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AHL AL-KITĀB IN THE QUR'ĀN:

An Analysis of Selected Classical and Modern Exegesis

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A thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

the degree of Master of Arts

ABSTRACT

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Title : *Ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān: An Analysis of Selected Classical and Modern Exegesis

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The Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* ("People of the Book") has a theological significance for Muslims, showing a sympathetic perception of other religions, particularly Jews and Christians, who share the same monotheistic belief as Muslims. There are many references to *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān which may be grouped into two categories: the sympathetic verses which give *ahl al-kitāb* a status similar to that of Muslims and the ambivalent verses which condemn the *ahl al-kitāb.* In this study, *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64, 113, 114 and 115 are chosen as examples of sympathetic verses. Six major works of selected classical and modern exegesis, from different schools of thought, are used in the analysis of these verses. Classical exegetes do not suggest any development of the concept of *ahl*

al-kitāb, while the modern exegetes include all religious communities in addition to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The Qur'ān itself recognizes the existence of good people among the *ahl al-kitāb* and invites people of diverse faiths to come to a "common word" (*kalimatin sawā'in*) to establish mutual understanding through critical dialogue. This would, in turn, enable all people to work together to build a new civilization and greater harmony. This thesis avails itself of the fundamental teachings of the Qur'ān on *ahl al-kitāb* and of Muslims' exegesis, as well as secondary scholarship on this topic. The concept of *ahl al-kitāb* is shown to have novel relevance for our religiously pluralist world both today and for the future.

RÉSUMÉ

Auteur : Jarot Wahyudi

Titre : Les *Ahl al-kitāb* dans le Qur'ān: Une analyse d'exégèse classique et moderne

Departement : Institut des Études Islamiques

Diplôme : Maîtrise

Le concept de *ahl al-kitāb* ("Gens du Livre") a une signification théologique pour les musulmans sympathisant avec les autres religions, plus particulièrement le Judaïsme et le Christianisme, qui partagent le même monothéisme. Il y a plusieures références aux *ahl al-kitāb* dans le Qur'ān qui peuvent être divisés en deux catégories: les versets donnant aux *ahl al-kitāb* un statut semblable à celui des musulmans et les versets qui les condamnent. Dans cette étude, les versets 3: 64, 113, 114 et 115 ont été sélectionnés à titre d'exemples. Six oeuvres majeures de l'exégèse *tafsīr* classique et moderne, provenant de différentes écoles de pensée, seront utilisées pour l'analyse de ces versets. Les exégètes classiques suggèrent aucun développement du concept d'*ahl*

al-kitāb, tandis que les exégètes modernes incluent toutes les communautés religieuses, en plus des Juifs, des Chrétiens et des Musulmans.

Le Qur'ān même reconnaît l'existence de bonnes personnes parmi les *ahl al-kitāb* et invite les gens de croyances différentes à adopter "une parole commune" *("kalimatin sawā'in")* afin d'établir un dialogue critique. Ceci permettrait à tous les peuples de travailler ensemble pour une nouvelle civilisation et une plus grande harmonie. Ce mémoire profite des enseignement fondamentaux du Qur'ān sur le concept de *ahl al-kitāb,* de l'exégèse musulmane et de l'analyse des érudits. Il montre que le concept de *ahl al-kitāb* a une pertinence nouvelle pour notre monde de pluralisme religieux aujourd'hui et pour l'avenir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study offers an analysis of the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book) for the purpose of establishing a theological foundation for multireligious dialogue in the religiously pluralist world of our time. It was projected and executed under the supervision of Professor Issa J. Boullata, without whose guidance and encouragement it could not have been accomplished. It was Professor Boullata who introduced me to the Qur'ān exegetes and their works of *tafsīr* systematically from the classical era to the modern period, as well as other related works in Qur'ānic studies, including the *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān). His stimulative advice, patience, and exemplary scholarship left a deep impression on me that I will never forget. I also owe a debt to him for his careful reading of all my term papers on the study of the Qur'ān as well as the current thesis.

The writer also wishes to gratefully acknowledge the help of others: Adam Gacek, Salwa Ferahian, Wayne St. Thomas, and the entire staff of the library at McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies as well as the librarians at the Hartford Seminary for providing the materials I needed during my study.

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Thanks, finally, to the other people, too numerous to mention, who have made this thesis possible by their kind efforts and support.

Montreal, June 1997

Jarot Wahyudi

NOTES

A. References

All Qur'ānic verses and their translations quoted in this thesis are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary* (Lahore: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1993), unless otherwise noted. Each quotation of the Qur'ānic verses notes the sūra (chapter) followed by the name, the number of the sūra in brackets, a colon and the number of the verse; for example, *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64. However, if the same sūra is quoted a second time on the same page, the name of the sūra is not repeated; i.e., sūra 3:64. This style will also be used in the footnotes.

Other references, including works of exegesis, will be fully quoted the first time used in the footnote, followed by the page number. For example, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Selected Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 67. Later references will use a shortened form of the work, followed by the page number, such as, McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* 1.

References to works in languages other than English will also follow the above pattern; for example a reference in *Bahasa Indonesia* would follow this form: Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Agama Peradaban: membangun Makna dan Revolusi Dalam Sejarah* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995) 100.

B. Transliteration

The Arabic transliteration in this thesis follows the system used by the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. Note, however, that the Qur'ānic words will be transliterated as the Qur'ān is orally read and not as it is written: for example, *as-samāwāt* not *al-samāwāt.* In all other instances, the definite article *al-* will not be changed. The table of transliteration is as follows:

b = ب	dh = ذ	ṭ = ط	l = ل
t = ت	r = ر	ẓ = ظ	m = م
th = ث	z = ز	' = ع	n = ن
j = ج	s = س	gh = غ	h = ه
ḥ = ح	sh = ش	f = ف	w = و
kh = خ	ṣ = ص	q = ق	y = ي
d = د	ḍ = ض	k = ك	' = ء

Short : a = ـَ ; i = ـِ ; u = ـُ.

Long : ā = ـَا ; ī = ـِي ; ū = ـُو

Diphthongs : ay = ـَي ; aw = ـَو

Long with *tashdīd*: iyy = ـِيّ and uww = ـُوّ

Tā' marbūṭah will be transliterated as "h" for example, *ahliyyah* = أهليّة and as "t" when in a construct phrase, such as *sūrat al-Mā'idah.*

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of *ahl al-kitāb*[1] ("People of the Book") is an important Islamic principle which recurs in many verses of the Qur'ān. This concept has had considerable impact within Islamic society, making it possible for Muslims to accept the existence of other religions. This profound and far-reaching concept, as Charis Waddy acknowledges, holds the promise of lasting co-operation among human beings. The concept of *ahl al-kitāb* springs from a prophetic view of history.[2] The fact that one revelation should recognize another as authentic is a truly extraordinary event in the history of religions, according to Cyril Glasse,[3]

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[1] Often translated as the "People of the Book." Muḥammad used this phrase to refer to Jews and Christians, in distinction from the heathens, on account of their possessing divine books of revelation. See Goldziher, "*Ahl al-Kitāb*," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leyden: E.J. Brill Ltd., 1913) 184. E. W. Lane translates it as "[people of the Scripture, or Bible: and] the readers, or reciters, of Mosaic Law, and of the Gospel" (E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* [Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863] 1:1210. Besides Goldziher and Lane, other scholars studied this term such as Cyril Glasse, "*Ahl al-Kitāb*," in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 1989) 27-28; Ronald L. Nettler, "People of the Book," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 307-308.

[2] Charis Waddy, "The People of the Book: A New Chapter in Co-Operation," *The Islamic Quarterly* 23 (1979): 195. In conformity with Charis Waddy, Dawud O.S. Noibi advances this concept for inter-faith co-operation with reference to *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64. Furthermore, he sees that there is a common feeling for the need for co-operation among adherents of the three great world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. See Dawud O.S. Noibi, "O People of the Book!: The Approach of the Qur'ān to Inter-faith Co-operation," *Muslim Education Quarterly* 12 (1994): 30.

[3] Cyril Glasse, "*Ahl al-Kitāb*," *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 27.

with the significant social and cultural ramification that Islam as a result is a religion of tolerance and free choice.

Bertrand Russell, although an atheist who was often highly critical of religion, sheds some appreciative light on the concept of *ahl al-kitāb.* He points out that, in the early period of Islam, while believers considered it their duty to conquer as much of the world as possible, Muslims were prohibited from persecuting Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians, known in the Qur'ān as "People of the Book" or those who follow the teaching of a scripture. This tolerance, in his view, permitted a handful of warriors to govern vast territories, encompassing higher civilizations and alien religions, with apparent ease.[4]

The concept of *ahl al-kitāb* has undoubtedly exerted a great influence on the development of Islamic culture and civilization. For example, the Arab conquest of Spain in 711 put an end to the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity initiated by King Reccared in the sixth century. In the subsequent 500 years of Muslim rule, Spain emerged as a land of three religions but one civilization. Muslims, Christians, and Jews found many more things in common than might have been expected of people with different religious affiliations.[5] Bernard Lewis notes that it is reasonable to assume that an easy social intercourse existed in earlier times among Muslims, Christians, and Jews who, though

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[4] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959) 420-21.

[5] Nurcholis Madjid, "*Ahl al-Kitāb,*" in *Islam Agama Peradaban: Membangun Makna dan Relevansi Doktrin Islam dalam Sejarah* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995) 70.

professing different faiths, constituted a single society in which personal friendships, business partnerships, intellectual discipleships, and other forms of shared activity were normal and, indeed, common.[6] Much evidence supports this idea of cultural co-operation. For example, the biographical dictionaries of famous physicians include the names of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish physicians without religious distinction. These biographies make it possible to construct a prosopography of the medical profession which traces the lives and careers of hundreds of practitioners throughout the Muslim world.[7] These sources offer a clear impression of a distinctly interfaith effort. In hospitals and private practice, physicians of the three faiths worked together as partners or as assistants, using the same manuals and accepting one another as pupils. The religious segregation common in Western Christendom at that time, and later in the Islamic world, was unknown in the early and medieval periods of Islam.[8] Based on these historical data, we can assume that freedom of religion has been a long-standing principle in the Muslim world.

