

On pluralism, religious ‘other’, and the Quran: a post September-11 discourse

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Abstract

The plurality and diversity of religions is not a new thing that we experience in the postmodern world. History is testimony to the fact that different religions have evolved and existed on the face of earth as the human life moved forward. However, in the recent decade, particularly aftermath of 9/11, the burgeoning conflict, violence, hatred pervasive in the world is often attributed to different ideologies and values associated with religions, Islam with no exception. Therefore, Muslims living as minorities on the both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are in a precarious condition. Besides, the increasing proximity between the individuals of different religions and, more so, of communities due to the miraculous advancements in the technology of communication and transport facilities have resulted into inevitable intercultural interaction and integration more than ever before. Consequently, attempts are being made to explain Islam’s compatibility with Western concept of religious pluralism. Islam recognises political, social pluralism rather than religious pluralism per se, which are explicit in the Quran and the prophetic traditions. In this background, the paper is an attempt to re-explore and re-revisit the concept of pluralism in Islamic sources. It attempts to re-construct the theme of

pluralism away from the extremes to a balanced (*wasatiyya*) and viable one that strives for the recognition and accommodation of the religious “other” without nullifying Islam’s own essence and identity. The paper concludes that Islam not only recognizes, appreciates and tolerates the religious differences but it also demands for peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among different religions.

Pluralitas dan keragaman agama bukan hal baru yang kita alami dalam dunia postmodern. Sejarah adalah kesaksian fakta bahwa agama-agama yang berbeda telah berevolusi dan ada di muka bumi sebagai kehidupan manusia bergerak maju. Namun, dalam dekade terakhir, khususnya setelah 9/11, konflik, kekerasan, kebencian yang menyebar di dunia ini sering dikaitkan dengan ideologi yang berbeda dan nilai-nilai yang berhubungan dengan agama, Islam tanpa terkecuali. Oleh karena itu, umat Islam yang hidup sebagai minoritas di kedua sisi Samudra Atlantik berada dalam kondisi genting. Selain itu, kedekatan meningkat antara individu-individu dari berbagai agama dan, lebih dari itu, masyarakat karena kemajuan ajaib dalam teknologi komunikasi dan fasilitas transportasi telah mengakibatkan interaksi antarbudaya yang tak terelakkan dan integrasi yang lebih dari sebelumnya. Akibatnya, diperlukan upaya yang untuk menjelaskan kompatibilitas Islam dengan konsep Barat mengenai pluralisme agama. Islam mengakui, pluralisme sosial politik daripada pluralisme agama *per se*, yang eksplisit dalam al-Quran dan tradisi kenabian. Dalam latar belakang ini, kajian ini merupakan upaya untuk kembali mengeksplorasi dan meninjau kembali konsep pluralisme dalam sumber-sumber Islam. Kajian juga mencoba untuk membangun kembali tema pluralisme dari pendekatan yang ekstrem ke pendekatan moderat (*wasatiyya*) dan berusaha untuk mengakui dan mengakomodasi agama “lain” tanpa meniadakan esensi dan identitas Islam sendiri. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa Islam tidak hanya mengakui, menghargai dan mentoleransi perbedaan agama tetapi juga menuntut untuk hidup berdampingan secara damai dan saling pengertian antara agama-agama yang berbeda.

Keywords: *Pluralism; Islam; Religious; Tolerance*

Introduction

The theme of “pluralism” has become a vigorous academic discourse and has implicitly attained a degree of separate discipline due to its overarching dimensions intruding in every sphere of human life. In the contemporary dynamic geopolitical vicissitudes, the interplay between religion and politics not only decides the fate of state machinery but it also has a profound implications on the cordial relationship between the individuals of different faith groups within a country on the one hand, and other individuals at the global level on the other hand.

The plurality and diversity of religions is not a new thing that we experience in postmodern world. History is testimony to the fact that different religions have evolved and existed on the face of earth as the human life moved forward. However, in the recent decade or so, the burgeoning conflict, violence, hatred pervasive in the world is often attributed to different ideologies and values associated with religions.

Moreover, the increasing proximity between the individuals of different religions and, more so, of communities due to the miraculous advancements in the technology of communication and transport facilities have resulted into inevitable intercultural interaction and integration more than ever before—thanks to globalization that helped people of different religions to learn and understand each other’s religious values and customs. However, on the other hand, it also presents a dismal picture; the conflict and violence has also increased so much that hardly a day passes when we do not hear and witness, directly or indirectly, the acts of various conflicts and violence across the globe.

As pointed out earlier, the general perception in the west is “to think religion and world politics is often to think violence”. Perhaps, therefore, the growing uneasy yet obnoxious tension among the adherents of the world’s largest three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Is-

lam is, at least, the main concern for all those who are dealing with the subject of pluralism. Moreover, the concern is more about the potential for social conflict and violence that heightened in the years since September 11, 2001, gives the problem of religious pluralism much of its urgency.¹

My concern in this paper is to deal with Islamic and thus Muslim perspective of “Pluralism”² because the aftermath of the September 9, 2001 condemnable event and in the ensuing violence, hatred, and discrimination against both immigrant and local Muslim population in the European and other western countries have impelled the Muslim intellectuals and social scientists to clear the (mis)understanding and (mis)representation about Islam’s benign message that media and other antagonists try to imitate and portray as a violent and alien to the western culture and secular politics. Besides, there is spectacular growth of public paranoia and religious prejudice in pulp fictions and other literature produced by the particular western scholarship. Thomas Banchoff views that “On many occasions, fear and ignorance have fed anti-Muslim prejudice and produced louder calls for cultural integration, challenging Muslims to organize more effectively within civil society in response”.³

Muslims living as minority in America and other European countries are in a precarious condition. They are struggling to claim and retain their Islamic identity in the midst of various political denominations: pluralism, liberalism, democracy, secularism, human rights, gender equality to name but a few. It is often been argued that Islamic faith and civili-

¹Thomas Banchoff, “Introduction”, in Thomas Banchoff (Ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 5.

