Religious Plurality and Pluralism in Indonesia: Western Influence on Liberal Muslim Intellectuals

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Abstract: This research explores the critical distinction between religious pluralism and religious plurality within Islamic thought, addressing a common misconception among contemporary Muslim intellectuals influenced by Western ideologies. The study employs a qualitative methodology that includes a historical analysis of the emergence of religious pluralism during the European Reformation, an epistemological evaluation of hermeneutics in interpreting Islamic texts, and a critique of the adoption of Western pluralist frameworks by Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. The research showed that religious pluralism, understood as the acceptance of all religions as equally valid, is derived from a Western context and is at odds with Islamic teachings, which recognise religious plurality but maintain the exclusivity of Islam as the final revelation. The research highlights the Indonesian Ulema Council's rejection of religious pluralism while advocating tolerance. In addition to clarifying misconceptions about Islamic perspectives on religious diversity, the study highlighted the need to distinguish between acceptance of plurality and endorsement of pluralism, thereby contributing to more informed interfaith dialogue and understanding. Ultimately, the research improved the representation of Islamic thought in academic and public discussions and to encourage a

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more nuanced appreciation of its theological underpinnings regarding religious diversity.

Keywords: *Religious Pluralism, Religious Plurality, Islamic Thought, Interfaith Dialogue, Indonesian Intellectuals.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perbedaan penting antara pluralisme agama dan pluralitas agama dalam pemikiran Islam, yang sering disalahpahami oleh intelektual Muslim kontemporer yang terpengaruh oleh ideologi Barat. Studi ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, meliputi analisis historis terhadap kemunculan pluralisme agama selama Reformasi Eropa, evaluasi epistemologis hermeneutika dalam menafsirkan teks-teks Islam, dan kritik terhadap adopsi kerangka pluralisme Barat oleh intelektual Muslim Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa pluralisme agama, yang dianggap sebagai penerimaan terhadap semua agama sebagai sama-sama sah, berasal dari konteks Barat dan tidak sejalan dengan ajaran Islam, yang mengakui pluralitas agama, tetapi mempertahankan eksklusivitas Islam sebagai wahyu terakhir. Penelitian ini menyoroti penolakan Majelis Ulama Indonesia terhadap pluralisme agama sambil mengedepankan toleransi. Studi ini tidak hanya menjelaskan kesalahpahaman seputar perspektif Islam terhadap keragaman agama, tetapi juga menekankan pentingnya membedakan antara penerimaan pluralitas dan dukungan terhadap pluralisme, sehingga berkontribusi pada dialog dan pemahaman lintas agama yang lebih berwawasan. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini meningkatkan representasi pemikiran Islam dalam diskusi akademik dan publik, serta mendorong apresiasi yang lebih mendalam terhadap dasar teologisnya mengenai keragaman agama.

Kata Kunci: *Pluralisme Agama, Pluralitas Agama, Pemikiran Islam, Dialog Lintas Agama, Intelektual Indonesia.*

Introduction

In contemporary interfaith discussions, confusion often arises between "religious pluralism" and "religious plurality." This misunderstanding, prevalent even among Muslim scholars and intellectuals, can lead to a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings. This paper aims to clarify the distinct meanings of religious pluralism and plurality from an Islamic perspective, examining how these terms, frequently used interchangeably in religious discourse worldwide, are understood within Islam, particularly in Indonesia.

Pluralism, according to Webster's Dictionary, is "a state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain and develop their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a

common civilization."[1] Similarly, the Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines it as "the existence of many different groups of people in one society, for example, people of different races, or of different political or religious beliefs."[2] The Cambridge Academic Dictionary also describes pluralism as "the existence of people of different races, religious beliefs, and cultures within the same society."[3] These definitions emphasize diversity, which Islam generally supports. However, issues arise when pluralism extends into the realm of "religious pluralism," implying a relativistic view that all beliefs hold equal validity.

Simon Blackburn, in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, defines this relativistic view as:

> "The general tolerance of different kinds of things, or more particularly of different and perhaps incommensurable descriptions of the world, none of which is deemed to be more fundamental than any of the others. Pluralism is often attributed to the later Wittgenstein, with his emphasis on different language games and forms of life. It is also a cardinal doctrine of post-structuralist literary theory, where it frequently consorts with relativism and general suspicion of a notion of 'the truth.' Sometimes this is the relatively innocuous doctrine that there is no way of stating the unique truth or the only truth about some subject-matter; at other times it may be the more sinister doctrine that no view is true, or that all views are equally true."[4]

This perspective, commonly linked with postmodern and liberal frameworks, becomes problematic from an Islamic viewpoint.[5] Runzo points out that one reaction to religious diversity is to deny any divine reality, suggesting that all religious truth claims are inherently false.[6] From his religious relativist perspective, he argues that no absolute truth exists among conflicting religious

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[1] Merriam-Webster, "Pluralism," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism.

[2] Oxford Learner's Dictionary, *Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2024), https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/pluralism.

[3] "Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary. s.v. 'Pluralism.,'" Cambridge University Press, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pluralism.

[4] Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 33.

[5] Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi et al., "Impact of Postmodernism on the Thought of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (IMIs)," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (December 6, 2023): 29–47, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.03; Harda Armayanto, "Problem Pluralisme Agama," *Tsaqafah Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 10, no. 2 (November 30, 2014): 325, https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i2.191; Harda Armayanto, "Meninjau Ulang Upaya Merukunkan Umat Dengan Pluralisme Agama," in *Pluralisme Agama: Dari Pandangan Hidup Ke Praktik Kehidupan* (Ponorogo: Centre for Islamic and Occidental Studies (CIOS), 2022), 95–129.

[6] Joseph Runzo, "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (1988): 343–64, https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19885446.

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claims, permitting multiple, contradictory beliefs to be valid simultaneously. Zarkasy contends that religious relativism and pluralism, along with liberalism, nihilism, and anti-authoritarianism, are products of a Western postmodern worldview.[7]

Many assume that Islam endorses religious pluralism as theorized by figures like John Hick. Hick's pluralism posits that all major world religions provide equally valid paths to the divine,[8] viewing them as distinct cultural expressions of a shared ultimate reality.[9] This approach, rooted in relativism, has gained traction in discussions of religious tolerance and inclusivity. Hick contends that no single religion possesses a monopoly on truth, arguing that religious diversity arises from the cultural and historical contexts of different faiths rather than essential differences in their truth claims.[10] While this view encourages mutual respect among religious traditions, it often leads to misinterpretations in Islamic contexts, where the distinction between pluralism and plurality is vital.