Despite the significance of the concept of *ahl al-kitāb,* only a few studies have dealt with this topic. But these studies focus exclusively on the role of *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān, and do not include discussions found on this subject in the works of *tafsīr.* One of the few works that discuss this topic in more detail is Jane

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[6] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 56.

[7] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews,* 56.

[8] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews,* 56.

Dammen McAuliffe's *Qur'ānic Christians,* particularly Section Seven of Part Two, "The Praiseworthy Amity of Christians." McAuliffe offers an exhaustive exegetical analysis of *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5): 82 and 83 which reveals the Qur'ān's view of Christians. Although McAuliffe does not include *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 113 in her discussion of the good people among the People of the Book, I nevertheless found her study of Christians in the Qur'ān to be illuminating and challenging.

In the last part (Appendix II) of his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* Fazlur Rahman interprets the Qur'ānic verses of the People of the Book. He discusses the evolution of the Prophet's attitude towards the People of the Book, that the Prophet encouraged Muslims to maintain a positive perspective. Although Rahman does not cite any works of *tafsīr,* he comments critically on major Muslim commentators who denied the salvation of non-Muslims.[9]

Faruq Sherif [10] also examines *ahl al-kitāb* from the Qur'ānic point of view. He juxtaposes one verse on *ahl al-kitāb* with another in order to give a balanced account of the People of the Book. His discussion, however, does not include any works of *tafsīr.* Sherif's *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'ān* makes an important contribution to the field and is easy to follow for those desiring succinct information on the contents of the Qur'ān. A similar account of *ahl al-kitāb* is offered by Jebran Chamieh who discusses "Rules Governing the People of the

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[9] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994) 162-170.

[10] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'ān* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1995) 130-37.

Book" from the Qur'ānic point of view.[11] Like Sherif, however, Chamieh does not consider works of *tafsīr*.

Charis Waddy discusses the concept of People of the Book from a Christian viewpoint in an article entitled, "The People of the Book: A New Chapter in Co-Operataion." She speaks as a practicing Christian who values the faith of others. She attempts to study the Qur'ānic teachings about the People of the Book, particularly Christians, from a new perspective.[12] In the last section of her article, Waddy expresses a hope that there will be more research devoted to analysing this ideological concept as a basis for co-operation among people of different faiths. The positive results of this solidarity should provide the conditions for feeding the hungry and for healing the hatred of mankind.[13] However, Waddy in turn neglects to consider works of *tafsīr* in her quest to understand the meaning of the term "People of the Book" in the Qur'ān.

In response to Waddy, Dawud O.S. Noiby's paper on the People of the Book presents a Qur'ānic approach to inter-faith co-operation. Noiby agrees with scholars like Waddy, Muhammad Asad and Suzanne Haneef who claim that the Qur'ānic concept of the People of the Book has a wider application which includes those people to whom God conveyed His guidance through Divine Scripture

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[11] Jebran Chamieh, *Traditionalists, Militants and Liberals in Present Islam* (Montreal: The Research and Publishing House, 1996).

[12] Charis Waddy, "The People of the Book," 195.

[13] Charis Waddy, "The People of the Book," 202-203.

transmitted by the prophets.[14] Noiby concludes his discussion by emphasizing action rather than theory in dealing with positive co-operation among Jews, Christians and Muslims,[15] as it existed under Muslim rule in Spain. Yet, his study employs only the brief *tafsīr* included with Muhammad Asad's translation of the Qur'ān.

Mohammed Arkoun presents a rigorous examination which offers a convincing new interpretation of *ahl al-kitāb*. He seeks to transform the Qur'ānic concept of the People of the Book into "the Societies of the Book." Beginning his discussion with the Qur'ānic theory of revelation, he proposes a deconstruction theory of Revelation based on a new methodology. He believes that "if we succeed in this reevaluation of Revelation as a central issue in Muslim tradition, we will undoubtedly discover new horizons in our approach to the concept of Revelation in the Jewish and Christian traditions as well."[16] In proposing the transformation of the term from People of the Book to Societies of the Book, however, Arkoun does not use *tafsīr* but goes beyond it, employing a wider hermeneutical approach.

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[14] Dawud O.S. Noibi, "O People of the Book," 31. See also Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 1980) 76-77.

[15] Dawud O.S. Noibi, "O People of the Book," 47.

[16] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation: from *Ahl al-Kitāb* to the Societies of the Book," *Die Welt Des Islams* 28 (1988): 63. See also Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997) 68-81. A brief account of Arkoun's stream of thought can be found in Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) 79-85.

Other scholars have also discussed *ahl al-kitāb* in brief accounts. Two leading Indonesian Muslim scholars -- M. Quraish Shihab[17] and Nurcholish Madjid[18] -- have outlined their views of *ahl al-kitāb* based on Indonesian Islam. As a *mufassir*, Shihab explains *ahl al-kitāb* from the Muslim exegete's point of view, by examining the concept's legal implications. Madjid approaches the topic from its historical and socio-political aspects which can lend greater significance to the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* for action. Three encyclopedias offer brief but helpful entries on *ahl al-kitāb: E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam*,[19] *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*,[20] and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*.[21]

There are many books bearing the title "People of the Book," but they do not really discuss the People of the Book. One of these books is John Barton's *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity*.[22] Barton, writing

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[17] Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"* in Muhammad Wahyuni Nafis, ed. *Rekonstruksi dan Renungan Religius Islam* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996) 3-15.

[18] Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam Agama Peradaban: Membangun Makna dan Relevansi Doktrin Islam Dalam Sejarah* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995) 69.

[19] See D.B. Macdonald, "*Dhimma*," *EJ Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1913-1936 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987) 1:958-959.

[20] Cyril Glasse, "*Ahl al-Kitāb*," *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 27-28.

[21] Ronald L. Nettler, "People of the Book," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World,* 307-308.

from a Christian point of view, remarks that it is problematic to call Christians the People of the Book, compared to Muslims or even Jews. Only one group, now gaining strength internationally, thinks it knows precisely how the Christian faith is related to the Scriptures: the fundamentalists.[23] The fundamentalists believe that the Christians are People of the Book in the same sense as Muslims, although having a different book.[24]

Another work on the People of the Book is that of Samuel Rosenblatt, Rabbi of the Beth Tfiloh Congregation in Baltimore, Maryland and Professor of Jewish Literature at Johns Hopkins University. He discusses the People of the Book in the third part of his book entitled, *The People of the Book* which emphasizes Jewish history from the time of Moses to the modern era.[25]

Edith S. Engel and Henry W. Engel present a collection of articles in a book entitled, *One God, People of the Book.* This is a survey of monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.[26] The book is intended as a tool for more understanding and peace. David Lyle Jeffrey also offers a volume on the *People of the Book* which seeks to restore Western literary

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[22] See John Barton, *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1988).

[23] John Barton, *People of the Book,* 1.

[24] John Barton, *People of the Book,* 1.

[25] Samuel Rosenblatt, *The People of the Book* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1943) 107-134.

[26] Edith S. Engels, *et. al.,* eds. *One God, People of the Book* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1990) viii.

culture to its most sustaining fountainhead, the Bible.[27] Samuel C. Heilman, equally concerned with the People of the Book, focuses his study on internal traditions no relation to the Qur'ān. He considers Orthodox Jews as "all who live in the modern world, some of whom consider themselves part of it."[28] Heilman is of the opinion that those who regularly spend some of their free time engaged in the traditional Jewish practice of *lernen,* the eternal review and ritualized study of sacred Jewish texts, are indeed, the "People of the Book."[29]

In view of the small number of studies on People of the Book, particularly from the perspective of Qur'ān and *tafsīr*, this thesis is offered with the hopes that ideas contained here can be developed in further studies. This thesis will examine the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the expression as derived from the sympathetic Qur'ānic verses pertaining to the *ahl al-kitāb* in *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64, 113, 114 and 115.

Before delving into this discussion, however, I will first address the significance of the Qur'ān for Muslims, in order to establish the authority of the Qur'ānic teachings in respect to other religions and to discuss the influence that those teachings have or should have on the beliefs and practices of Muslims. Then, I will present a general picture of the *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān based on verses

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[27] David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book* (Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996). According to Jeffrey, the phrase "People of the Book" may have been coined by the Prophet Muhammad. See his Preface in page xi.

[28] Samuel C. Heilman, *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) 1.

[29] Samuel C. Hilman, *The People of the Book,* 1.

sympathetic to the *ahl al-kitāb* and those which take a more critical view. These two introductory themes will be examined in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, I will examine the responses of six major Qur'ānic exegetes, both classical and modern, to the verses dealing with the *ahl al-kitāb*. Their analysis of *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64, 113, 114 and 115 will be divided into two sub-headings: (a) *ahl al-kitāb* as a Qur'ānic invitation to pure monotheism and (b) a Qur'ānic approval of the People of the Book. The concept of *ahl al-kitāb,* as derived from different works of *tafsīr*, will be introduced in the light of religious pluralism.

Subsequently, Chapter Three will be devoted to two significant topics: the People of the Book and the challenge of religious pluralism, on the one hand, and the Qur'ān's pluralistic vision on the other. The former topic will analyse the position of *ahl al-kitāb* -- Jews-Christians-Muslims -- in a religiously pluralist world, while the second section will examine the Qur'ānic foundation of pluralism. I will also attempt to discuss the advantages of the pluralistic principles inherent in Islamic teachings.

Finally, I will conclude this thesis with some recommendations for the positioning of the Qur'ānic ideals in the modern world. It may be unrealistic to hope to implement Qur'ānic concepts like *ahl al-kitāb* in daily life. Nonetheless, this thesis will offer a theological basis for co-operation among religious communities.

I shall use several approaches to reconstruct the notion of *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān. The most important sources are, of course, the works of *tafsīr* that deal directly with the subject. Of the vast traditional literature, I will discuss both *Shī'ī* and *Sunnī* works of *tafsīr,* from the classical to the modern era. In my discussion of the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* in the light of religious pluralism, I will use secondary sources produced by modern scholars of different backgrounds.