²“Pluralism is a very recent phenomenon within Christianity. This kind of approach has its strongest supporters among ‘liberal’, liberationist, process, and feminist theologians – and some ‘postmodern’ theologians too”; for this see Gavin D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 9.

³Banchoff, *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism...*, 8.

zation are incongruent and incompatible with these western principles.⁴ Moreover, Islam is being labeled as a radical ideology, a threat, an alien religion incapable to face the inevitable modernity. The stereotypical and problematic denominations such as "Islamophobia", "Islamic terrorism", "fundamentalism", "radicalism" etc., have become key and buzzwords for the western media to label against the Muslims and Islam. There is a great deal of anxiety for the Muslim populace throughout the globe as:

These attitudes of fear and suspicion, not only towards Muslims but also towards Islam as such, are alarming in view of the fact that the occasions for a real "clash of civilizations" are on the increase in a globalizing world, in which, as during the previous century, worldwide migration is likely to remain unidirectional. For political, economic, and educational reasons people will continue to move from East to West and from South to North, not into but away from the Muslim world. Indeed, Islam still seems to be spreading in the United States and Europe.⁵

John L. Esposito, in the similar vein, expresses that "Living as a minority in a dominant non-Muslim culture as well as experiencing the negative fallout from the acts of violence and terror committed by Muslim extremists and from the effects of Islamophobia, many Muslims have experienced a sense of marginalization, alienation, and powerlessness".⁶

Therefore, against this suspicious background, it is significant for the Muslim to explore and highlight the notion that Islam exhibits a rich legacy of "tolerance"⁷, multiculturalism and multiethnic civilization

⁴Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 4.

⁵Murad Wilfried Hofmann, "Religious Pluralism and Islam in a Polarised World", in Roger Boase (Ed.) *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, 236.

⁶John L. Esposito, "America's Muslims: Issues of Identity, Religious Diversity, and Pluralism", in Banchoff (Ed.) *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism...*, 134.

⁷Though the term signifies various problems (see note, 36 below) when used in Islamic perspective but due to its frequent use and general acceptance I would like to retain its usage in this paper.

wherein people of other faiths enjoyed such degree of freedom of religion that contemporary western society would not believe due to its pre-occupied notion with the history full of persecution, discrimination and hatred against other religious groups.

The time is ripe to discuss and to show the world today that the traditional jurisprudence of religious pluralism is still more relevant than it was in the past as the issue of religious pluralism was not a major issue for the majority Muslims, however, this has become one of the significant and decisive issue for the Muslim minorities living in the western countries. Consequently, not surprisingly than, major voices for illustrating and explicating the Islamic perspective of religious pluralism have primarily come from the western scholars—Muslims as well as non-Muslims—to make aware the institutions that exert an influence on the public opinion.⁸

Before I progress further, it is significant to explain and nuance the meaning of the term “Pluralism” as the term is differently interpreted in the academic discourse. Perhaps my opinion on religious pluralism may not follow the suite the scholars generally adopt. The departure, though I strongly strive and accept the concept of Pluralism, could buy this paper new vista of research in the discourse.

Pluralism: concept and meaning

According to the *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, the term “Pluralism” was first used to signify “philosophical positions emphasizing diversity and multiplicity over homogeneity and unity”. And it first appeared in the work of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) but it was later popularized by William James (1842–1910).⁹ In *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, “Plural-

⁸ Esposito, “America’s Muslims...”, 237-238.

⁹ Dennis Bielfeldt, “Pluralism”, in J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, New York: Thomson Gale, 2003, 682-683.

ism” is defined as “a situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests”.¹⁰ Similarly, *Concise Dictionary of Religion* defines Pluralism as “philosophically any system which emphasizes diversity and rejects Monism. Many modern societies use the term to refer to Social Systems where different religious communities live together in one Nation”.¹¹

From these definitions, it is obvious that pluralism is an umbrella and multifaceted term encompassing socio-political, religious and other allied public and private spheres. As such, religious pluralism recognizes and discusses a number of complex socio-political questions about the nature of religious freedom, about the interfaith dialogue, about the limits of toleration and about the place and role of religion in secular society.¹² There is a good deal of skepticism about religious pluralism, much of it healthy. However, one thing must be borne in mind that while dealing with the concept of religious pluralism, there should be no coercion or any form of force to attempt to mix all the religious traditions into a single box as such attempts have been made in the past and continue to be so. Rather, the study of religious pluralism should seek to reach greater understanding of religions.¹³

The label religious pluralism has been used differently and often with confusing claims. There is a lot of ambiguity linked with the label. Some scholars use the term “religious pluralism” for a theological view that

¹⁰Merriam-Webster, available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism> (7 January 2014).

¹¹Irving Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion*, Retrieved from <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/concise/WORDS P.html> (7 January 2015).

¹²Michael Barnes, “Religious pluralism”, in John R. Hinnells (Ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 406.