Islam, however, maintains a unique theological stance. While it recognizes the existence of diverse religions and respects the reality of religious plurality, it does not equate this recognition with accepting all religions as equally true or valid. The Qurʾan and hadith affirm Islam as the final, complete revelation. For example, Surah Ali Imran (3:19) states, "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam," underscoring Islam's theological exclusivity and directly opposing the pluralistic idea that all religions are equally valid.

The conflation of religious plurality with pluralism has led to widespread misinterpretations of Islamic teachings. Some scholars incorrectly equate Islam's acknowledgment of religious diversity with an endorsement of pluralism, which misrepresents Islam's stance on truth and tolerance. This misconception distorts Islam's theological framework, creating a false perception that Islam aligns with

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[7] IIIT Online Classes, "K2-5: Refleksi Tentang Islam, Westernisasi, Dan Liberalisasi," YouTube video, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G453LADMqYU.

[8] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 233–93.

[9] John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (England: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 1977), 161.

[10] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (Oneworld Publications, 1993), viii.

the pluralistic notion that all religions are equally true.[11] Such misunderstandings undermine scholarly interpretations and hinder constructive interfaith dialogue.

This research addresses two interconnected issues: the confusion between religious pluralism and plurality within Islamic thought and the broader implications of these misinterpretations. The central problem is the mistaken belief that Islam's acceptance of religious plurality equates to a validation of religious pluralism. This assumption contradicts Islamic doctrine, which acknowledges other religions' existence without endorsing the idea that all beliefs hold equal truth. Misinterpreting this distinction obscures the Islamic theological position, complicating interfaith dialogue and academic discussions on religious diversity.

Clarifying this confusion is essential for a more accurate understanding of Islamic teachings and their implications for interfaith relations. This research critically examines Islamic perspectives on religious pluralism, exploring the theological basis of Islam's stance on religious beliefs and reviewing its historical practices of tolerance and coexistence. By addressing these misconceptions, the study aims to foster a more precise understanding of Islam's approach to religious diversity, thus enhancing interfaith dialogue and ensuring that Islamic thought is accurately represented in both academic and public discourse.

Additionally, this research investigates how the misperception that Islam endorses religious pluralism affects broader perceptions of Islamic teachings. It will explore the historical and theological foundations of Islam's acceptance of religious plurality while emphasizing the clear distinction between this acceptance and the pluralistic view that all religions are equally valid. By addressing these critical issues, the study aims to contribute to a more informed and nuanced understanding of Islamic perspectives on religious diversity, ultimately fostering improved interfaith relations and promoting a more accurate representation of Islamic thought in global and academic contexts.

This study employs a qualitative approach to critically examine the historical, epistemological, and Islamic perspectives on religious pluralism. The methodology is divided into three main stages. The first stage undertakes a historical analysis of religious pluralism's development, focusing on its origins

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[11] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 36–37.

in response to religious conflicts in Europe. The tensions between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation and Enlightenment periods played a key role in the formation of religious pluralism as a conceptual framework aimed at addressing Christian sectarianism. This analysis underscores that religious pluralism is a distinctly Western construct, unrelated to Islamic tradition. By reviewing Europe's historical context, the study highlights how religious pluralism emerged as a reaction to internal Christian conflicts, with no direct connection to Islam's teachings on tolerance or religious diversity.

The second stage explores the epistemological foundations of religious pluralism, emphasizing the role of the hermeneutic method. Developed in response to religious conflicts in Europe, hermeneutics facilitated flexible interpretations of religious texts to accommodate differing perspectives. This study critically examines the application of hermeneutics within pluralist discourse, demonstrating how it diverges from traditional Islamic interpretative methods. Instead of hermeneutics, the research employs the classical Islamic method of tafsir *al-Qurʾān bi al-Qurʾān* (interpreting the Qurʾan through the Qurʾan), as advocated by scholars like Jalal al-Din al-Suyuthi in *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* and Abdel Haleem. This approach follows the principle of *al-Qurʾān yufassiru baʿdhuhu baʿdhan* (the Qurʾan explains itself),[12] ensuring a consistent and coherent interpretation of Qurʾanic verses. In modern linguistic terms, this mirrors the concept of *intertextuality*,[13] where texts are interpreted in relation to one another within the same corpus.[14] This method is used to analyze Qurʾanic verses often cited in support of religious pluralism and to assess whether these interpretations are consistent with traditional Islamic theology.

The third stage critiques the promotion of religious pluralism by Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia, examining how their arguments are influenced by Western thought. This study investigates the intellectual and cultural dynamics that lead some Indonesian scholars to adopt Western ideas, particularly concerning religious pluralism, without critical evaluation. This phenomenon is

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[12] Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqān Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān*, IV (Saudi Arabia: Wizarat al-Syuʾun al-Islamīyah wa al-Awqaf wa al-Daʿwah wa al-Irsyad, Mujammaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Thibaʿat al-Mushaf al-Syarif, al-Amanah al-ʿAmmah al-Syuʾun al-ʿIlmiyah, n.d.), 2274–75.

[13] M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qurʾan* (Themes and Style. London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 97.

[14] M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *Exploring the Qurʾan: Context and Impact* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 183.

analyzed through the *Peter Pan Theory of the East*[15] and the theory of *Oriental Despotism*,[16] which suggest that Eastern intellectualism is often infantilized or regarded as inferior by the West, resulting in a reliance on Western concepts.[17] Using these frameworks, the study demonstrates that the discourse on religious pluralism among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals is not independently developed but heavily shaped by Western intellectual traditions rather than evolving organically from within the Islamic tradition.

Additionally, the 2005 Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) fatwa,[18] which rejects religious pluralism while advocating for religious tolerance, will be analyzed in relation to the Qurʾanic interpretative method of *al-Qurʾān yufassiru baʿdhuhu baʿdhan*. The research will evaluate whether the interpretations of pluralism offered by certain Muslim intellectuals align with this traditional Islamic method and the MUI's position.

