasi Gündüz, Cafer Sadık Yaran, (Washington DC, The Council for Research in values and Philosophy, RVP, 2005), 7-24; Süleyman Ateş, “Cennet Kimsenin Tekelinde Değildir” *İslami Arastirmalar Dergisi* 3, no.1 (1989): 7-24; “Cennet Tekelcisi mi” *İslami Arastirmalar Dergisi* 4, no.1 (1990): 29-37; Talat Koçyigit, “Cennet Müslümanların Tekelindedir”, *İslami Arastirmalar Dergisi* 3, no.3 (1989): 85-94.

⁸⁹ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 1-2.

⁹⁰ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 170.

⁹¹ Isma’il Raji Al-Faruqi, Lois Lamya al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 187-188; Al-Faruqi also has written some articles that deal directly with Islam and other faiths, and Christianity and Judaism in particular. Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataullah Siddiqui, (Islamic Foundation, 2007).

⁹² Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 189-191.

⁹³ This word refers to idolatry or to worship anything except Allah in Islamic theology.

⁹⁴ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 188.

⁹⁵ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 210.

⁹⁶ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 188-189.

⁹⁷ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 191-192.

⁹⁸ Those who lived before the time of Prophet Muhammad and who followed a non-pagan but monotheistic religion.

⁹⁹ For the concept of hanif, see Al-Faruqi, "Toward a Critical World Theology," in *Toward Islamization of Disciplines*, (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought Herndon, 1989), 409-449.

¹⁰⁰ "Anonymous Christian" is a person who is not a nominative Christian but has an opportunity of salvation with Jesus' blessing on other religions. Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. John Hick, Brian Hebblethwaite, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 19-39; Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation V* (Oxford: The Centre for Culture, Technology and Values, 2009), 132.

¹⁰¹ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 192.

¹⁰² Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 192-193.

¹⁰³ Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, 193.

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