¹³Paul L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009, 2.

allows salvation for the adherents of different religions and admits some sort of validity to a plurality of religions. Many other writers, however, use the term in a political sense, for a position that advocates the acceptance of and respect for the followers of different religions.¹⁴

Historical background of religious pluralism

Historically speaking, the whole discourse of religious pluralism, according to Muhammad Legenhausen, got emerged and developed from the eighteenth century—in the background of religious intolerance and the rise of liberalism—down through to twentieth century wherein it got fully manifested specifically in reaction to widespread Christian views about salvation. Legenhausen states that “Religious pluralism is the outcome of an attempt to provide a basis in Christian theology for tolerance of non-Christian religions; as such, it is an element in a kind of religious modernism or liberalism”.¹⁵

As we know that one of the main doctrine in Catholic Christian faith was “no salvation outside the Christianity” i.e., only members of the Catholic Church could be saved or get salvation. This belief was severely opposed mainly by Protestant Christians and by those who were excommunicated in public after committing the sin. However, later the doctrine of salvation was extended (inclusivism) to the individuals of other religions provided they lead a good and moral life. The salvation doctrine was further widened and transformed into a full-fledged view what, later has come to be called “*religious pluralism*”, based on the view “insisting that it

¹⁴Muhammad Legenhausen, “A Muslim’s Non-Reductive Religious Pluralism”, in Roger Boase (Ed.) *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, 52.

¹⁵Muhammad Legenhausen, “Islam and Religious Pluralism”, in *Al-Tawhid*, Volume 14, Number 3, Retrieved from <http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol14-n3/islam-and-religious-pluralism-dr-muhammad-legenhausen/islam-and-religious#non-reductive-religious-pluralism-Islam> (8 January 2015).

is by virtue of moral guidance common to all the major religious traditions that the religions are vehicles of salvation".¹⁶

Soteriology in religion

One of the main and controversial issues in the discourse of religious pluralism, as elaborated above, is the question of "soteriology" i.e. whether one can find salvation/liberation/fulfillment/enlightenment by following any religion. In general, therefore, there are three perceptions about the truth claim or salvation in religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Exclusivism

According to this view, the absolute truth is confined to only one religion, and consequently the way to salvation is only through that particular religion exclusively.¹⁷ As pointed out earlier, the absolute truth-claim is found in every religion. However, obviously it was predominantly illustrated in Christianity which claims itself as the only Truth in exclusion to others. Malik Thoha in his paper "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?" has put it:

Catholicism with its doctrine of "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*", and Protestantism with its doctrine of "outside Christianity, no salvation" determine the status of the piety and salvation of a man based only on the firm belief in a sacrifice performed by Jesus on the cross in order to redeem original sin".¹⁸

¹⁶Legenhausen, *Islam and Global Dialogue*, 57-58.

¹⁷Mahmoud Ayoub, "Religious Pluralism And The Qur'an", Retrieved from [http://iiit.org/Research/ScholarsSummerInstitute/TableofContents/Religious Pluralism And The Quran/tabid/244/Default.aspx](http://iiit.org/Research/ScholarsSummerInstitute/TableofContents/Religious%20Pluralism%20And%20The%20Quran/tabid/244/Default.aspx) (30 December 2014).

¹⁸Anis Malik Thoha, "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?" Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&rlz=1C1CHMO_en_IN582IN5_82&oq=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&aqs=chrome..69i57j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=Religious+Plurality:+Myth+or+Reality%3F (25 December 2014).

Inclusivism

This is a modern and mainly western Christian theological concept with various meaning. In its truest sense, the concept in itself is an absolute claim of religious truth and uniqueness, which is a little bit wider and more open. Its main doctrine is that “even though my religion is the only way to salvation, moral women and men of good conscience, even if they be atheists, will attain salvation”¹⁹ not because their religions are right, but because of “blessings” or “charity” of the absolute truth it enjoys.²⁰

Pluralism

The discourse of pluralism as seen from the foregoing discussion is actually a byproduct of a particular socio-political western configuration and setting. It was/is the response to the above two opposite beliefs—Inclusivism and Exclusivism. One of the main principles of western pluralism is that all the religions are but one. Different religions are manifestations of the same absolute Truth. This has been deliberately advocated and presented in such a manner that it apparently embodies various attractive and appeasing claims such as “humanist, friendly, polite, open, tolerant, smart, democratic, enlightening and promising”. These views are the outcome of the “pluralistic hypothesis”²¹ put forth by one of the most influential British philosopher and theologian John Harwood Hick (1922-2012). He has been a pioneer and one of the key icons in pluralist thinking, in his *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, he explains:

¹⁹Ayoub, “Religious Pluralism and the Qur’an”.

²⁰Anis Malik Thoha, “Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?” Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&rlz=1C1CHMO_en_IN582IN582&oq=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&aqs=c_hrome..69i57.1010j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=Religious+Plurality:+Myth+or+Reality%3F (25 December 2014).

²¹Hick’s hypothesis is that all religions are culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality.

Stated philosophically...pluralism is the view that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or the Ultimate from within the major variant cultural ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality centeredness is manifestly taking place...and taking place, so far as human observation can tell, to much the same extent.²²

According to Hick, in other words, all major religions are different ways of experiencing the Divine or "Real". Religions are alternative soteriological "spaces" through which people find the way from self-centredness to "Reality-centredness",²³ and, thus, all of them are authentic manifestations of the "Real".²⁴

There are various shortcomings of the hypothesis; such pluralistic truth claim has, according to Thoha, never been better than the previous—inclusivistic and exclusivistic truth-claims, and itself viewed as an absolute "relative truth-claim,"²⁵ because it not only keen to relativize all of the existing absolute religious truth-claims—to claim that all religions are relatively the same, but it also in essence it strives to transcend them all—to claim that it is only absolute one.²⁶ Barnes has echoed the same concern that:

This determination to search out common values and essences tends almost inevitably to short-circuit the highly complex ways in which people of faith seek to identify themselves. Such a universalism fails to take seriously the variety of religions and the differences between them

²²John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1985, 36, as cited in Thoha, Thoha, "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?"

²³Barnes, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, 409.