By incorporating the *Peter Pan Theory of the East* and the *theory of Oriental Despotism*, this study reveals the extent of Western intellectual influence on the acceptance of religious pluralism among some Muslim scholars. It argues that this influence has led to a misinterpretation of Islamic tolerance, conflating religious plurality—a reality acknowledged by Islam—with religious pluralism, a concept rooted in Western ideology. Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the impact of Western epistemology on Islamic intellectualism in Indonesia, demonstrating that the acceptance of religious pluralism in this context is a product of Western intellectual dominance rather than an organic development within Islamic thought.

Discussion

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[15] J. M Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory 1760–2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[16] J. M Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation. Cambridge* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[17] J. M Hobson, "Civilizing the Global Economy, Racism, and the Continuity of Anglo-Saxon Imperialism," in *Global Standards of Market Civilization*, ed. B. Bowden and L. Seabrooke (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 7–26.

[18] MUI Digital, "Fatwa Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, Dan Sekularisme Agama, No. 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005," Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2024, https://mui.or.id/baca/fatwa/pluralisme-liberalisme-dan-sekularisme-agama.

The Evolution of Western Religious Pluralism and Its Impact on Islamic Thought: A Critical Examination

The emergence of religious pluralism in the Western world, particularly the view that all religions are valid, as advocated by John Hick, can be traced back to Europe's long history of religious conflict and domination. For centuries, the Catholic Church held immense power, often suppressing dissent, as seen in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, which directly challenged Catholic authority. This period was marked by religious persecution, wars, and violent repression against those who opposed Catholic doctrine.

The Protestant movement, led by figures like Martin Luther, arose in response to this oppression, seeking freedom from the Catholic Church's control. The Reformation, along with the subsequent religious wars, demonstrated that enforcing religious uniformity through violence and state power was unsustainable. As a result, the concept of tolerance began to emerge, eventually evolving into modern religious pluralism.

Europe endured relentless religious conflicts for decades, including the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453),[19] the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648),[20] and the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648).[21] These wars, fuelled by religious and political strife, had devastating consequences for the continent, further deepening divisions among nations and faiths. France became a battleground for competing religious factions, with Protestants fighting for their rights and survival against Catholic dominance. These conflicts laid the foundation for the long and difficult path toward religious tolerance and civil rights, especially for French Protestants.

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte embarked on a military campaign in Egypt, where he established the Institute d'Égypte, modelled after the Institute de France.[22] This institution was intended to promote scientific research and intellectual collaboration between French and Egyptian scholars. Today, it

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[19] Anne Curry, *The Hundred Years' War 1337-1453* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2002).

[20] Thomas Grattan, *The Eighty Years' War: The War between the Dutch and the Spanish in the Netherlands, 1568-1648* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Leonaur Ltd, 2019).

[21] Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[22] David A Bell, *Napoleon: A Concise Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); David G Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Scribner, 1973); Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

remains a center for scientific and cultural exchange, with Ahmed Youssef, an Egyptian historian and expert on Franco-Arab relations, playing a key role in uncovering Napoleon's engagement with Islam during his Egyptian campaign. Youssef has highlighted Napoleon's admiration for Prophet Muhammad and the Qurʾan.[23]

According to Youssef, Napoleon was deeply impressed by the Prophet Muhammad's leadership and the Qurʾan's significance in governance. He saw Muhammad not only as a religious leader but also as a unifier who built a vast empire. Napoleon's respect for the Qurʾan as both a legal and governing text further solidified his admiration for Islamic principles. Before arriving in Egypt, he had studied the region extensively and engaged with Orientalists to better understand its society.[24]

In Cairo, Napoleon engaged in theological discussions with local sheikhs, demonstrating his knowledge of the Qurʾan. His respect for Islamic traditions was notably evident when he funded a three-day celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. During this event, he was symbolically named "Ali-Bonaparte" and honored as a son-in-law of the Prophet. Youssef suggests that these experiences had a lasting influence on Napoleon, potentially shaping his later policies on religious tolerance.[25] After returning to France in 1801, Napoleon introduced the Napoleonic Concordat, which formalized the relationship between the French state and the Catholic Church. This agreement, which lasted over a century, recognized Catholicism as the primary religion of France while maintaining state authority over religious matters. The 1802 Organic Articles further acknowledged Protestant denominations, marking a significant step toward religious tolerance and protecting religious minorities.

It could be argued that Napoleon's time in Egypt, particularly his exposure to Islamic teachings on tolerance and governance, influenced the creation of the Concordat and Organic Articles. Youssef's research indicates that Napoleon's admiration for the Prophet Muhammad and his understanding of the Qurʾan's role in governance shaped his approach to religious policy in

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[23] Ahmed Youssef, *Bonabarta: Napoléon, Une Passion Arabe?* (Paris: Passés Composés, 2024).

[24] Youssef.

[25] Youssef.

France.[26] The Qurʾan's emphasis on tolerance may have inspired Napoleon to adopt a more inclusive stance toward religious minorities, suggesting that his interactions with Islamic scholars and respect for the Prophet influenced his vision of religious tolerance in France. The enduring impact of these policies, which balanced Catholic influence with the recognition of Protestant faiths, underscores the profound role Napoleon's experiences in Egypt played in shaping his religious policies.[27]

The 19th century in France was marked by political upheaval, particularly between monarchists and republicans.[28] The Concordat of 1801 aimed to restore the Catholic Church's influence after the French Revolution, but tensions between the secular state and religious institutions persisted. Anticlerical republicans saw the Catholic Church as a barrier to social progress.[29] These conflicts culminated in the 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State, which ended the Concordat and firmly established France's commitment to secularism, or laïcité.[30] In the broader European context, nationalism, which rose in the aftermath of the Hundred Years' War, became intertwined with exclusionary ideologies of racial superiority.[31] This dynamic fuelled conflicts like World War II and continues to be evident in modern xenophobic movements.[32]

Following the Protestant Reformation, Western philosophers and theologians developed frameworks to interpret religious diversity. Alan Race's tripartite division into exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism is a key model.[33] Exclusivism claims that only one religion is true, while pluralism argues that multiple belief systems contain valid truths. Inclusivism, a middle-ground

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[26] John McManners, *Church and State in France, 1870-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, Publisher, 1972).