The significance of this study is precisely that it provides a detailed examination of the concept of *ahl al-kitāb* from the Qur'ānic point of view as explained by Qur'ānic exegetes. It will enrich a field of Qur'ānic studies which Alford Welch has divided into three basic areas: (1) exegesis or the study of the text itself, (2) the history of its interpretation and (3) the roles of the Qur'ān in Muslim life and thought.[30] It is my earnest hope that this thesis will be useful to both Muslims and non-Muslims in developing inter-faith cooperation.

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[30] See Alford Welch's Introduction to "Qur'ānic Studies -- Problem and Prospects," in Studies in Qur'ān and Tafsīr." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979): 630.

CHAPTER I
QUR'ĀNIC DISCOURSE ON THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

In the current chapter, I will examine the *ahl al-kitāb* verses of the Qur'ān, presenting them in logical rather than chronological order. Before entering that discussion, first of all, I would like to address the significance of the Qur'ān for Muslims in order to establish the authority of the Qur'ānic teachings in respect to other religions and to discuss the influence that those teachings have or should have in the thought and practices of Muslims.

A. The Qur'ān and Its Significance for Muslims

Any discussion which deals with Islamic thought must begin with the Qur'ān, the basis of all Muslim thought. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān is not a collection of books, separated by time and by different authors.[1] It is a single text delivered by Muḥammad during the last twenty years or so of his life, consisting mainly of short passages of religious or ethical teachings, arguments against opponents, commentaries on current events, and some rulings on social and legal matters.[2] Historically, Muslims have accepted the Qur'ān as the Word of God

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[1] HAR. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972) 3.

[2] HAR. Gibb, *Modern Trends,* 3.

that became audible through Muḥammad, the pure vessel, in clear Arabic.[3] Literally, the Qur'ān means "the reading," hence Muslims would constitute "the readers." This should not be taken to mean, however, that the Qur'ān is easily accessible to everyone. On the contrary, its language, style, and arrangement are often problematic, both for general Western readers, most of whom rely on translations, and for Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs alike. As such, Alford Welch argues that the Qur'ān can only be fully appreciated in the original Arabic.[4]

Muslim attitudes toward the Qur'ān reflect their attitudes toward their faith. They read it with a sense of reverence and adoration befitting the transcendental mediation of divine expression, though without necessarily grasping its full significance.[5] The reader of the Arabic text is often carried away by its rhythmic harmony without attributing any intellectual meaning to it.[6] On reading or hearing the Qur'ān, the believer finds his or her faith strengthened. The Qur'ān itself states that it is revelation which strengthens the believer's faith and brings joy to his heart.[7] This in itself is a valuable pillar for those who find their belief in God and in the Hereafter to be a source of solace, comfort and support in

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[3] Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: an Introduction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 29.

[4] Alford T. Welch, "Studies in Qur'ān and *Tafsīr*," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979): 620.

[5] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 2.

[6] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 2.

[7] *Sūrat Yūnus* (10):57, "O mankind! there hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the (deseases) in your hearts, and for those who believe, a Guidance and a Mercy."

their daily life. When Qur'ānic teaching transcends individual experience, however, and affects social conduct, it becomes necessary to reflect on the objective meaning of the revelation. In addition, there are many who, either out of curiosity or desire for knowledge, seek to understand the Qur'ān and the numerous topics on which its sūras expound.[8]

The Qur'ān has played and continues to play two distinct but constant roles in the lives of Muslims. It is a guide in this life and the next, and a source of blessing and grace for its bearers *(ḥamalah)* on earth and their intercessor with God on the Day of Judgment.[9] The Qur'ān is in itself a source of virtue and blessing, not only for those who occupy themselves in reciting and studying it, but also for the course of world history.[10]

Ibn Kathīr notes that the Qur'ān was revealed in stages in a noble place, the sacred city of Mecca, and in a noble time, the month of *Ramaḍān.*[11] Thus it

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[8] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 2.

[9] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984) 1: 7-8.

[10] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān,* 1: 8.

[11] Ibn Kathīr believes that God praises the month of Ramaḍān as an excellent month because He revealed His Books in this month. Ibn Kathīr related on the authority of Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, from Abū Sa'īd, from Qatādah, from Abū Fafīḥ, from Wāthilah, that the Prophet said that "The *Ṣuḥuf* of Ibrāhīm was revealed on the first night, *Tawrah* on the sixth, *Injīl* on the thirteenth and the Qur'ān on the twenty-fourth of the month of *Ramaḍān.* In addition Ibn Kathīr explains, based on the authority of Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh, that *Zabūr* was revealed on the twelfth and *Injīl* on the eighteenth of *Ramaḍān,* while the Qur'ān was revealed in the course of *laylat al-Qadr.* See al-Ḥafiẓ 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. Kathīr al-Qurayshī al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Istiqāmah, 1956) 1: 215-16.

combined the nobility of space and time.[12] In *sūrat al-Muzzammil* (73):5 the Qur'ān refers to its own transmission from God to the Prophet: *"Innā sanulqī 'alayka qawlan thaqīla"* ("Soon shall We send down to thee a weighty message"). The Qur'ān can, therefore, be regarded as a heavy responsibility for those who recite, study, and teach it, and who are therefore known as the bearers of the Qur'ān *(ḥamalāt al-Qur'ān).* Those people receive a compensation of honor and a reward for their effort. Qurṭubī describes them as follows: "They are bearers of the hidden mysteries of God and keepers of His treasured knowledge. They are the successors of his prophets and His trustees. They are His people and the elect of His creatures."[13] Qurṭubī then cites a tradition in which the Prophet declares the people of the Qur'ān to be the elect of God *("inna li-llāhi ahlīna minnā: hum ahl al-Qur'ān hum ahl Allāh wa khāṣṣatuh").*[14]

The variety of styles of Qur'ānic recitation has itself raised considerable controversy in the Muslim community. At issue is the permissibility of allowing Qur'ānic recitation to become a show-piece of vocal excellence or musical virtuosity.[15] Qur'ānic scholars have long been divided on this issue. Some have quoted *ḥadīths* extolling musical chanting *(taghannī)* of the Qur'ān, while others have cited equally accepted traditions enjoining a simple chant *(tartīl).*

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[12] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Adhīm,* 1: 216.

[13] Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubi, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Dār al-Kitāb, 1351/1933) 1: 1.

[14] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān,* 1: 1.

[15] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān,* 1: 13.

Eventually, two modes of Qur'ānic recitation came to prevail: *tajwīd* (making good, that is, musically beautiful) and *tartīl* (a slow and deliberate, simple chant). Scholars, however, are unanimous in their rejection of musical techniques and rhythms commonly associated with profane singing. Dignity in demeanor, softness of voice and a sorrowful tone are among the qualities required of a good Qur'ān reciter.[16] It is related that, when the Prophet was asked, about the best voice for chanting the Qur'ān, he answered, "It is he who, when you hear him, you see that he fears God."[17]

From the earliest period of Islamic history, Muslims realized that the Qur'ān required interpretation and commentary; over the next fourteen centuries, scholars developed a considerable body of exegesis (the *tafsīr* tradition) reflecting a wide variety of methods, presuppositions, focal points of interest and substantive conclusions.[18] Such attempts to explain the Qur'ān serve as a bridge between Muslims and the primary source of their faith; however, as most of these works are written in Arabic, only a small number of Muslims have been able to appreciate them.[19]

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[16] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān,* 1: 13.

[17] Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm,* 1: 13.

[18] See G.R. Hawting and Abdul Kader A. Shareef, ed. *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London: Routledge, 1993) i.

[19] Muslim efforts to translate works of *tafsīr* into languages other than Arabic are still limited. Modern Muslim scholars offer only an application of contemporary methodology to the Qur'ān, but they have failed to produce major works of *tafsīr* -- as in the case of Fazlur Rahman. However, Rahman was successful in implementing what is called "a thematic approach" to the study of

The significance of the Qur'ān for Muslims is clearly enunciated by the Qur'ān itself which designates itself *al-kitāb*[20] (the Book). In this linguistic sense, the Qur'ān, as Mohammed Arkoun phrases it, is a "pre-text" in which everything can be established based on this very basic source.[21] Other designations of the Qur'ān include *hudā*[22] (guidance), which functions to direct believers to the right path *(al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm)*; *furqān*[23] (distinguisher between right and wrong, good and bad, *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil, ma'rūf* and *munkar* or the criterion to distinguish truth from falsehood and error); *raḥmah*[24] (blessing); *shifā*[25] (healer); *mau'iẓah*[26]

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the Qur'ān, as we see in his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* where he analysed the verses of the Qur'ān based on logical rather than chronological order.

[20] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):2; *al-A'rāf* (7):2; *al-Naḥl* (16):64, 89; *al-Naml* (27):1; *Fuṣṣilat* (41):3. William A. Graham says the use of the word *kitāb* in the Qur'ān also means "to decree", "to prescribe," "to make [something] incumbent" as in God's actions with respect to His creation. For example, *"kutiba 'alaykumu-ssiyāmu"* (*al-Baqarah* [2]:183). See William A Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 83, and Herbert Berg, "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'ānic Term *al-Kitāb," Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995): 761-74.

[21] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 70.

[22] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2): 2, 97, 185; *Āl 'Imrān* 3:138; 5:46. Commenting upon *al-hudā,* F.E. Peters stated that "The Qur'ān is not only a guidance for Muslims (2:185); it is also a history of God's past attempts to warn His people. It abounds with tales of other Prophets and other Books, notably the *Tawra* through Moses to the Jews and the *Injīl* sent through Jesus to the Christians." F.E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 158.

[23] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2): 185; *Ali 'Imrān* (3): 4; *al-Furqān* (25):1.

[24] *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (7):52, 203; *Yūnus* (10):57; *Yūsuf* (12):111; *al-Naḥl* (16): 89.

[25] *Sūrat Yūnus* (10):57.

[26] *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 38.