²⁴Anis Malik Thoha, "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?" Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/search?q=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&rlz=1C1CHMO_enIN582IN582&oq=Religious+Plurality%3A+Myth+or+Reality%3F&aqs=chrome..69i57.1010j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=Religious+Plurality:+Myth+or+Reality%3F (25 December 2014).

²⁵Anis Malik Thoha, "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?"

²⁶Anis Malik Thoha, "Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?"

and turns out to be covertly elitist....On the one hand, each religion is given equal soteriological value; on the other, a privilege is assumed for the pluralist 'system' itself.²⁷

Therefore, this view of the religious pluralistic-claim in fact poses various problems—threatening to the very existence of religions and human rights primarily religious freedom.²⁸ No matter, argues Legenhausen, how laudable the intentions of those have advocated and advanced religious pluralism, and, he further goes on to say that “no matter how much we may sympathize with their struggle against entrenched intolerance, the theological project is severely flawed... which stand out most prominently in contrast to Islamic political thought”,²⁹ for the liberal separation of religion from social order is founded on the assumption that this separation is consistent with the tenets of all sects, while it is in direct conflict with the ideals of Islam.³⁰

Unfortunately, views of “liberal religious pluralism” have become a recurrent theme and one can find it in the works of some highly influential Muslim scholars whose voices have a profound impact on a large section of population especially in the west. However, this does not mean that there is no place for any sort of religious pluralism in Islam. In fact, Islam offers a more viable, acceptable and, more so, in the words of Legenhausen, a pluralism “free from the flaws of liberalism”.³¹

The Islamic perspective of Pluralism as depicted in the basic source of Islam—Quran will be discussed though. My approach will not be exclusive in the sense only looking into the Quran alone but it will be supplemented and complemented by the prophetic traditions coupled with some historical evidences illustrated in the Islamic civilization.

²⁷Barnes, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, 410.

²⁸Anis Malik Thoha, “Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?”

²⁹Legenhausen, *Islam and Global Dialogue...*, 57-58.

³⁰Legenhausen, *Islam and Global Dialogue...*, 57-58.

³¹Legenhausen, *Islam and Global Dialogue...*, 57-58.

Islam, pluralism and the Quran

Islam recognizes religious pluralism as an important social, political, moral and ethical issue not because it was the outcome of certain historical encounters but it is duly sanctioned by the Divine Himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that "Islam from its origins developed in and responded to a pluralistic world" because both "Islamic faith and history (the Quran, the example [sunnah] of the prophet Muhammad, Islamic law and jurisprudence, and Muslim institutions) reflect a pluralism that is relatively more advanced and viable when compared to Christianity (the far more exclusivist approach of Western Christendom was intolerant of other faiths).³²

Notwithstanding, we do not find a precise equivalent expression for the word "pluralism" in Quran or *Ḥadith*. However, according to Kamali, the nearest Arabic word that occurs in these sources is *alsamḥjah*³³ and *al-tasāmu%*,³⁴ often translated as "tolerance," which is, however, less than accurate³⁵ because the connotations of the word "tolerance" is deeply problematic as the root of the term "tolerance" comes from medieval toxicology and pharmacology that characterizes how much poison a body could "tolerate" before it would succumb to death.³⁶ As such, "Would it be accurate to say that Islam wants its adherents to merely tolerate living side by side with the adherents of other religions and to endure the pain

³² Esposito, "America's Muslims....", 137; for this see also, Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 1.

³³ Generosity (*jūd wa karam*).

³⁴ Generosity and ease on both sides on a reciprocal basis.

³⁵ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Diversity and Pluralism: A Qur'ānic Perspective", *Islam and Civilizational Renewal (ICR)*, Volume 1, Number 1: (2009), 1-55, 29; on this see also, Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam....*", 1-2.

³⁶ Omid Saū, "Introduction", in Omid Safi (Ed.) *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Oneworld: London, 2008, 23-24; Safi is also critical to often used terms like "peaceful", "simple" Islam; for more discussion about this see, Safi's "Introduction", in Omid Safi (Ed.) *Progressive Muslims*, especially 1-32.

and hardship of such co-existence?”³⁷ Is this the most transcendent way to aspire the heights of pluralism in Islamic perspective? No sensible person would ever think to and long for such a tolerance. Since, “the view of the Islamic stance as one of mere tolerance is untenable [...] the Islamic model goes beyond tolerance”.³⁸

However, the most precise Arabic equivalent of pluralism is *al-ta'āddudiyyah*³⁹, and on Combining with *tasāmuh* fully characterizes the pluralism of Islam as *al-ta'āddudiyyah al samḥah*, “which implies recognition and engagement inclined towards facilitation and ease”.⁴⁰ One can find various interpretations of religious pluralism among Muslims that underline its far reaching implications on faith, identity, ethnicity and culture especially in countries where Muslims are living as minorities such as in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The dominant and mainstream Islamic viewpoint, however, is that “Islam is superior to other religions; while protecting individual’s rights to practice and religion of other choice privately. Islam sees itself as the final revelation, perfect and complete, which corrects the errors of earlier religious communities. Its law must therefore remain dominant and may not be challenged by other legal system”.⁴¹

Moreover, there are Muslim extremists⁴² who negate and reject any view of pluralism and sort of establishing any relations with non-Muslims on the one hand. On the other hand, there are liberal Muslim reformists who, like John Lock and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, think that all reli-

³⁷ Syed Farid Alatas, *An Islamic Perspective on the Commitment to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2008, 14, as cited in Kamali, “Diversity and Pluralism...”, 29.

³⁸ Alatas, *An Islamic Perspective on the Commitment to Inter-Religious Dialogue*.

³⁹ John L. Esposito, ed., “Pluralism”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003, 248

⁴⁰ Kamali, “Diversity and Pluralism...”.

⁴¹ Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*.