[27] Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[28] Gibson.

[29] Gibson.

[30] Jasper Doomen, "Laïcité: Ousting Some Religious Elements While Introducing Others," *Democracy and Security* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2023): 274–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2022.2111303.

[31] Peter Rutland, "Racism and Nationalism," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 4 (July 2, 2022): 629–42, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.60.

[32] Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (June 1998): 737, https://doi.org/10.2307/2650570.

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

position, suggests that while various traditions hold elements of truth, one (often Christianity) represents ultimate truth, as noted by McKim.[34] Additional perspectives include relativism, anti-realism, and scepticism, each offering different views on the validity of religious beliefs.[35] Western discourse on religious diversity tends to favor frameworks that acknowledge the potential for positive relationships among religious traditions. Thinkers like Spinoza, Locke, Hume, and Voltaire in the 17th and 18th centuries promoted rational interpretations of religion and tolerance. Later, figures like Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, and James emphasized that religious diversity is an inevitable aspect of human experience, shaped by historical and epistemological limitations.

Immanuel Kant's work significantly influences religious pluralism and Hick's perspectives. Kant's distinction between rational religion and specific faith traditions implies the possibility of pluralism, arguing that true religion is based on morality.[36] Though he does not advocate for pluralism explicitly, Kant suggests that various religious traditions can reflect the essence of true religion. Friedrich Schleiermacher builds on this, proposing that religion's essence transcends specific doctrines, focusing instead on universal intuition.[37] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel further expands the discourse, viewing religious traditions as expressions of the absolute spirit and positing Christianity as the most developed form.[38] William James, meanwhile, emphasizes individual religious experiences over doctrinal truth claims,[39] arguing for a pluralistic approach where no tradition monopolizes divine experiences.[40]

Hick defines religious pluralism as a doctrine of salvation, challenging earlier Christian perspectives of exclusivism and inclusivism. Central to his

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[34] Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[35] Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements," in *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. L. M. Antony (New York, NY: Oxford Academic, 2007), 194–214, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195173079.003.0016.

[36] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, ed. W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009).

[37] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. R. Crouter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[38] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987).

[39] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[40] William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

theory is the question of salvation: "Who is eligible to enter heaven?" Exclusivists claim that only members of their own faith can be saved, while inclusivists allow for the possibility of salvation for non-Christians who live virtuous lives according to Christian moral standards. Karl Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christians" aligns with this view.[41] Hick takes this further, proposing that salvation is attainable for nearly anyone, regardless of their religious background, as long as they shift from self-centeredness to "Reality-centeredness" within their tradition. Hick even suggests that communism could offer a path to salvation, emphasizing that his views on pluralism are rooted in Christian theology.[42]

The debate over religious pluralism largely centers on interpreting the Christian doctrine of salvation. Traditional Christian theology holds that salvation is made possible through Christ's suffering and sacrifice on the cross, with individuals participating in redemption either through faith, as emphasized by Protestants, or through sacraments, as in Catholicism.[43] In Catholicism, Baptism is central to salvation, with three forms: Baptism by water, desire, and blood, each offering different paths to receiving grace.[44] Hick, however, approaches the topic from his background as a Presbyterian minister, theologian, and social activist. Appointed as a professor of Philosophy of Religion at Birmingham University in 1967, he engaged deeply with religious diversity through encounters with various religious communities, shaping his pluralist views.

Plurality and Tolerance in Islam: Differentiating Acceptance from Endorsement

The discourse surrounding Islam's approach to religious diversity often conflates two distinct concepts: religious plurality and religious pluralism. It is essential to differentiate between these terms to prevent misrepresenting Islamic teachings. Religious plurality refers to the factual existence of multiple religions within a society, a reality that Islam acknowledges and accommodates through a

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[41] Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 33–38.

[42] D. L. Okholm and Eds. T. R. Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 15.

[43] Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

[44] Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (Great Britain: Al-Hoda, 1999), 36–40.

framework of respect and coexistence. In contrast, religious pluralism is a philosophical or theological stance that claims all religions are equally valid paths to the truth, a notion explicitly rejected in Islamic theology. The Qurʾan and Hadith provide no support for the idea that all religions hold equal validity.

Islam's recognition of religious plurality is grounded in its historical and theological foundations. From the early days of Islam, Muslims encountered various religious communities, notably in Medina, where Jews, Christians, and polytheists coexisted alongside Muslims. This coexistence was formalized in treaties such as the Constitution of Medina, which granted non-Muslim communities the right to practice their faith while living under Muslim governance.[45] These communities, referred to as Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book), were given protection and religious freedom as long as they fulfilled certain obligations, including paying the jizya (a tax for non-Muslim subjects). This arrangement demonstrates Islam's acknowledgment of cultural and religious diversity, allowing people of different faiths to live according to their beliefs while contributing to the state's welfare—Muslims through zakah and Ahl al-Dzimma (protected people) through jizya.[46] The Qurʾan affirms the existence of other religions: "To you be your religion, and to me my religion" (Qurʾan 109:6). This verse, often cited in discussions of religious tolerance, underscores Islam's acceptance of religious plurality, providing individuals the freedom to practice their faith as long as it does not disrupt the social order.

Islamic history offers numerous examples of tolerance, particularly during the reign of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and subsequent Islamic empires.[47] Non-Muslim communities were frequently integrated into Islamic society and contributed significantly to advancements in fields such as science, medicine, and philosophy. This historical precedent reflects Islam's recognition of religious diversity as part of the natural order. Adam Smith, for instance, acknowledged the revival of scientific inquiry under the Islamic Caliphs, attributing it to the peace they established, which allowed for the restoration and development of Greek philosophy and astronomy in the East. Smith credited the Caliphs' just

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[45] Muhammad Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution in the World* (Birmingham: Maktaba Bab ul Ilm, 2020).

[46] Abdel Haleem, *Exploring the Qurʾan: Context and Impact*, 46.