(advice); *al-dhikr*[27] (the remembrance or warning);[28] *tibyān*[29] (clarity); and *tafṣīl*[30] (explanation). The term *hudā* (guidance), which implies that the teachings of the Qur'ān bear on all aspects of Muslim life is particularly significant. Muslims have, in fact traditionally regarded Islam as a complete way of life. Fazlur Rahman asserts that Muslims view the Qur'ān as primarily prescriptive and not just descriptive; it provides inner motivation and basic rules for daily life.[31] Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī emphasizes that the Qur'ān provides both the theoretical basis for producing a universal ideological movement and a guide-book for this movement. Furthermore, he states that the Qur'ān presents a message, invites the whole human race to a true view of reality and society, organizes those who respond to this call into an ideological community and enjoins upon this

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[27] *Sūrat Ṣad* (38):87; *al-Qalam* (68):52.

[28] Ṭabarī noted two meanings of the word *dhikr*. The first is the "reminder" by which God reminded His servants, giving them knowledge of His bounds or limits *(ḥudūd);* obligation of prayer, fasting *(farā'iḍ),* moral and legal precepts *(aḥkām)* and the like. The second meaning of *dhikr* is remembrance or honor for those who accept faith. See Ṭabarī's explanation of the names of the Qur'ān in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān,* edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.) 1: 94-106.

[29] *Sūrat al-Naḥl* (16):89.

[30] *Sūrat Yūsuf* (12):111

[31] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes,* 22.

community the necessity to strive for the socio-moral reconstruction of humanity, both individually and collectively.[32]

The Qur'ān seeks to guide Muslims in the realm of ethics or morality, a mission which Fazlur Rahman refers to as the basic *élan* of the Qur'ān,[33] and which Toshihiko Izutsu calls its ethico-religious purpose.[34] Izutsu concludes that ethico-religious themes are the very essence of the Qur'ān, since they relate to the daily life of people in society.[35] Therefore, the Qur'ān emerges as a document that consistently seeks to emphasize the moral tensions necessary for creative human action.[36] Qur'ānic teaching, therefore, appears destined to develop not only as a religion but also as a culture and a civilization.

In keeping with this concern for social life, the Qur'ān frequently stresses the need for temperance in the treatment of non-Muslims. While the Qur'ān asserts that the Muslim community is the best community of God *(khayra*

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[32] Sayyid Abū al-A'lā al-Maudūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān,* vol. 1. This is an English Version of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān,* translated and edited by Zafar Isḥāq Ansārī (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988) xiv.

[33] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 33.

[34] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966) 252.

[35] In a concluding remark Toshihiko Izutsu said, "Moreover, Islamic thought at its Qur'ānic stage, makes no real distinction between the religious and the ethical. The ethical language of the Qur'ān, however, has another important field, composed of key concepts relating to social ethics, ... while ethico-religious concepts concern vertical relations between human beings and God." Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious,* 252.

[36] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam,* 35.

ummah),[37] it also invokes tolerance, providing the Muslims with an ethical standard by which to regulate inter-faith relations. The Qur'ān, particularly its Medinan, portions has much to say about community life, including how to live with the People of the Book.

B. People of the Book in the Qur'ān

To gauge the position of the People of the Book in the Qur'ān, we begin by analysing, in the hope of defining, the oft-repeated term, *ahl al-kitāb.* This term occurs thirty-one times in the Qur'ān:[38] twice in *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):105, 109; twelve times in *surat Āl 'Imrān* (3):64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 98, 99, 110 , 113, 199; four times in *sūrat al-Nisā'* (4):123, 153, 159, 171; six times in *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):16, 21, 62, 68, 71, 80; once each in *sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (29):46, *sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33):26, *sūrat al-Ḥadīd* (57):29, and *sūrat al-Ḥashr* (59):2, 11, and twice in *sūrat al-Bayyinah* (98):1, 6. Of the thirty-one verses, four take a

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[37] Muslims are assured in the Qur'ān, "You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in God..." (*Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* [3]:110), However, Muslims themselves disagree on how the "best community" should live (See Marshall Goodwin Simms Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 1: 71.

[38] Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1364/1945) 95-96, search under term "*ahl,*" and 592-593 under "*al-kitāb.*" See also Hanna Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'ān* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 114-15 under "*ahl.*" According to McAuliffe, "the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* found more than thirty times in the Qur'ān." See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 3. I found thirty one instances.

symphatetic view: sūra 3:64, 110, 113 and 199 --which were revealed in Medina-- while twenty-seven others are critical toward *ahl al-kitāb.* It is important to note that from the thirty-one verses, only three were revealed during the Meccan period: *sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (29):46, *sūrat al-Bayyinah* (98):1 and 6.

Sūrat al-Baqarah (2):105 describes *ahl al-kitāb* as being without faith. They were dissatisfied when Muslims received special compassion. Many from the People of the Book wished that Muslims could return to infidelity after they had come to believe (2:109). A group hoped even to lead Muslims astray (3:69). In fact, the People of the Book well knew the truth but they did not want to acknowledge it (3:70). This is why the Qur'ān accuses them of covering truth with falsehood (3:71). They pretend to believe in order to deceive Muslims; or in other words having believed in the early part of the day, they deny what they believed by the end of the day (3:72). Historically, these descriptions are addressed to the Jewish people who in sūra 3: 75 are described as those who never keep their promise, although not all of them were alike. The verse reads:

> Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back; others, who if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless thou constantly stoodest demanding, because, they say, "there is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (Pagans)." But they tell a lie against God, and (well) they know it.

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):75 continues to criticize the People of the Book for their rejection of the signs of God. Moreover, the Qur'ān raises a critical question of why People of the Book hinder Muslims from the path of God while they were witnesses to God's covenant (3:99).

Sūrat al-Nisā' (4):123 denies the wishful presumption (*amāniyy*) of the People of the Book having God's reward, for they never accept the Book from Heaven as evidence of prophethood. They asked Moses something greater than that -- to show God visibly before their eyes, having worshipped the calf, which seemed more real to them (4:153).

After faulting the Jews, the Qur'ān turns to criticizing the Christians who go to religious excess. Sūra 4:171 reminds Christians that Jesus Christ was no more than an Apostle of God (*rasūlu llāh*), His word (*wa kalimatuh*), and His Spirit (*wa rūḥun minhu*). Indeed, some People of the Book believe that Jesus was a prophet of God before death (4:159). Sūra 5:16 states that God has sent the Prophet Muḥammad to disclose the teachings of the Book that the People of the Book had concealed. Sūra 5:21 responds that God sent Muḥammad to explain the *sharī'ah* to the People of the Book after the break of succession in order that they may not claim that "there came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner [from evil]."[39]

Sūrat al-Mā'idah (5):62 describes *ahl al-kitāb* as those who disapprove of the Muslims since the Muslims believe in God and what was revealed to them. That is why they were accused of being disobedient (*fāsiq*). However, the sūra (*al-Mā'idah* [5]:68) declares that if *ahl al-kitāb* believed and become righteous, they would be forgiven and promised the heavenly reward. This verse should be

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[39] Yusuf Ali explains that "the six hundred years [in round figures] between Christ and Muḥammad were truly the dark ages of the world. Religion was corrupted; the standard of morals fell low; many false systems and heresies arose; and there was a break in the succession of apostles until the advent of Muhammad." See Yusuf Ali. *The Holy Qur'ān*, 247, footnote 720.

understood in conjunction with the next verse, 5: 69, which states that if they consistently hold to the Torah and the Gospel and what has been sent to them, they would be granted happiness and included in the community of the righteous party (*ummah muqtaṣidah*). However, most of them followed the path of evil.

The importance of the Torah and the Gospel for *ahl al-kitāb* is again, restated by sūra 7: 71. Besides, this sūra also suggests that *ahl al-kitāb* stand upon what has been revealed to them, the Qur'ān.[40] Sūrat 5:77 still warns *ahl al-kitāb* not to transgress the bounds of their religion. Although *ahl al-kitāb* were reproached, *sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (29):46 suggests Muslims were at peace with everyone except those who tried to abuse them. With reference to the Jews of Banī Qurayẓah, *sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33):26 tells of the Prophet's struggle with *ahl al-kitāb*. The Jews had associated with the infidels to fight the Muslims at the battle of *Aḥzāb* ("Confederates").

Sūrat al-Ḥadīd (57):29, which follows, tells us that the *ahl al-kitāb* who do not believe in the Prophethood of Muḥammad will receive nothing of God's Grace. With reference to the Jews of Banī Naḍīr, *sūrat al-Ḥashr* (59):2 describes the banishment of the People of the Book from Medina. The *munāfiqūn* deceived the People of the Book for offering help if they were exiled from Medina (59:11). The two final judgment verses on *ahl al-kitāb* are explicitly mentioned in *sūrat al-Bayyinah* (98:1 and 2) showing that, while clear evidence came to them, they denied it. Accordingly, they were condemned to hell-fire. They did not want to

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[40] See Hasbi Ashshiddiqi, *et. al.*, trans. *al-Qur'ān dan Terjemahannya, Juz 1 - Juz 30* (Jakarta: Departemen Agama, 1971) 172.

accept the Prophethood of Muḥammad, because they were not looking for clear evidence, but to follow their own desires.

The above-mentioned verses are clearly negative in their portrayal of the People of the Book. However, as indicated in other verses, not all of them are alike. Some *ahl al-kitāb* are portrayed as pious, believing in God Almighty, the Last Day, practicing their religious teachings consistently, enjoining right, forbidding wrong and performing good works (3:113, 114 and 199). The Qur'ān places them in the rank of the righteous (3:115). Then the Qur'ān reminds *ahl al-kitāb* not to deviate from pure monotheism and calls upon them to a "common term" (3:64).

The various usages of the term *ahl al-kitāb* in different contexts show that certain verses refer to Jews alone, to Jews and Christians together, or in some verses, to Christians alone. Most of the critical verses are addressed to the Jews who took a rival or opposing position against the Prophet Muḥammad, for example, *sūrat al-Bayyinah* (98):1 and 6 which describe the expulsion of Jews from Medina because they associated themselves with the Meccan infidels against the Muslims.