⁴² See for example, Ridwan al-Sayyid, “Pluralism and Liberalism in Contemporary Islamic Thought”, in Abdou Filali Ansary and Sikeena Karmali (Eds.) *The Challenge of Plural*

gions including Islam are equal. In my view, both of these views are not in accord with the essence of Islam. Islam neither destines all adherents of other religions—especially Judaism and Christianity—to hell, nor does it liquidates its own standing and right to claim supremacy. Islam adopts a moderate and middle path because Almighty Allah has created the Muslim community, *ummatan wasat*, “a middle community” that signifies the community that avoids extremes.⁴³

The principles of this community are illustrated in the revelation of the Quran and interpreted in the prophetic traditions.

Principal of unity

Let me start, one of the basic principles that guide us towards understanding the equality and unity of the origin of all human beings is manifested in Allah's saying:

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the People of the Book, after the clear Signs came to them did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His Grace guided the believers to the Truth concerning that wherein they differed. For Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight.⁴⁴

From the above verse, it signifies that humanity all belong to the same family and given the same message from Allah through His prophets to guide them to the right path. Similarly, the above verse, according to the prolific writer Sachedina, reveals three facts: “the unity of human-kind

ism: Paradigms from Muslim Contexts, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 49-56.

⁴³ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “Islamists and the Challenge of Pluralism”, Occasional Papers Series, Washington, DC: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, 1995, 10.

⁴⁴ Al-Qur'an, 2:213, trans. Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali; for its various interpretations, see for example, Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, 14-19.

under One God; the particularity of religions brought by the prophets; and the role of revelation...in resolving the differences that touch communities of faith".⁴⁵

Principal of unity in diversity

However, in another passage, Allah Wishes that this family to be diversified not to judge among them who is good or bad rather they would identify and recognize among themselves. The Quran makes it clear that Allah has deliberately created the world to be divided in and composed of different nations, ethnicities, tribes, and languages. The Quran says:

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know.⁴⁶

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).⁴⁷

The purpose of these differences is not to promote any sort discord, hatred or war, but, rather, they are first and foremost Allah's signs that humans should strive to have a better mutual understanding.⁴⁸ Moreover, the second verse, according to Amir Hussain, reveals four key points:

First, the passage is addressed to all of humanity, and not specifically limited to Muslims. Second, the passage mentions that the creation of

⁴⁵Abdul Aziz Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001, 23.

⁴⁶The-Quran, 30:22.

⁴⁷The Quran, 49:13.

⁴⁸Haddad, "Islamists and the Challenge of Pluralism", 6; see also, Mohamed Fathi Osman, "The Children of Adam: An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism", Occasional Papers Series, Washington, DC: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, n. d., 2.

humanity into distinct groupings comes from God and is a positive value. Third, it encourages people to transcend their differences and learn from each other. Finally, the passage... [says] that the best people are those who are aware [have *taqwa*] of God.⁴⁹

The Quran further emphasizes that Allah deliberately divided people into nations and, more so, prescribed them separate systems and laws to follow. Allah says: "To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute".⁵⁰

This verse clearly manifests that Islam does not seek the negation nor the eradication of "the other" since Allah "created differences as a means of fostering competition in virtue among the nations, a fact that guarantees progress".⁵¹ In other words, we can say that Allah Himself created the diversity—a degree of pluralism in Islam.

Principal of "tolerance"

Owing to this diversity in ethnicities, cultures, races, and system of laws, differences among the individual are inevitable that at times, due to ignorance, may lead to the violent conflicts. Each group may resort to the force and coercion to impose its certain particular ideas and values on others, thus breaches into ones freedom of conscience. On the contrary, the Quran sets its principle—"no compulsion in religion", because, Thoha asserts:

...in the Islamic point of view, faith in particular and religion in general are a matter of conviction (*iqtinā'*) -thus, there should be no com-

⁴⁹Amir Hussain, "Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue", in Omid Safi (Ed.) *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism...*, 255.

⁵⁰The Quran, 5:48.

⁵¹Haddad, "Islamists and the Challenge of Pluralism"..., 7.

pulsion in religion, “*la ikraha fi al-din*”; and sincerity (*ikhlas*) –thus, in al-Quran the *surah* that prescribes the essence of Islamic faith is named “*Al-Ikhlās*”. However, it should be added immediately here, that that conviction and sincerity meant above is not that of an emotional and uncritical stemming out of sheer desire, rather it is meant to be rational and critical, for Islam is a rational religion *par excellence*. In this matter of *iqna*‘(convincing) and *iqtina*‘(to be convinced)...⁵²

Therefore, Quran is crystal clear about not forcing people to convert. This in turn provides an open atmosphere for the people of other religions not to afraid to be converted forcefully rather Islam bounds its followers to protect and secure the people of other religions (particularly of “people of the book” *ahl al-kitab*), to give them freedom to practice their own religion, to allow them to decide the day-to-day affairs according to their own customs.

Moreover, interestingly, the Quran does not outrightly reject all together the “people of the book” rather “we can say that the Quran directs reproaches at the Christians [and Jews] but explicitly or implicitly recognizes positive religious values in them”.⁵³

There are also prophetic traditions supporting not only the view of peaceful co-existence between different religions but causing any harm to them is also strongly prohibited: In one of the Prophetic traditions, which states that if someone kills a non-Muslim whom he is not engaged in an open war with, or who has the protection of a peace agreement with a Muslim government, he would never get to smell the fragrance of paradise, the ḥadīth narrated by ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr: The Prophet said, “Who-

⁵²Thoha, “Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?”..., 10.