[47] Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Protecting Non-Muslim: Its Implementation During Early Muslim Rule of Islamicjerusalem," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Al-Quran Dan Al-Hadith* 9, no. 1 (2011): 209–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-90000027.

governance for fostering an environment that promoted intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of natural principles.[48]

In the West, the separation of Church and State is often seen as essential for fostering tolerance. However, Muslims do not need to distance themselves from their religious teachings to embrace tolerance. In Islam, tolerance is an active principle deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qurʾan, shaping both governance and society. The Qurʾan explicitly encourages respectful and tolerant behavior toward people of different faiths: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error" (Qurʾan 2:256).[49] This verse reinforces that Islam does not seek to impose religious beliefs on others by force. Instead, it promotes a system of religious tolerance where individuals are free to follow their own beliefs.

Imam al-Qurthubī (d. 671/1272) and Imam al-THabarī (d. 310/923) provide valuable insights into the historical context behind the Qurʾanic verse on tolerance. They report that the verse "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qurʾan 2:256) was revealed in relation to Muslim parents whose children had connections to the Banū Naḍīr, a Jewish tribe exiled from Madinah. Some Muslim parents wondered whether they should compel their children to embrace Islam.[50] Imam al-THabarī also recounts the case of a Muslim man whose sons converted to Christianity and left for Syria, as well as instances of Muslim children raised by Jewish families.[51] This verse emphasizes that the Qurʾan does not endorse fighting those of other faiths unless they initiate aggression against Muslims.[52] These examples illustrate that tolerance in Islam was applied practically, respecting individuals' freedom to choose their religion.

This principle of tolerance is also reflected in Islamic legal traditions, particularly in the fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) concerning minority rights. Non-Muslims were not only allowed to practice their religion but were also provided

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[48] Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1982), 67.

[49] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation & Commentary* (Lahore: The Presidency of Islamic Researchers, IFTA, 1938), 2:256.

[50] Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 293.

[51] Nasr et al., 293.

[52] Wael B Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī Usūl Al-Fiqh* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 237.

legal protection under Islamic law.[53] This tradition of tolerance exemplifies Islam's understanding of religious plurality as a natural aspect of human existence that should be respected through fair treatment of all communities.

The distinction between religious plurality and pluralism is especially pertinent in Indonesia, where religious diversity is a defining feature of the nation. Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, upholds Pancasila, a state philosophy that promotes unity in diversity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika). The People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia (MPR RI), in their book *Empat Pilar MPR RI*, highlights the importance of unity in diversity as one of the four pillars of the nation. This principle emphasizes that despite Indonesia's cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, the nation remains united (Pimpinan MPR dan Badan Sosialisasi MPR RI 2020: 191–196).[54]This framework aligns closely with Islam's concept of religious plurality, encouraging tolerance and peaceful coexistence among various religious communities.

In Indonesia, prominent thinkers like Nurcholish Madjid and Amin Abdullah have contributed significantly to the discourse on religious pluralism.[55] However, many Muslim intellectuals struggle to clearly differentiate between religious pluralism and religious plurality, leading to misconceptions. As a result, there is a mistaken belief that Islam endorses religious pluralism, a view popularized by scholars like John Hick, who argue that all religions are equally valid paths to the divine. This interpretation, however, contradicts Islamic teachings, as neither the Qurʾan nor the hadith supports the theological equality of all religions.

Recent debates in Indonesia have seen increased confusion between religious plurality and pluralism, particularly among intellectuals and political leaders advocating for a more pluralistic approach. The Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) has been vocal in rejecting this trend, distinguishing between Islam's acceptance of plurality and its rejection of pluralism. In a 2005 fatwa, the MUI declared religious pluralism incompatible

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[53] Wael B Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 328.

[54] Pimpinan MPR and Badan Sosialisasi MPR RI, *Empat Pilar MPR RI* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Jenderal MPR RI, 2020), 191–96.

[55] M. Amin Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam," in *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts - Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, ed. M. Hashas (Cham: Springer, 2021), 189–99, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66089-5_11.

with Islamic teachings, emphasizing that it undermines the uniqueness of Islam as the final and true revelation.[56]

The fatwa clarified the MUI's position by outlining key points. First, it stated that pluralism, secularism, and religious liberalism are ideologies fundamentally at odds with Islam. Therefore, it is forbidden for Muslims to adopt or follow these ideologies. Second, in matters of faith (aqidah) and worship, Muslims must maintain an exclusive stance, refraining from mixing Islamic beliefs and practices with those of other religions. However, in social interactions—especially for Muslims living among followers of other religions— the fatwa encourages an inclusive approach, fostering peaceful coexistence and social engagement, provided it does not compromise Islamic principles.[57] By distinguishing between faith and social engagement, the MUI rejects religious pluralism while supporting religious plurality as a foundation for harmonious social relations in Indonesia's multi-religious society.

Uncritical Acceptance of Western Pluralism: The Impact of Perceived Inferiority on Indonesian Muslim Scholars

The uncritical and ahistorical adoption of Western religious pluralism by many Indonesian Muslim intellectuals reflects a deeper intellectual inferiority complex, shaped by the long history of Western colonialism and imperialism in the Muslim world. Edward Said, in Orientalism, famously argued that Western colonial powers crafted a narrative that justified their dominance by portraying themselves as superior, rational, and progressive, while depicting the colonized as primitive and irrational.[58] This colonial discourse framed the East, especially the Muslim world, as backward[59] and in need of Western civilization.[60] The extended period of Western domination left a lasting psychological and cultural impact on the colonized, leading many to internalize this narrative and view Western civilization as inherently superior.[61] Consequently, numerous intellectuals from former colonies, including Indonesia, adopted Western

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[56] MUI Digital, "Fatwa Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, Dan Sekularisme Agama, No. 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005."

[57] MUI Digital.

[58] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 7.

[59] Edward W Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17.

[60] B. Ashcroft and H. Kadhim, *Edward Said and the Post-Colonial* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), 139.

[61] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

thought uncritically, believing that imitating it was essential for progress and modernity.

Two prominent secular figures whose works are widely studied in Islamic universities in Indonesia are Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid. Both Nasution and Madjid, along with H.M. Rasjidi, the first Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, initially received traditional Islamic education in Indonesia but later pursued higher education in the Western world. Interestingly, Rasjidi, who lectured at McGill University, taught Nasution and even recommended him for admission to the institution.[62] Despite this academic connection, Rasjidi remained a staunch critic of Western ideologies, whereas Nasution and Madjid became known for integrating Islamic teachings with Western approaches. Their works, which often advocate for religious pluralism and secularism, have garnered considerable attention and are widely referenced by Indonesian authors who support these ideas.