Other terms used by the Qur'ān to designate Jews and Christians are *al-yahūd, al-ladhīna hādū, banī isrā'īl* and *an-naṣārā*. Let us elaborate on these terms in order to highlight their different connotations. For example, when the Qur'ān uses the term *al-yahūd,* it is generally used in verses blaming Jews or stating certain negative characteristics of the Jews. However, when the Qur'ān employs

the term *al-ladhīna hādū* ("those who adhere to the Jewish faith") in its verses,[41] the reference to Jews is the same but the connotation different. Here the Qur'ān seeks to produce a more positive impression on its audience. Among the Qur'ānic verses that use the term *al-yahūd* are: *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):85, which indicates the unfriendliness of the Jews to the believers; *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):120, which describes the Jews who will never be pleased with the Muslims unless the Muslims follow their religion; *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):20, which explains the Jews' claim to be the beloved children of God; and *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):67, about the Jews' statement that God is tightfisted -- literally, that God's Hand is tight. Compare these with verses which use the sympathetic term, *al-ladhīna hādū: sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):62 -- "for those who follow the Jewish [Scriptures] ... shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." The same sympathetic term is found in other sūras, e.g., *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):72 and *sūrat al-Ḥajj* (22):17. These sūras describe Jews positively.

The way the Qur'ān presents Jewish people is thus significant; different styles will produce different meanings. When the Qur'ān uses the noun *"al-yahūd,"* it means to condemn; when it applies the verb *"al-ladhīna hādū,"* it is giving a positive description: to honor Jewish people, even to give them a position -- with important theological implications -- as high as the believers. However, belonging to the People of the Book is not, by itself, a guarantee of salvation. In addition to fulfilling the outward requirements of belonging to a religion, the believer must

have "true faith" and do good works just as required of the Muslims. Moreover, becoming a Muslim is not a guarantee of salvation; it is only for those who are consistent in fulfilling the dictates of the *sharī'ah.* According to the Qur'ān, not all the People of the Book are devout or pious; they can be unfaithful, untruthful and hypocritical. They may entertain polytheistic fallacies and try to lead the believers astray. Several of these verses -- for example, *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5): 67 -- stress that the beliefs, actions and sayings of some of the People of the Book run counter to God's commandments, and that Jews do not stand firm upon their Scriptures any more than Christians stand firm upon theirs. The Prophet's mission was to warn them that they must observe the precepts of the books according to their true import.[42]

The basic question of who the People of the Book are, is a subject that has been debated by Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history. Some scholars state that People of the Book are Jews and Christians as recipients of earlier revealed books, the Torah and the Gospel;[43] while others prefer to extend *ahl al-kitāb* to include the *Ṣābi'ūn* [44] and the *Majūs,*[45] as well. A clue suggesting the inclusion of

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[41] Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"* in Muhammad Wahyuni Nafis, ed. *Rekonstruksi dan Renungan Religius Islam* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996) 4.

[42] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 131.

[43] G. Vajda, "*Ahl al-Kitāb,*" *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 1: 264.

[44] Commenting on the *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2): 62, Muhammad Asad defines *Ṣābi'ūn* as an intermediate monotheistic religious group between Judaism and Christianity. Their name may be derived from the Aramaic verb *tsebha,* means "he immersed himself in water," it would indicate that they were followers of John the

the Sabeans as *ahl al-kitāb* can be found in *sūrat al-Ḥajj* (22):17, where people are divided into the following six groups: those who believe *(al-ladhinā āmanū),* those who follow the Jewish faith *(al-ladhīna hādū),* the Sabean (*aṣ-Ṣābi'ūn),* the Christians (*an-Naṣārā*), the Magians *(al-Majūs),* and those who adhere to polytheism *(alladhīna ashrakū).*[46] Some commentators have interpreted *al-Majūs* simply to be another reference to those who adhere to polytheism. But this is an

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Baptist, in which case they could be identified with the Mandeans, a community which to this day is to be found in Iraq. They are not to be confused with the so-called "Sabeans of Ḥarrān," a gnostic sect which still existed in the early centuries of Islam, and which may have deliberately adopted the name of the true Sabeans in order to obtain the advantages accorded by the Muslims to the followers of every monotheistic faith. See Muhammad Asad, *The Message,* 14. Al-Tujībī defines *Ṣābi'ūn* as a group of people who worship angels and read *al-Zabūr ("wa al-ṣābi'īn qawm ya'budūna al-malā'ikah wa yaqra'ūna al-zabūr").* See Abū Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibn Ṣumādiḥ al-Tujībī, *Mukhtaṣar min Tafsīr al-Imām al-Ṭabarī,* edited by Muḥammad Ḥasan Abū al-'Azam al-Zafīnī and Jawdah 'Abd al-Raḥmān Hilāl (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah, 1970/1390) 1: 480. An excellent study on the *Ṣābi'ūn* has been undertaken by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Exegetical Identification of the *Ṣābi'ūn," The Muslim World* 72, (1982): 95-106.

[45] Muhammad Asad explains *al-Majūs* as the followers of Zoroaster or Zarathustra (Zardusht), the Persian prophet who lived about the middle of the last millenium B.C. and whose teachings are laid down in the Zend-Avesta. They are represented today by the Gabrs of Iran and, more prominently, by the Parsis of India and Pakistan. Their religion, though dualistic in philosophy, is based on belief in God as the Creator of the universe. See Muhammad Asad, *The Message,* 507.

[46] Ṭabarī comments on this verse by citing the *ḥadīth* reported by Muqātil saying "the religions are six, one for God Almighty, which is Islam, and five for Satan." Al-Ṭabarī says that the believers, the Jews and the Christians agree to acknowledge one God but disagree in recognizing the prophethood of Muḥammad. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr, 1986) 17: 74-75. See also McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* 123.

obvious error,[47] considering that the two expressions are separated by the words *wa l-ladhīna,* which shows that Magians are clearly distinct from the polytheists. The phrasing also suggests that, when God examines the various forms of faith on the Day of Judgment, they will be on an equal footing with the previously mentioned groups.[48]

Most Qur'ānic exegetes commenting on *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):6 identify the People of the Book as those with whom Muslims could consume food or from among whom Muslims could choose a bride. Muslims' opinions regarding this verse's depiction of the People of the Book may be divided into three main approaches. Imām al-Shāfi'ī, for example, states that the verse denotes only the descendants of Israelite Jews and Christians, because Moses and Jesus were sent only to their own nations and not to others. This argument is supported by the use of the term *min qablikum* ("those who received Scripture before you") to denote those nations whose women could be taken in marriage by Muslims.[49] Al-Shāfi'ī's opinion, however, differs from that of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah as well as that of the majority of Islamic jurists who say that whoever believes in a prophet or a Book revealed by God is included among the People of the Book, and not just Jews and Christians. It follows then that a group of people who believe only in the *Suḥuf* of

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[47] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 131.

[48] Faruq Sherif, *A Guide,* 131.

[49] Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"* 10.

Ibrāhīm, or the *Zābūr* revealed to Dāwūd, may logically be regarded as People of the Book.[50]

A third view is put forward by a minority of classical Muslim scholars *('ulamā' al-salaf)* who insist that any community which one supposes to possess scripture can be regarded as People of the Book -- for example the *Majūs.*[51] This third argument is, according to al-Mawdūdī, expanded by some modern Muslim scholars, to the point where the adherents of Buddhism and Hinduism can be regarded as People of the Book. Ibn Kathīr informs us that Abū Thawr Ibrāhīm b. Khālid al-Kalbī (d.860), the loyal follower of Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, states that the meat slaughtered by the *Majūs* may lawfully be consumed and that Muslims are permitted to marry their women.[52]

The most detailed treatment of this matter is found in Rashīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār.*[53] According to Muhammad Quraish Shihab, Riḍā was asked by a Javanese (Indonesian) Muslim what the law was concerning marriage to the pagan women of China, as well as the permissibility of eating the meat of animals

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[50] Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"* 10.

[51] Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"*10-11.

[52] See Ibn Kathīr's commentary on *sūrat al-Ma'idah* (5):5 where he discusses in detail the legal implications of this verse. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987) 21-23. Yusuf Ali puts this verse in *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5): 6. See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān,* 241.

[53] A detailed discussion on *Tafsīr al-Manār* may be found in Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: a Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) 198-204 and J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt,* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) 18-34.

slaughtered by Chinese butchers.[54] To answer these questions, Riḍā examined many transmissions *(riwāyāt)* on the authority of the Prophet's Companions and those who followed *(tābi'īn),* the rules of Islamic jurisprudence, the linguistic construction of the Qur'anic verses and the previous opinions of Muslim scholars. He came to the conclusion that Muslim men are not allowed to marry women who are unbelievers,[55] as stated in *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):221.[56] Nevertheless, he explains, the *Majūs, Ṣābi'ūn* and the Indian idolaters, Chinese and others like them, may be regarded as People of the Book. Rashīd Riḍā further explains that *ahl al-kitāb* is not a term limited to Jews and Christians, but includes *Ṣābi'ūn* and *Majūs,* Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists. He argues that the Qur'ān mentions the *Ṣābi'ūn* and *Majūs,* but not the Brahmans (Hindus), Buddhists and Confucians, because the former were known to the Arabs of Iraq and of Baḥrayn. The latter were far from Arab lands. The Arabs themselves had not yet traveled to India, Japan or China. In the interest of avoiding a strange statement *(ighrāb),* this verse does not mention those religions of which the Arabs were not yet aware.[57]

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[54] Quraish Shihab, *"Ahl al-Kitāb,"* 11.

[55] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm al-Musammā bi Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1972) 2: 276-283. In these pages Riḍā discusses the issue of marriage to women of other religions in some detail; while in volume 6: 157, he expands his discussion on marriage to Chinese women, where he has no objection, as long as its purpose is to call the Chinese to Islam.

[56] "Do not marry unbelieving woman (idolaters), until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allure you."

[57] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 156.