⁵³Jacques Waardenburg, “Muslim Studies of Other Religions: The Early Period: 610–650”, in Jacques Waardenburg (Ed.) *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999, 9; In this regard, Qur’anic verse 2:62 is important, however, there is a lot of debate about its being abrogated by the verse 3:85, for more discussion on this, see for example, Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism...*, 24-34.

ever killed a Mu'ahid (a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslims) shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise though its fragrance can be smelt at a distance of forty years (of traveling)".⁵⁴ The Prophet repeatedly prohibited the killing of women, children, old persons and/or innocents during war. It is reported in another ḥadīth, which declares, "Do not kill any old person, nor any child or woman".⁵⁵

Prophet Muhammad not only articulated for the good treatment of non-Muslims but he himself practiced, showed, and extended his compassion and affection to them, for instance, when a Christian delegation from Najran came to the Prophet in Medina in 630 AD, a debate took place which guaranteed the preservation of Christian institutions and they performed their prayers at Masjid Nabwi, the Prophets mosque.⁵⁶ This signifies one of the great episodes of religious tolerance. In addition, the famous *Ṣāḥifa al-Madīna*, commonly known as "Constitution of Medina" (*'ahd al-umma*) laid the foundation of and "legislated for a multi-religious society, based on equality, tolerance, and justice, many centuries before such an idea existed in Europe".⁵⁷ Indeed, it can be said that the early Muslim society characterized a more pluralistic in nature than some Muslim societies today. The constitution provided within a single community each religious and ethnic group a complete freedom to practice their social, cultural and religious affairs, and they were bound by the

⁵⁴Imām Abū 'Abdul Allāh Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *baḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9 volumes, Eng. tr. Dr. Muḥammad Moḥsin Khān, Riyādh, KSA: Dār al-Salām, 1997, volume 4, 247, ḥadīth 3166.

⁵⁵Imām Ṣāfi' Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, 5 volumes., Eng. tr. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Khattāb ḥadīth, Riyadh, KSA: Dār al-Salām, 2008, volume 3, 264, ḥadīth 2613-14; Imām Muḥammad bin Yazīd ibn Mājāh, *Sunan Ibnī Mājāh*, 5 volumes., Eng. tr. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Khattāb, Riyadh, KSA: Dār al-Salām, 2007, volume 4, 98-99, ḥadīth 2857.

⁵⁶Roger Boase, "Ecumenical Islam: A Muslim Response to Religious Pluralism", in Roger Boase (Ed.) *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, 252; and Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, 64.

⁵⁷Boase, "Ecumenical Islam...", 259.

same duties as the other parties to the contract.⁵⁸ Farid Esack asserts that this union—interfaith coexistence and cooperation— into a single community was actually based on four Quranic verses (23:52, 5:5, 5:47, and 22:40) which recognize the People of the Book as part of the Muslim community (*ummah*) because they were recipients of divine revelation.⁵⁹

After the Prophet's time, the tradition of tolerance and compassion was continuously maintained and practiced by the companions of the Prophet. After the conquest of Jerusalem in 638 AD, the second caliph 'Umar visited Jerusalem and as the prayer time approached, he was offered to pray inside the church, by the Patriarch, but decided instead to pray outside for fear that his action would be taken as a precedent to convert the church into a mosque.⁶⁰ What emerges is clear that 'Umar not only give them guarantee and security for the freedom of worship but he also equally showed due respect to their religious places.

There have been numerous examples of peaceful existence and tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the Islamic civilization that can be used as inspirations for the contemporary peace and tolerance stripped global society. Therefore, it is safe to claim that Islam proved more tolerant towards other religions than that of Christianity.⁶¹ However, Esposito points out that these interreligious relations have deteriorated over the time due to many external as well as internal factors. This gap between the religions is by and large manifested in the pervasive Islamophobia and extremist activities against the Muslim minorities, prevalent in the west on the one hand, and the unabated violence in the Middle East.

⁵⁸ Boase, "Ecumenical Islam...", 259.

⁵⁹ John L. Esposito, "Pluralism in Muslim-Christian Relations", Occasional Papers Series, Washington, DC: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, 2008, 27.

⁶⁰ Esposito, "Pluralism in Muslim-Christian Relations"; see also, Hussain, "Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith Dialogue"..., 257.

⁶¹ John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, second edition, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011, 79.

In order to alleviate this gap and to foster a mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence between the religions, attempts are being made through various indoor and outdoor activities—interfaith dialogues, projects, conferences, monographs, books to name a few. One such endeavor is the recent book *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) by a young and dynamic American scholar Jerusha Tanner Lamptey. Here it seems to me appropriate to explore and explicate her views on religious pluralism because some scholars, as pointed out earlier, have been constrained and compelled by the particular environment to shape and articulate their opinions, which explicitly contradicts with the dominant, prevalent and explicit views of Islam.

Lamptey aims to (re)construct—within the Quranic discourse—an alternative yet innovative conception and mythological approach to the dialogue of religious difference or pluralism. Implicitly Lamptey seeks to explicate and extend the stereological question of “salvation” to the religious “Other”. The book is divided into three parts: part 1 explores the historical and contemporary Islamic discourse on religious difference; part 2 constructs the conceptual and hermeneutical infrastructure of a *Muslima* (Feminist) theology of religious pluralism; and part 3 while (re)constructing a Feminist theology of religious pluralism, it simultaneously deconstructs vis-à-vis re-evaluation, re-interpretation, and re-envision the Quranic discourse on the religious Other.⁶²

She begins exploring various genres of historical Islamic discourse of religious Other—including the so-called apologetic and polemical (vis-à-vis *tahrif* or distortion, *naskh* or abrogation, and supersession), exegetical and juridical (*Islam*, *Iman*, *kufir*), and Sufi (vis-à-vis divine ontology)—to highlight the complexity and diversity of “Self” and “Other”. Here she

⁶² Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 11-12.