In contrast, Rasjidi's critiques of Nasution and Madjid, although significant, have not gained the same level of recognition, particularly in Islamic universities.[63] His critical writings, such as Correction of Nurcholish Madjid on Secularization and Correction of Harun Nasution on Islam Reviewed from Various Aspects, offer important counterarguments to the ideas of pluralism and secularism, yet remain less circulated.[64] These works are essential for understanding the intellectual debates surrounding pluralism and secularization in Indonesian Islamic thought.

The epistemological foundations of religious thought in Islam and Western Christianity differ fundamentally. Islamic religious interpretation, particularly of the Qurʾan, is grounded in a well-established tradition of knowledge transmission.[65] This system, known as *isnād*, traces its origins to the

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[62] H. M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi Rasjidi Terhadap Harun Nasution Dalam Uraiannya: Ajaran Islam Tentang Akal Dan Akhlak* (Jakarta: Media Dakwah, 1985).

[63] H. M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi Terhadap Nurcholish Madjid Tentang Sekularisasi* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972).

[64] H. M. Rasjidi, *Koreksi Terhadap Harun Nasution Tentang Islam Ditinjau Dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1997).

[65] Wael B Hallaq, *Law and Legal Theory in Classical and Medieval Islam* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 15; Delfina Serrano Ruano and Wael B. Hallaq, "A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to the Sunni Usul Al-Fiqh," *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2000, 14, https://doi.org/10.2307/1051528; Wael B Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129; Wael B Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 109; Wael B Hallaq, *The Formation of*

early generations of Muslims and ensures that interpretations of Islamic scripture remain consistent with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.[66]

In contrast, the Christian religious tradition in the West lacks such a structured epistemological framework. One key reason for this is the absence of the Bible in its original form or language, as the existing texts are translations of ancient manuscripts that have undergone numerous revisions over the centuries.[67] This has led to interpretive discrepancies, creating confusion among Christian scholars and believers. To address these ambiguities, Western scholars turned to *hermeneutics*, a method grounded in Greek philosophy rather than Christian tradition.[68] Consequently, various and often contradictory interpretations of Christian texts have emerged,[69] contributing to the rise of relativism in Western religious thought.[70]

Religious relativism suggests that multiple religions may be considered correct, with their validity dependent on the perspectives of their respective communities.[71] This approach, which accepts differing interpretations as equally valid, has paved the way for religious pluralism. Religious pluralism, in this context, arose as a response to the internal contradictions within Christian theology, particularly as Western Christianity confronted modern intellectual challenges. However, when Indonesian Muslim intellectuals adopt this concept without acknowledging its roots in Christian theological crises, they risk distorting the well-defined and coherent principles of Islamic thought. Furthermore, within the Catholic Church, leaders' responses to religious

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Islamic Law. London (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46; Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 16; Wael B Hallaq, *Shariʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 93.

[66] Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: The Oxford Center for Islamic Studies and The Islamic Text Society, 1996), 154–200.

[67] Al-A'zami, 245, 284, 290, 322.

[68] Kevin J Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 160.

[69] N. T Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (Amerika Serikat Britania Raya: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005); James D. G Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 121.

[70] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, 261.

[71] Mikael Stenmark, "Relativism as a Challenge to Religion: Christianity, Truth and the 'Dictatorship of Relativism,'" in *Relativism and Post-Truth in Contemporary Society* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 177–96, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96559-8_11.

pluralism vary. Pope John Paul II adopted a more accommodating stance,[72] whereas Pope Benedict XVI viewed pluralism as problematic, arguing that it leads to religious relativism.[73] This divergence highlights the complexity of the concept, especially when it intersects with Islamic thought.

The intellectual inferiority observed among some Indonesian Muslim intellectuals cannot be fully understood without considering the historical context of Western colonialism and imperialism. As Edward Said noted in his *Orientalism*, Western colonial powers constructed a narrative portraying the Muslim world as backward, irrational, and in need of Western "civilizing" influence.[74] This narrative was not solely political but also cultural and intellectual, shaping how colonized peoples viewed both themselves and the West. As a result, the colonized came to believe that adopting Western intellectual frameworks was essential for their advancement, driven by the pervasive sense of inferiority to the West. This perception of Western superiority in intellectual, political, and cultural domains led many to abandon or diminish their own indigenous traditions, hoping to achieve progress by aligning with Western ideals.[75]

In Indonesia and much of the Muslim world, this colonial mentality fostered a tendency to imitate Western thought, even in matters of religion. Colonized populations were conditioned to believe that the West represented progress, rationality, and modernity, while their own traditions were viewed as outdated. This phenomenon, described as "intellectual imperialism," persists as colonized intellectuals, even after the end of formal colonial rule, continue to adopt Western ideas and values without critical engagement.[76]

This intellectual subordination is particularly evident in the uncritical acceptance of Western religious pluralism by some Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. Rather than engaging with Islamic epistemology, which offers a

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[72] John P. Hittinger, "Pope John Paul II on Church, State, and the Ground of Religious Freedom," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Religion and State Volume I*, ed. S. Holzer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 97–114, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35151-8_7.

[73] Stenmark, "Relativism as a Challenge to Religion: Christianity, Truth and the 'Dictatorship of Relativism.'"

[74] Said, *Orientalism*.

[75] Rasjidi, *Koreksi Rasjidi Terhadap Harun Nasution Dalam Uraiannya: Ajaran Islam Tentang Akal Dan Akhlak*, 3–8.