Historically, the Muslims levied a poll-tax *(jizyah)* on the *ahl al-kitāb* including the *Majūs* of Baḥrayn, Hajar and Persia, as stated in the *hadīth* collection of Bukhārī and Muslim. Imām Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Tirmīdhī inform us that the Prophet collected *jizyah* from the *Majūs* of Hajar.[58] This is affirmed in a *hadīth* related by 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Auf (in the presence of 'Umar) and recorded by both Mālik and al-Shāfi'ī: "I testify that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: *Sunnū bihim sunnata ahl al-kitāb"*[59] (treat them as People of the Book). However, there is a debate among the *muḥaddithūn* on the validity of this *hadīth,* some stating that its transmission (*sanad)* was discontinuous *(wa fī sanadihi inqiṭā'),* which is why some *muḥaddithūn* do not consider the *Majūs* as *ahl al-kitāb.*[60] However, Riḍā argues that this interpretation is weak, since the popular association of the term *ahl al-kitāb* with Jews and Christians has its origins in their traditional proximity to Arabs. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that there exist no other *ahl al-kitāb* in the world. Indeed, there is every reason to assume that others do exist, as Islamic teachings tell us that God sends His messengers to every community to deliver both glad tidings and unhappy news *(mubashshirīna wa mundhirīna),* and to reveal at the same time *al-kitāb wa al-mīzān* (scripture and just teachings) that they may do what is

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[58] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 156.

[59] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 156.

[60] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 156.

right.[61] Furthermore, argues Riḍā, this interpretation is analogous to the usage of the word '*ulamā'*, a term which signifies people who have a specialized knowledge (in religion) exceeding that of the common Muslim people, but which does not preclude the possibility that knowledge can also be acquired by others.[62]

Riḍā's contention is legitimized by Ibn Taymiyyah who held that the Prophet granted the *Majūs* the status of *ahl al-kitāb,* after which he signed a peace treaty with the people of Baḥrayn where some *Majūs* lived. Ibn Taymiyyah added that all the caliphs and Muslim scholars were unanimous in their agreement on this matter.[63] Rashād Sālim commented on Ibn Taymiyyah's statement that in *al-Muwaṭṭa'* (1:278, in the part on *zakāt, jizyah* of the People of the Book, and *Majūs*), *ḥadīth* number 41, related by Ibn Shihāb, stated: "News came to me that the Prophet took *jizyah* from the *Majūs* of Baḥrayn, and 'Umar took *jizyah* from the *Majūs* of Persia, and 'Uthmān b. 'Affān took *jizyah* from the Berbers." It is further recorded in *ḥadīth* number 42 that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in discussing the *Majūs* said, "I don't know what I should do for them." 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf answered, "I testify that the Prophet said: Treat them as *ahl al-kitāb."* It is also told in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīh* 4:96, in the part on *jizyah* and *muwāda'ah* to the *ahl al-ḥarb,* that 'Umar did not take *jizyah* from the *Majūs,* but then 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf testified that the Prophet had taken it from the *Majūs* of Hajar. In the same

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[61] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 156.

[62] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 157.

[63] Quoted in Nurcholis Madjid from Ibn Taymiyyah's *Minhāj al-Sunnah,* edited by Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Cairo: Mu'assasat Qurṭubah, 1406/1986) 8: 516. See Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam Agama Peradaban,* 80.

passage, from 'Amr b. 'Auf al-Anṣārī comes the tradition that the Prophet sent Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ to Baḥrayn to collect the *jizyah.*[64] 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is also reported as having referred to the *Majūs* as *ahl al-kitāb.*[65]

From the above passage, it is clear that the term *ahl al-kitāb* included Jews, Christians, *Majūs* and *Ṣābi'ūn,* and could even be extended, as Riḍā proposed, to Confucians, Hindus and Buddhists. In the contemporary world, Muslims are exposed to all of these faiths and it is, therefore, incumbent upon scholars to anticipate this phenomenon and, accordingly, reformulate their injunctions on the basis of the Qur'ān. I believe that Qur'ānic injunctions will retain their relevance throughout the ages *(sāliḥ fī kull zamān wa makān),* as long as Muslims are courageous enough to reinterpret every Qur'ānic concept contextually, including that of the *ahl al-kitāb* in a practical and appropriate manner, as will be examined in the next chapter.

Certain verses of the Qur'ān clearly confirm the status of older monotheistic religions and command the faithful not to discriminate against them, as they also have been promised God's grace and mercy. But other verses state an opposite sentiment, making it difficult to reconcile their content with the principle of tolerance. The contradiction is so glaring that some commentators have, by way of explanation, invoked the Qur'ānic concept of abrogation to conclude that one group of verses must necessarily abrogate the other as the following examples:

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[64] Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam Agama Peradaban,* 80-81.

[65] *Faqāla 'Aliyy: bal hum ahl al-kitāb,* see Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 6: 189.

Sūrat al-Baqarah (2):62.

Those who believe (in the Qur'ān) and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):85.

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).

Sūrat al-Mā'idah (5):72.

Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians, any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Sūrat al-Ḥajj (22):17.

Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians, Christians, Magians and polytheists, God will judge between them on the Day of Judgement: for God is witness of all things.

Ibn 'Abbās who is joined by the traditional exegetes insists that the first of these verses, *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):62 should be abrogated by the second, *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3):85. In his rebuttal of Ibn 'Abbās's theory of abrogation, al-Ṭabarī argues that God would not single out some of his creatures to the exclusion of others when rewarding those who had lived in faith and acted rightly *("li'anna Allāh jalla thanā'uh lam yukhaṣṣis bi al-ajr 'alā al-'amal al-ṣālih ma'a al-īmān").*[66] In support of al-Ṭabarī's argument, al-Ṭūsī convincingly refutes the possible abrogation of

this verse on the simple grounds that God's promise cannot be abrogated *("li'anna al-naskh lā yajūz an-yadkhula fī al-khabar al-ladhī yataḍammanu al-wa'īd").*[67] In other words, "once God has promised something, He will not subsequently withdraw His promise."[68] It is thus reasonable to assume that God's promise is not abrogated in this case, and that the believers -- the Christians, the Jews, the Sabeans, who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds -- are redeemed in the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, other verses would seem to contradict this conclusion, as will be seen later.

In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's commentary on *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):72, the custodians of the Gate of Bliss will attach no importance to titles, whether a group be called believers, Jews, Sabeans or Christians.[69] The determining factors are held to be an upright life and belief in God and the Last Day *("lā 'ibrah fī bāb al-sa'ādah bi al-asmā' wa al-alqāb katasammī jamā'ah bi al-mu'minīn wa firqah bi alladhīna hādū, wa ṭā'ifah bi al-ṣābi'īn wa ākharīn bi al-naṣārā, wa innamā al-'ibrah bi al-īmāni bi allāh wa al-yawm al-ākhir wa al-'amal al-ṣāliḥ."*[70]

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[66] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 155-56.

[67] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsi, *al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* (Najaf: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1376/1957) 1: 284-285.

[68] McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 119.

[69] McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 123.

[70] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirūt: Mu'assasat al-A'lāmi lil-Maṭbū'āt, 1394/1974) 6: 69.

Fazlur Rahman, a modern Muslim scholar, critiques the traditional exegesis upon the said verses in the following words: [71]

> The vast majority of Muslim commentators exercise themselves fruitlessly to avoid having to admit the obvious meaning: that those--from any section of humankind--who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds are saved. They either say that by Jews, Christians, and Sabeans here are meant those who have actually become "Muslims"--which interpretation is clearly belied by the fact that "Muslims" constitute only the first of the four groups of "those who believe"--or that they were those good Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who lived before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad--which is an even worse *tour de force.* Even when replying to Jewish and Christian claims that the hereafter was theirs alone, the Qur'ān says, "On the contrary, whosoever surrenders himself to God while he does good deeds as well, he shall find his reward with his Lord, shall have no fear, nor shall he come to grief."

According to Rahman, the logic behind a recognition of universal goodness, which commands a belief in one God and the Last Day as pre-requisites, necessarily entails that Muslims be ranked as one community among many.[72] *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):51 appears to yield a final judgement on the problems of a religiously plural world:

> To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God 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 God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.

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[71] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes,* 166.

[72] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes,* 166-67.

The positive value of diverse religions and communities, then, is that they may compete with each other in goodness. Professor Issa J. Boullata remarks that the mere existence of various religious communities in the world points to a religious pluralism intended by God to create competition between them in a race to attain all virtues *(fa-stabiqū l-khayrāt).*[73] It should be noticed that *khayrāt* is expressed in a plural form, meaning that there are many types of goodness in the world, including values in religions, for the attainment of which we as human beings must compete with each others in a proper manner. This is, I believe, the *élan vital* of the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* in the contemporary world.

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[73] See Issa J. Boullata, *"Fa-stabiqū l-khayrāt:* A Qur'ānic Principle of Interfaith Relations," in Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995) 43-53.

CHAPTER II

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *AHL AL-KITĀB* VERSES OF THE QUR'ĀN

This chapter will survey the depiction and perception of *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book) by some notable Muslim exegetes. For this purpose, six major Muslim exegetes from different backgrounds and their exegetical works have been selected in order to provide a range of perspectives on this issue. The first is *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* [1] of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī,[2]

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[1] Many editions of *Jāmi' al-Bayān* of al-Ṭabarī exist, a thirty-volume edition has been published under the title *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Yamāniyyah, n.d.). Another edition, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān,* was edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960). This edition is complete through *sūrat Yusuf* (12):18 and published in 15 volumes. The latest edition, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* was published in 30 volumes (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr, 1986). An abdridgement of *Jāmi' al-Bayān* was made by Abū Yaḥyā Muḥammad b. Ṣumādiḥ al-Tujībī, and entitled *Mukhtaṣar min Tafsīr al-Imām al-Ṭabarī,* edited by Muḥammad Ḥasan Abū al-'Azm al-Zufaytī (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Ta'līf wa al-Nashr, 1390/1970). Pierre Gode has translated this work into French under the title, *Commentaire du Coran* (Paris: Editions d'Art Les Heures Claires, 1983) and J. Cooper has translated it into English as *The Commentary of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[2] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born in Āmul, Ṭabarīstān, in northern Persia in 224/ 839 and died in Baghdād in 310/923. He devoted his life to scholarly activities, collecting Muslim traditions from the preceding generations. He wrote on diverse subjects including poetry, lexicography, grammar, ethics, mathematics, and medicine, although none of his works on these areas has survived. Al-Ṭabarī's fame rests primarily on his works in the field of history and Qur'ān, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (The History of the Prophets and the Kings) and *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (The Comprehensive Explanation of the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Verses). A detailed biography can be found in: Rudi Paret, "al-Ṭabarī, *First Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1913-1936 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) 7:578-79; Andrew Rippin, "Ṭabarī, Al-"

which represents Sunnī *tafsīr* at its best; the second is *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*[3] of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī,[4] which is written from a Shī'ī point of view. As for the third, it is *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*[5] of Abū al-Qāsim

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The Encyclopedia of Religion (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 14: 231-32; and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 38-45. McAuliffe has written an excellent study on al-Ṭabarī's Qur'ān hermeneutics, entitled "Qur'ān Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr" in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* edited by Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 46-62.