asserts after treading through the works of selected Muslim scholars that “the historical discourse displays an array of approaches to identifying the Muslim self and non-Muslim Other. Moreover, she criticizes the historical discourse for its failure to promote appreciation of religious diversity; even if diversity existed, she argues, fostered aggression.⁶³ In the follow-up chapter, Lamptey critically explicates the contemporary Islamic discourse of religious difference within the context of and for the US. Therein, a number of scholarly approaches illuminate various theological concerns of religious difference. This includes three prominent trends: the prioritization of religious sameness where difference is devalued but sameness is emphasized; simultaneous affirmation of sameness and difference; and prioritization of difference. However, she maintains that none of the trends is without crucial limitations as they fail to integrate and articulate a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic religious identity.⁶⁴

Next, postulating her conceptual framework, she explores the hermeneutical approach and complex conception of sexual difference articulated by Muslim feminists like Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan. While focusing on sexual difference, argues Lamptey, this nevertheless is capable of revealing a general framework, which helps to “understand other forms of human sameness, difference, and the relationship between the two”.⁶⁵ However, the feminist approach employed to understand the sameness is exclusive in itself as it plausibly fails to accommodate other Quranic verses like 2:282; 4:34, which explicitly assign roles to and differentiates men over women.

Moving ahead from sexual difference to religious difference, she critically evaluates and compares various standard topologies of theology of

⁶³ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 48.

⁶⁴ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 49-78.

⁶⁵ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 88.

religions primarily propounded by feminist theologians; for, their contents and concerns, states Lamptey, will contribute towards constructing a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism. Typologies such as “Exclusivism and particularism defend difference but promote incommensurability, thereby inhibiting the possibility of interconnections across religions. Inclusivism and pluralism highlight sameness, thereby ‘erasing’ Otherness and ignoring significant difference”.⁶⁶ Thus, none of these options is acceptable according to Lamptey, therefore she propounds an alternative “identity theory” where both religious difference and sameness and their mutual relationship are integrated within the Quranic discourse.

Follow-up chapter critically engages the hermeneutic approach of Toshihiko Izutsu, focusing primarily on his intra-Quranic and synchronic semantic methodology. Lamptey moves from holistic (thematic and contextualization) Interpretation of Wadud that “failed to illuminate the dynamic relationships and overlap among multiple Quranic terms and concepts”,⁶⁷ to an Intratextual relational context of Toshihiko Izutsu. What Lamptey appreciates of Izutsu is that he provides a method that ensures for complex and simultaneous consideration of aspects of sameness and aspects of difference between Quranic concepts.⁶⁸ Moreover, Izutsu’s semantic analysis method does not restrict the Quranic key terms like ‘*iman*’, ‘*kufr*’, and ‘*nifaq*’ within their boundaries rather are overlapping with multifaceted interconnections. This leads us to her main thesis—a *Muslima* theology of religious pluralism—explaining in part 3.

Lamptey’s main critique to the contemporary discourse on religious difference is their inability to deal effectively for both proximity and the otherness of the Other and the failure to offer an integrated model for

⁶⁶ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 110.

⁶⁷ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 123.

⁶⁸ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 133.

understanding religious difference. Thus, for Lamptey “difference” is the central issue. Therefore, based on the insights drawn from preceding chapters, she proffers nuance between “hierarchical and lateral” religious difference in the Quran—between *taqwa* and *umma*—and thereby challenging the static and holistic alignment of the two distinct genres of difference.⁶⁹ She asserts that the semantic fields of *taqwa* and *umma* are not exclusively related to any particular group or community; rather any individual can achieve *taqwa* and be a member of *umma* irrespective of religious affiliation. According to her, the semantic fields of hierarchical religious difference (e.g., *taqwa*) and lateral religious difference (e.g., *umma*) are distinct yet mobile and continuously intersecting each other.⁷⁰

The last two Chapters in part 3 reflect the core of the book wherein she further explores in detail various concepts subsumed in the semantic field of *taqwa*. The hierarchical concepts like *īmān*, *Islām*, *ḥanīf*, *kufr*, *shirk*, and *nifāq* are explained in relation to the central concept of *taqwa* to elucidate similarities, differences, overlaps, and gradations in the Quranic discourse. Like lateral religious difference, she argues that the hierarchical religious difference is also characterized by dynamism, ambiguous boundaries, and relational complexity. Finally, she articulates an integrated model of religious difference; based upon her explorations of lateral and hierarchical religious differences she attempts to re-interpret creation, revelation, sameness, difference into a coherent yet ambiguous narrative,⁷¹ that, she concludes, produces the Other, not simply a byproduct, but more than a means by which God sustains God’s challenge to humanity through irreducible complexities and tensions. What she deduces explicitly is quite explicable from her thesis is that no particular community (*umma*), revelation, messenger exhibit the primary and

⁶⁹ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 139.

⁷⁰ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 171.

⁷¹ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 239, 241.

exclusive criterion that defines a supposed boundary for an individual or a group to be evaluated to; rather all religious Others' could attain salvation/*taqwa* without affiliating to any particular religious identity.

This led me criticism to her approach of and treatment with the Quranic text from which she articulates her perception of and (re)construction for an alternative theology of religious Other. First, her approach is selective in nature; for while analyzing to and generalising the concept of *umam—wahida, muslima, khayr, qa'ima, muqtasida*⁷², she not only conditioned the *khayr umma* of the Prophet Muhammad by introducing *if* in her own interpretation, but she even ignored to accommodate here the terms *ummatan wasata* (Quran, 2:143) that explicitly discerns the nuances of the *umma* of Prophet Muhammad and the others'. Next, she asserts, "in the Quran all people are called to obey a messenger but they are not all called to obey the same messenger"⁷³. Intriguingly, how many messengers were there when the Quran was revealed? Juxtaposing her argument with the Quranic verse, "...and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me [Jesus], whose name is the Praised One [Muhammad]..." (61:6) so, there was one and the only last Prophet Muhammad to obey to at the time the Quranic was revealed. After relating all this, she pretends that "it is not an attempt to universally and automatically validate all people, all actions, or all beliefs"⁷⁴. However, of course, implicitly her attempt is to liquidate the particularity of the *umma* of Prophet Muhammad which the Quran says in many verses, for example "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion" (5:3); "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be ac-

⁷² Jerusha Tanner Lampsey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 159-177.