[76] Syed Hussein Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits, and Problems," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, no. 1 (2000): 23–45.

systematic approach to religious diversity, these intellectuals have embraced a Western concept of pluralism rooted in Christian relativism.[77] This imitation, driven by a colonial mindset, undermines the distinctiveness of Islamic teachings on religious plurality and tolerance. Due to prolonged colonialism, Islam has often been framed through the lens of the *Peter Pan theory*, portraying the East as stagnant and inferior to the West.[78]

Islamic scholars have long maintained that while Islam acknowledges religious plurality—the coexistence of different religious communities within society—it does not endorse religious pluralism, which asserts that all religious paths are equally valid. In this context, the MUI, under the leadership of K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, who served as the Vice President of Indonesia (2019-2024), issued a *fatwa* (a formal religious ruling) stressing the necessity for Muslims to maintain an exclusive stance regarding matters of faith and worship. The *fatwa* explicitly prohibits the blending of Islamic beliefs and practices with those of other religions.[79]

Conversely, in social matters unrelated to faith and worship, Muslims are encouraged to adopt an inclusive approach, engaging in social interactions with individuals of different religions as long as such interactions do not lead to harm.[80] This principle is embodied in the Indonesian motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (unity in diversity). Despite Indonesia's vast diversity of ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions, citizens are called to respect one another while preserving the integrity of their respective religious teachings.

In contrast, Western religious pluralism, grounded in relativism, emerges from the internal contradictions and epistemological crises within Christianity. By failing to critically examine these differences, Indonesian Muslim intellectuals like Nurcholish Madjid and Harun Nasution risk compromising the integrity of Islamic thought, which is based on distinct principles. This conflation between

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[77] Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*.

[78] Hobson, "Civilizing the Global Economy, Racism, and the Continuity of Anglo-Saxon Imperialism."

[79] MUI Digital, "Fatwa Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, Dan Sekularisme Agama, No. 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005."

[80] MUI Digital.

religious plurality and pluralism poses a threat to the coherence of Islamic teachings.[81]

John Hick's concept of religious pluralism further complicates the landscape by advocating a synthesis of religious doctrines that overlooks the profound differences in beliefs. For example, even though a Hindu or Buddhist may reject the notion of a personal ultimate reality, and a Christian may affirm it passionately, Hick asserts that no genuine conflict exists between these perspectives.[82] He claims that each view represents different paths to the Ultimate, but this stance neglects the deep-lived experiences and genuine conflicts among the followers of various faiths. Although religious pluralism is often portrayed as promoting tolerance, it ultimately fails to respect the authentic differences that define the world's diverse religious traditions.[83]

Instead, this approach could foster new conflicts in regions or countries with multiple religions, such as Indonesia. Thus, Indonesia is well-equipped with its motto of "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" without needing to advocate for or spread religious pluralism. This is evident in Indonesia, where harmony among religious communities generally thrives, despite the fact that conflicts often arise from political and economic factors rather than religious ones.[84] In this context, fostering understanding and respect for religious plurality is more effective than promoting a homogenized view of faith, ensuring the preservation of each religion's unique principles while facilitating coexistence.

Qurʾanic Verses Misinterpreted as Foundations for Religious Pluralism

Certain verses in the Qurʾan are often cited by proponents of religious pluralism as evidence that Islām endorses this concept. However, these interpretations are selective and problematic for several key reasons. First, the

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[81] Harda Armayanto, "Membangun Kerukunan Dalam Bingkai Pluralisme Agama: Analisis Gagasan Pemikir Muslim Kontemporer," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama Indonesia (JSAI)* 5, no. 1 (March 31, 2024): 48–73, https://doi.org/10.22373/jsai.v5i1.4254.

[82] Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*; Armayanto, "Membangun Kerukunan Dalam Bingkai Pluralisme Agama: Analisis Gagasan Pemikir Muslim Kontemporer."

[83] Armayanto, "Membangun Kerukunan Dalam Bingkai Pluralisme Agama: Analisis Gagasan Pemikir Muslim Kontemporer."

[84] Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeddin et al., "Inequality and Violent Conflict: New Evidence from Selected Provinces in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 26, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 552–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/13547860.2020.1773607.

approach taken by advocates of pluralism fails to adhere to the established principles of *tafsīr* for the Qurʾan. Classical scholars, including al-Suyuthi, emphasize the necessity of a rigorous and disciplined methodology for Qurʾanic *tafsīr*. Mufassirīn (exegetes) must be well-versed in at least fifteen branches of knowledge, such as *ushūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), *balāghah* (rhetoric), *naḥw* (syntax), and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), all of which ensure a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of Qurʾanic verses.[85] Imam al-Suyuthi states that "Whoever wishes to perform *tafsīr* of the Noble Book should first seek its explanation within the Qurʾan itself. What is presented in general terms in one place is clarified in another, and what is summarized in one part is expanded upon elsewhere. If he does not find the meaning of a verse within other verses, he should seek it in the Sunnah."[86] This internal coherence is critical, as the Sunnah—regarded as an extension of the Qurʾan—serves as an authoritative commentary and clarification of its meanings. Imam al-Syafi'i also asserted, "Everything decided by the Messenger of Allah stems from his understanding of the Qurʾan."

This principle of internal coherence is further exemplified by the Qurʾan's intertextual nature, where one part of the Qurʾan clarifies or expands upon another. The idea of *al-Qurʾān yufassiru baʿdhuhu baʿdhan*—"the Qurʾan explains itself"—is fundamental to understanding its message as a unified whole.[87] Furthermore, *yuḥmal al-muthlaq ʿalā al-muqayyad*—"unqualified statements should be interpreted in the light of qualified ones"—ensures that verses that might appear broad or ambiguous are always interpreted in the context of more specific and qualified verses.[88] These guidelines ensure that the Qurʾan's message is understood cohesively and holistically, without fragmenting its teachings.

Furthermore, pluralistic interpretations are inconsistent with the Qurʾan's own emphasis on its internal consistency and unity of message, as the Qurʾan insists that there are no contradictions within its text (Qurʾan 4: 82). By neglecting these established methodologies of *tafsīr*, proponents of pluralism engage in a fragmented approach that not only contradicts other, more definitive verses on faith but also undermines the integrity of a holistic Qurʾanic worldview. This

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[85] Al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqān Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān*, 2274.

[86] Al-Suyuthi, 2274.

[87] Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an*, 97.

[88] Abdel Haleem, 97.

misinterpretation reveals the inherent weaknesses in the pluralism argument, illustrating its incompatibility with the cohesive and contextually informed understanding required by Islamic scholarship.

Before examining the specifics of these pluralistic claims, it is crucial to remember that the Qurʾan's internal coherence is a cornerstone of its *tafsīr*, one that decisively refutes any suggestion of inherent pluralism within its message. The methodology of *tafsīr* outlined by scholars like al-Suyuthi and al-Syafi'i ensures that the Qurʾan's message is not diluted or misrepresented, but rather understood as it was revealed—contextually rich, coherent, and firmly grounded in its own internal relationships.