[3] This comprehensive work consists of ten volumes, comparable in breadth to al-Ṭabarī's work. Al-Ṭūsī usually begins his *tafsīr* by offering *asbāb al-nuzūl;* he then analyses the verse under discussion from the perspective of grammar, language and meaning. See, for example, his treatment of sūra 3: 64-70 in his *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Najaf: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1376/ 1957) 2: 488-498.

[4] Al-Ṭūsī was born in 385/995 in Ṭūs. He was the student of Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nu'mān, known as al-Mufīd, a noted Shī'ī jurisconsult and al-Sharīf Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Ṭāhir al-Murtaḍā. He became a leading intellectual in the Baghdād Shi'ī community and taught many students there. The Caliph al-Qā'im (422/1031-467/1075) appointed him to the chair of *kalām*, an honor bestowed only on a scholar with no equal. See McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 45-49. Henri Corbin places al-Ṭūsī in the second period of Shī'ī intellectual history. See Henri Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy.* Translated from the French by Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of Philip Sherrard (London & New York: Kegan Paul, 1993) 23.

[5] Al-Zamakhsharī wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān entitled *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.) during his second visit to Mecca. His swift completion of this work was credited to the miraculous power of the Ka'bah and the blessed influence that emanates from it. See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf.* 1: *ghayn.* Ibn Khaldūn has remarked that al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the Qur'ān is based wholly upon the disciplines of the science of rhetoric *('Ilm al-balāghah).* See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History,* translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) 3:337, which gives his commentary greater distinction vis-a-vis any other commentary. However, al-Zamakhsharī tried to defend and confirm the

Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī,[6] who adopts a Mu'tazilite perspective; then *Tafsīr al-Manār*[7] of Muḥammad 'Abduh[8] and Rashīd Riḍā,[9] which provides a

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Mu'tazilite articles of faith through the rhetorical manipulation of the Qur'ān. Hence, many orthodox Muslims have read his commentary with caution, despite his abundant knowledge of rhetoric. *Al-Kashshāf* is known as the only complete extant Mu'tazilite commentary on the Qur'ān. It is also the first and by far the most successful effort to apply the principles of Arabic rhetoric to Qur'ānic exegesis with a view to laying bare the bases of *i'jāz,* the inimitability of the Qur'ān. See Fazlur Rahman, *An Analytical Study of al-Zamakhsharī's Commentary on the Qur'ān, al-Kashshāf* (Aligarh: Faculty of Theology, 1982), i. Al-Zamakhsharī believed that the beauty of the Qur'ānic composition, the elegance of its style and the marvel of its diction could not be appreciated, nor its *i'jāz* be established unless reference was made to the principles of *Ma'ānī* and *Bayān,* the two disciplines of Arabic rhetoric. See Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Bayān I'jāzih* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968) 216-17. See also Fazlur Rahman, *An Analytical Study,* prologue, and its review, *Islamic Culture* 3, vol. 63, July 1989, 114-16. Ibn Khallikān stated that nothing like *al-Kashshāf* had been written before. See Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' al-Zamān,* edited by Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1968) 5: 168. Moreover, Ibn Khaldūn declared that he often suggested to his students to make use of this *tafsīr* for its varied linguistic information, albeit asking them to be careful when reading it, as al-Zamakhsharī was a Mu'tazilite by faith and action and consequently used the verses of the Qur'ān to argue in favor of the doctrines of the Mu'tazila. See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah,* 2: 447.

[6] Al-Zamkhsharī was born in 467/1075 in the province of Khawarazm. See C. Brocklemann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur (GAL)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), Book I, 290; c.f. Supplement, 507. He travelled a great deal, studying under scholars in Bukhārā, Samarqand, Baghdād and Mecca. It is said that the strongest intellectual figure to influence him was Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣbahānī, later known as Abū Muḍar (d. 507/1113). See Yūsuf Biqā'ī, *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Zamakhsharī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1981) 5. The latter is credited with introducing Mu'tazilī teachings to al-Zamakhsharī and the people of Khawarazm, where his proselytization was far-reaching. See Lutpi Ibrahim, "Az-Zamakhsharī: His Life and Works," *Islamic Studies* 29, 2 (1980): 95-97. Al-Zamakhsharī had a close personal relationship with his teacher who not only imparted knowledge to his student, but also supported him financially. Al-Zamakhsharī's own adoption of the Mu'tazilite doctrine was open and outspoken, and he frequently called himself "Abū Qāsim al-Mu'tazilī," see Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-Balāghah* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr, 1965) 6. Because al-Zamakhsharī was well versed in knowledge, some scholars called him "unique

in his time" *(waḥīd 'aṣrihi).*After receiving a licence in *ḥadīth* in Baghdād, he moved to Mecca, where his tenure in that city was long enough to win him the nickname "God's neighbour *(Jār Allāh)."* See BN MacGuckin De Slane, trans. *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary* (Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1842) 3: 322. He acknowledged the superiority of the Arabic language. His book on Arabic grammar, *al-Mufaṣṣal,* became renowned for its bright and comprehensive exposition of grammatical principles. See Andrew Rippin, "Zamakhsharī, Al-," *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* 15:554-55. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987. In 538/1144, at the age of seventy-one, al-Zamakhsharī died in Jurjānīyah, a town about twenty miles north of Zamakhshar.

[7] *Tafsīr al-Manār* was composed by two scholars, Muḥammad 'Abduh (teacher) and Rashīd Riḍā (student). To describe the process of writing this *tafsīr* J.J.G. Jansen wrote: "...Abduh gave a series of lectures on the Koran at the Azhar university, and his Syrian pupil, Rashīd Riḍā attended these lectures and took notes, which he afterwards revised and enlarged. The result was shown to Muḥammad Abduh who approved, or corrected as necessary. These lectures began to appear in [the periodical] *al-Manār,* volume iii (A.D. 1900), as the commentary of Muḥammad 'Abduh, since the editor thought it proper, so long as 'Abduh had read what had been written, to ascribe them to him. The commentary that resulted from this cooperation is known as the *Manār* commentary." See J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) 23-4. After the death of Muḥammad Abduh, Riḍā continued working on the commentary, and analysing the verses between sūra 4: 125 and sūra 12: 107. This twelve-volume *tafsīr* groups the Qur'ānic verses into logical units of 5 or 10 verses followed by commentary. The commentary is often interrupted by long discussions on the general problems of religion and society. See for example Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1973) 267-72.

[8] 'Abduh was born sometime before 1850 (1849) in the Egyptian countryside. In 1862 he studied in Ṭanṭā and when in 1865 he became interested in mysticism, his uncle Shaykh Darwish introduced him to the Shādhilī order. In 1866 he continued his studies at al-Azhar university and completed them in 1877. See Jansen, *The Interpretation,* 18.

[9] Riḍā was born on 27 Jumāda al-Ūlā, 1282 A.H. in the village of Qalamūn [Lebanon, now] South of Tripoli, Syria. He learned the Qur'ān from Muslim scholars in his village and then attended an Islamic school, *al-Madrasah al-Rushdiyyah,* in Tripoli where he studied Arabic, Islamic Law, Logic, Mathematics and Philosophy from his professor, Ḥasan al-Jisr al-Azharī, the founding father of the *madrasah.* His detailed biography can be found in Amīr Shakīb Arsalān, *Limādhā Ta'akhkhara al-Muslimūn wa Limādhā Taqaddama*

modern Sunnī perspective; *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [10] of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī,[11] which is a modern Shī'ī work; and lastly Mohammed Arkoun's works, which offer a contemporary Muslim perspective.[12] The first three exegetes

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Ghayruhum, edited by Ḥasan Tamīm (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1390 A.H.) 27-32.

[10] This work consists of twenty volumes (Beirut: Mu'asasāt al-A'lāmī li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1394/1974). It has been translated into English by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, as *al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'ān* (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1403/1983). Ṭabāṭaba'ī usually commented on a particular Qur'ānic verse with the aid of other Qur'ānic verses, taking into account classical and modern Qur'ānic commentaries by both Sunnīs and Shī'īs. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 4:161-62.

[11] Known to his contemporaries as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, he lived from 1903 to 1981 in Tabriz, and was one of the foremost Qur'ānic commentators and traditional Persian philosophers of the twentieth century. He wrote a plethora of works, some in Arabic, and others in Persian, dealing with the Qur'ān and other religious matters. The most important work by him is *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān.* See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 4: 161-62. A comprehensive study of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's autobiography can be found in 'Alī al-Awsī, *al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhu fī Tafsīr al-Mīzān* (Teheran: Mu'āwaniyyat al-Ri'āsah li al-'Alāqāt al-Duwaliyyah, 1985) 14-57.