⁷³ Jerusha Tanner Lampsey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 250.

⁷⁴ Jerusha Tanner Lampsey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 240.

cepted from him and he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter” (3:85); “The Religion before Allah is Islam” (3:19). Although, the author extensively discussed and compared the word “*al-Islām*”, with “*al-Imān*”, however, she just made the discussion more complex and intricate⁷⁵ and came up with her conclusion, as did some Intellectuals, that this “Islam” is not unique and exclusive with the Prophet Muhammad rather the people of other faiths also manifested the same Islam.⁷⁶ The most famous argument used by these intellectuals is that the term “Islam,” in the Qur’ān, should not be taken as a noun but just as a verb *aslama* (“he submitted, surrendered”) in the literal sense rather than in the technical sense as derivatives of the name Islam.⁷⁷ And Sometimes they differentiate, as the author did, between “islam” (the act of submission) and “Islam” (the religion); and say⁷⁸ that the main message of God and the basis of salvation is submission to God, and that it does not matter whether the submission takes place through Ibrahim, Musa, ‘Isa or Muhammad (peace be upon them all). These views are best rebuffed by Ayatullah Murtadha Mullahhari in his *‘adl-e Ilāhī* (The Divine Justice) where he puts it:

If someone were to say that the meaning of ‘Islām’ in this verse is not our religion in particular; rather, the intent is the literal meaning of the word, or submission to God, the answer would be that undoubtedly ‘Islām’ means submission and the religion of Islām is the religion of submission, but the reality of submission has a particular form in each age. And in this age, its form is the same cherished religion that was brought by the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad). So it follows that the word ‘Islām’ (submission) necessarily applies to it alone.

⁷⁵ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 222.

⁷⁶ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 26-38.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, 39.

⁷⁸ For this see, Ayoub, “Religious Pluralism And The Qur’an”; and Esposito, “Pluralism in Muslim-Christian Relation”; and Kamali, “Diversity and Pluralism....”, 37.

In other words, the necessary consequence of submission to God is to accept His commandments, and it is clear that one must always act on the final Divine commandments. And the final commandments of God is what His final Messenger [Muhammad] has brought.⁷⁹

Moreover, ironically, Lamptey goes against her own approach when she particularizes the pilgrimage *hajj*, although, the Quranic verse, 22: 30, where God commanded the Prophet Ibrahim to “Proclaim the pilgrimage to people”, is a universal proclamation, but Lamptey delimits it and smoothly escapes and states “The rites of the *hajj* are the *manasikh* of the *umma* of Muhammad and perhaps of the *umma* of Abraham”⁸⁰. Although, she cites other Quranic verse 22:34, for her argument, but the verse never mentions *different* mansak rather *mansak* for every *umma*. How she arrives at her conclusion, I do not know. Further she argues that “the commands also and equally imply that Muhammad should not be distinguished from or privileged in respect to other messengers”⁸¹ again she did not take into account the Quranic verses: “Of those messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others...” (2: 253), and “...but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets...” (33:40). How would she relate these verses with her above argument entail interesting debate.

Her next argument is against the Quran’s holistic guardianship in the truest sense of the word; she argues, “no religious community, including the Muslim community, is exempt from corruption. Even if the Quran has divine protection for its textual integrity, this does not prevent its message from being interpreted and enacted in ways inconsistent with *taqwa*”⁸². First it should be clear that this divine protection is not restricted but re-

⁷⁹ As quoted in Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, “Islam and Religious Pluralism”, Retrieved from <http://www.al-islam.org/islam-and-religious-pluralism-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/introduction#religious-pluralism> (05 January 2015).

⁸⁰ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 231.

⁸¹ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 220.

⁸² Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other...*, 252.

lated to all aspects of the Quran—text, meaning, recitation, script. Although, we have different interpretations of the Quran but that does not mean the original meaning and message have lost; the author also adopts her own interpretation adding to the genre of interpretations but that hardly affect the principles and meaning of its universal message.

There are other contentious arguments in her book which are open to criticism, but due to the space constrains I am not able to deal with them here.

The book, although, written in and for US context delimits it from its universal acceptance, however, time and again invokes its readers to contemplate upon the protean Quranic key terms and concepts while attempting formulation of any conception of religious pluralism, which is overarching in Quranic discourse. The book overall is engaging, illuminating and innovative, and subtle and nuanced analysis of the Quranic depiction of religious “Other”.

Conclusion

Said that, Islam treats and views other religions as the way they are and let them be themselves, without any exaggeration, reduction and manipulation. Moreover, a true religious pluralism that Islam recognizes and appreciates must be duly respected, and not to be simplified or relativized, let alone negated or ignored. The Quran, the Prophetic traditions and other historical evidences aspire people of different religious faiths, cultures and ethnicity to come together, to strive for individual virtues and for the common good and have mutual understanding; that represents, indeed, tolerance and pluralism in its real sense, that is, “to respect and guaranty other people’s or group’s right to be different”.⁸³ This has become more relevant and urgent in the contemporary peace stripped global society.

⁸³ Thoha, “Religious Plurality: Myth or Reality?”

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