Qurʾan 2:62, often cited in support of religious pluralism, upon deeper analysis reveals a different perspective. Rather than endorsing pluralism, classical Qurʾanic scholars like al-Qurthubi in *al-Jāmʿli-Aḥkām* and al-Thabari in *Jāmiʿal-Bayān* interpret terms such as (الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا) —"those who believe"—as specifically referring to believers in Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Similarly, (الَّذِينَ هادُوا) — "those who repented or returned [to God's command]" — uses a verb form, highlighting actions rather than identities. This emphasis on action over mere affiliation underscores the Qurʾanic view that true faith is validated through righteous conduct.

The term "Jews" (*Yahūd* in Arabic) derives from Judah, the son of Yaʿqub, and has also been interpreted by some scholars as linked to the root *hāda*, meaning "he repented."[89] This interpretation aligns with Qurʾan 7:156, where the phrase "We have returned to You" (*hudnā ilayka*) signifies repentance, emphasizing the return to God's command after the Israelites' worship of the calf during Musa's absence. In the case of (النَّصارى), or Christians, the term originates from Nāshira (Nazareth), where ʿIsa (Jesus) lived, and connects to his disciples' declaration, "We are the supporters of God" [Qurʾan 3:52], reflecting active support of God's mission rather than a mere title.[90]

The Sabians (الصابئين) represent a distinct religious group historically linked to the Mandaeans, a sect with practices blending Jewish, Christian, and pre-

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[89] Al-Thabari, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qurʾān*, 2024, https://tafsir.app/tabari/2/62.

[90] Al-Qurthubiyy, *Al-Jamī' Li-'Aḥkām*, 2024, https://tafsir.app/qurtubi/2/62.

Islamic elements. Residing mainly in Lower Babylonia, they preserved sacred texts in a dialect similar to that of the Babylonian Talmud.[91]

Ibn Katsir, citing al-Suddī, explains that Qurʾan 2:62 was revealed in response to Salman al-Farisi's concerns over his former companions, who had lived righteously while awaiting the Prophet's arrival. When the Prophet initially expressed doubt about their salvation, this verse was revealed, affirming that those who sincerely adhered to their previous scriptures and prophets are acknowledged by the Qurʾan. This interpretation demonstrates that salvation was attainable by following successive prophets and adhering to their teachings, with each prophet's arrival marking a new stage in divine guidance.[92]

Qurʾan 2:62 and its surrounding context in Qurʾan 2:40–61 and Qurʾan 16:36 address exclusivist beliefs held by some among the People of the Book. While certain Jews and Christians claimed that only adherents of their faith would attain salvation, the Qurʾan refutes this by emphasizing that salvation is open to all who sincerely believe in God and perform righteous deeds. Qurʾan 16:36 reinforces the universality of this message, stating that God sent a messenger to every community, urging them to worship Him and reject evil. Thus, every community was provided with a path to God through their respective prophets.

The Qurʾan further critiques exclusivist claims, such as assertions by certain Jews and Christians that they alone are "children of Allah and His most beloved" [Qurʾan 5:18] or that only members of their faith will enter paradise [Qurʾan 2:111]. Qurʾan 2:62 challenges this view by affirming that salvation is accessible to anyone who truly believes and lives righteously, regardless of religious identity, focusing instead on universal faith and sincere actions.

Qurʾan 3:81 further establishes continuity among prophets by detailing a covenant that required each prophet to support future prophets affirming their message. This covenant culminated in the mission of Prophet Muhammad, whom Muslims regard as the final prophet prophesied by Musa and ʿIsa (Deuteronomy 18:18; John 16:13). Qurʾan 3:84 instructs Muslims to honor all

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[91] Joseph Jacobs and Isaac Broydé, "Mandæans," in *Jewish Encyclopedia 2002–2021*, 2024, https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10349-mandaeans.

[92] Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-ʿAẓīm*, 2024, https://tafsir.app/ibn-katheer/2/62.

prophets equally, reinforcing that all conveyed a consistent message of monotheism and submission to God.

The finality of Prophet Muhammad's mission marks a pivotal moment in spiritual accountability. As Qurʾan 3:85 states, "Whoever seeks a way other than Islam, it will never be accepted from them." While previous followers of the Torah and Injil were eligible for salvation through sincere adherence to their teachings, those after the arrival of Prophet Muhammad are required to accept his message to complete their covenant with God. The Qurʾan thus criticizes those who, despite recognizing Prophet Muhammad as the prophesied messenger, rejected him for worldly gains. Hence, post-Prophet Muhammad, the path to salvation is through sincere acceptance of his guidance and adherence to the Qurʾan's principles.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism, particularly in the context of Islamic thought. The common misunderstanding that Islam endorses religious pluralism, as articulated by theorists like John Hick, stems from a misinterpretation of Islam's theological foundations. Qurʾan 2:62, often cited by proponents of pluralism, does not advocate for theological equivalency among religions. Instead, classical exegesis reveals that the verse emphasizes salvation through sincere faith in God and adherence to prophetic guidance, affirming the importance of continuity in divine revelation through successive prophets.

Islam's recognition of religious plurality—the coexistence of diverse faiths—stems from a framework of tolerance and respect without equating all religions as equally valid paths to salvation. This is evident in the Constitution of Medina and the Qurʾanic principle of "no compulsion in religion." However, Western constructs of pluralism, as proposed by thinkers like Hick, have influenced some Indonesian Muslim scholars, leading to a conflation of plurality with pluralism. The Indonesian Ulema Council's (MUI) rejection of religious pluralism further clarifies this distinction, reaffirming that Islamic teachings prioritize tolerance without compromising theological boundaries.

By advocating a return to classical methods of Qurʾanic interpretation, this study addresses the influence of Western ideologies on Islamic perspectives, particularly within Indonesian intellectual circles. This clarification enriches

scholarly discussions and fosters interfaith dialogue that respects Islam's core tenets. Such an approach, rooted in mutual respect and understanding, is essential for promoting social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies like Indonesia, where the interplay of religious identities demands a balanced and nuanced perspective.[]

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