[12] Mohammed Arkoun was born on January 2, 1928 in the Berber village of Taourirt-Mimoun in Kabylia in Algeria. He began his career by studying Arabic in his native country and completed it in Paris. Now retired, he has been a Professor of the History of Islamic Thought at the Sorbonne University and was formerly director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies there. According to Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Arkoun is "involved in the sensitive task of reinterpreting and recasting the classical religious, legal and philosophical traditions through a sophisticated hermeneutical system inspired by contemporary Western critical methodologies, a task that has made him a controversial participant in the creation of a modern Arabo-Islamic critical discourse." See Malti-Douglas, "Arkoun Mohammed," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World,* 1: 139. In my opinion, his works on Qur'ānic Studies such as *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982) and "The Notion of Revelation: From *Ahl al-Kitāb* to the Societies of the Book," *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1988): 62-89 have earned him the title of *mufassir.* In *Lectures du Coran,* Arkoun proposes several

belong to the Classical period, while the last three interpreters come from the modern period.[13] Their views on *ahl al-kitāb* will be analysed on the basis of their interpretation of certain verses of the Qur'ān. These verses and their interpretations are believed to provide a Qur'ānic concept *of ahl al-kitāb,* which can be developed into a scriptural foundation for inter-religious dialogue. Although verses pertaining to the People of the Book are numerous, four have been selected for the purpose of this study. They are:

> *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3):64
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> Say: "O People of the book! come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God." If then they turn back say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will)."
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> Sūra 3:113
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> Not all of them are alike: of the people of the book are a portion that stand (for the right); they rehearse the signs of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.
>
> Sūrā 3:114
>
> They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: they are in the ranks of the righteous.
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> Sūra 3:115

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analytical distinctions, arguing that the actual written text of the Qur'ān requires a sophisticated reading of the scripture. See also Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) 79-85.

[13] The classification of *tafsīrs* into classical and modern is based on the common division devised by some scholars who described any *tafsīr* from the formative period of Islam to 1500 A.D. as classical, and after 1500 A.D. up to the present as modern.

> Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for God knoweth well those that do right.

These verses, particularly 3:64 and 113 will be examined in detail, and their interpretation by the six exegetes analyzed in order to gain a general understanding of the Qur'ānic perception of the People of the Book.

A. *Ahl al-Kitāb:* A Qur'ānic Call to Pure Monotheism

In interpreting sūra 3:64, exegetes differ considerably with regard to several issues, not least of which is the identity of the People of the Book addressed in this sūra. While some understand the term *ahl al-kitāb* to mean the Jews, others believe that they are the Christians. Similarly, a third group believes that this term denotes both religious communities, whom the Qur'ān invites to embrace pure monotheism.

Al-Ṭabarī begins his exegesis of this verse by paraphrasing it, and explaining that *ahl al-kitāb,* in the context of this verse, means *ahl al-tawrāt* (the People of the Torah) and *ahl al-injīl* (the People of the Gospel).[14] According to al-Ṭabarī, this verse does not specify either group as *ahl al-kitāb,* but includes both *ahl al-kitābayn.*[15] He writes: "...Neither are the People of the Torah better *(awlā)* than the People of the Gospel nor are the People of the Gospel better than the People of the Torah," and that neither the text nor any valid tradition *(wa lā athar*

[14] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 483.

[15] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 485.

ṣaḥīḥ) specifies either group as the only one addressed in this verse.[16] Hence, he argues that both occupy the same position, and can be called to a *kalimatin sawā'in,* that is a *kalimati 'adlin* (a just word),[17] meaning the worship of the one Supreme God without associating Him with others. Al-Ṭabarī cites many traditions in support of his opinion. For example, a *hadīth* reported by Ibn Isḥāq stating that: "The Prophet called the Jews to the just word,"[18] and another reported on the authority of al-Qāsim, declaring that: "News came to us that the Prophet called the Jews of Medina to that [the just word], but then they were disinclined." So the Prophet cited the verse *"qul yā ahla l-kitābi ta'ālaw ilā kalimatin sawā'in baynanā wa baynakum."*[19] Nevertheless, al-Ṭabarī quotes other traditions in contradiction to these, and observes that this verse must have been revealed when a messenger had arrived from the Christians of Najrān.[20] He further reports on the authority of Ibn Zayd that God had initially commanded the Prophet to invite them to an easier task, but they still refused it. Commenting on al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of this verse, Mahmoud Ayoub maintains that when the

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[16] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 485.

[17] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6:483. Arberry renders it as "a word common." "Say: 'People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from God.' And if they turn their backs, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.' See Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 54.

[18] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6:484.

[19] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6:484.

[20] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 484.

people of Najrān refused the *mubāhalah,*[21] God commanded the Prophet to call them to something easier,[22] and invited them in the following terms: "O People of the Book, come to a just word common between us and you."[23] Al-Ṭabarī then synthesizes the two sets of traditions and reaches the conclusion that God uses the term *ahl al-kitāb* to refer to the followers of both the *Tawrāh* and the *Injīl.*

In further support of his argument, al-Ṭabarī interprets *kalimatin sawā'in* to mean "the just word." In analyzing this phrase from a grammatical perspective,[24] he points out that Abū al-'Āliyah defines the 'just word' as the

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[21] *Mubāhala* is a synonym for *mulā'ana,* literally meaning "mutual imprecation." The term indicates spontaneously swearing a curse in order to strengthen an assertion or to find the truth, for example: "May God's curse fall on the one of us who is wrong, who lies." Historically, this kind of pledge was proposed by the Prophet in the year 10/632-3 to the deputation of the Christian Balḥārith b. Ka'b from Najrān. This took place during a dispute on Christology and Prophetology through an examination of the "truthful" and the "liar." See W. Schmucker, *"Mubāhala,"* in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993) 276.

[22] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 2: 202. In this book, Ayoub provides a comprehensive account of the views of commentators and the different schools of thought, approaches and movements they represent. As in his first volume (published in 1984), Ayoub uses the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr to represent exegesis based on tradition. This book attempts to present the Qur'ān to scholars and interested readers as Muslims have understood and interiorized it through its rich exegetical tradition.

[23] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6:486.

[24] He also offers the explanations devised by the Baṣrah and Kūfah schools of grammar concerning *kalimatin sawā'in.* The Baṣrah school of grammar was of the opinion that the word *sawā'in,* as an adjective of the previous word *kalimah,* takes the genitive form while the Kufans argued that it is a noun. Ibn Mas'ūd preferred to read the verse *"ilā kalimati 'adlin baynanā wabaynakum."* See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 486-87.

shahādah, or the testimony that there is no god but Allāh.[25] As for the phrase "we do not take one another as lords" *(walā yattakhidha ba'ḍunā ba'ḍan arbāban),* it refers according to him to the obedience that the People of the Book accorded their leaders, who led them to commit acts of rebellion against God. In support of this interpretation, al-Ṭabarī cites *sūrat al-Tawbah* (9):31, "they took their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of God, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but one God...."[26] Interestingly, in the last paragraph of his commentary on this verse, al-Ṭabarī speaks of the religious tolerance that this verse inspires. Indeed, he declares that if the People of the Book do not want to answer the Prophet's call to the just word, it is enough for them to acknowledge Muslims as people who have submitted to the will of God (*muslimūn*).[27]

The major Qur'ānic exegetes after al-Ṭabarī basically agree with his interpretation. Al-Ṭūsi, for example, offers the same three alternative interpretations of the phrase: People of the Book, namely the Christians of Najrān, the Jews of Medina who worshipped their leaders and their monks, and a combination of both groups.[28] Al-Zamakhsharī also agrees with this

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[25] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6:488.

[26] *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (9):31; al-Ṭabarī explains that the term *arbāban* here means *rubūbiyyah,* in the sense of not worshipping our leaders and treating them as lords. See *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 488.

[27] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 6: 489.

[28] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān,* 2: 488. The first opinion is based on the sayings of al-Ḥasan, al-Saddī, Ibn Zayd, and Muḥammad ibn Ja'far ibn al-Zubayr; and the second on the authority of Qatādah, al-Rabī', and ibn Jurayj; while the third relies

interpretation,[29] and explains the phrase 'the just word, common between us and you' as a common word on which the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān would agree.[30] In addition, he interprets the call to worship nothing but God and to associate nothing else with Him, as a call to avoid labelling either *'Uzayr* and *'Īsā* as sons of God,[31] because both are simply human beings. He also understood the phrase "we do not take one another as lords" to be a warning to the people not to obey their leaders, especially the latter's innovative sanctions and prohibitions against God's laws.[32] Interestingly, al-Zamakhsharī reports that when 'Adī b. Ḥātim, a Christian convert to Islam, told the Prophet that the Christians were not worshipping their leaders and monks; the Prophet then asked him if they [the leaders] either prohibited or allowed them something which was then taken for granted, to which Ḥātim replied in the affirmative. The Prophet then replied: "That is it,"[33] meaning that such acceptance constituted blind obedience which was a form of worship. In the same vein, al-Zamakhsharī narrates another *ḥadīth* on the authority of al-Fuḍayl, another early traditionist, which declared: "It is the

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on the sayings of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī. It is interseting to note that in demonstrating the second opinion, he also refers to Abī 'Abdillāh that is Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Shi'ī imām.

[29] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 370.

[30] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 370.

[31] Sūrat al-Tawbah (9): 30.

[32] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 371.

[33] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 371.

same for me whether I were to obey a creature in an act of rebellion against the Creator, or to pray in a direction other than the *qiblah."*[34]

The above-quoted verse is closely related to the next one, namely sūra 3:65, which was revealed in response to the arguments raging between some of the Jews and Christians concerning Abraham's religious affiliation. The prophet had explained that the Jews came into existence after the Torah was revealed and that the Christians became a distinct group after the revelation of the *Injīl;* in addition, the period of time separating Abraham and Moses was one thousand years, while that between Abraham and Jesus was two thousand years. Hence, how could Abraham, the Prophet asked, have belonged to a religion which was founded one or two thousand years after his death? Rather than answer this rhetorical question, al-Zamakhsharī then quoted the last words of sūra 3:65, *"afalā ta'qilūn"* (why don't you think?).[35] Al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the above verses indicates that God, through the Prophet, called the People of the Book to return to the original pristine teachings of their scriptures, to *tawḥīd* or pure monotheism, the worship of none other than God Himself, the Supreme Being, and to ascribing divinity to none besides Him as well as to accepting no human being as Lord.

From the three representative exegeses of the classical period, one can deduce that the *ahl al-kitāb* referred to in sūra 3:64 were the Jews and Christians,

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[34] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 371.

[35] See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1: 371. Sūra 3:67 explicitly mentions that Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but a *ḥanīf* who submitted himself to God and hence should not be included among those who associated others with Him.

who shared the same right to be invited to follow the just word. The term *ahl al-kitāb* was expressed as a firm concept, with a standard definition and usage. In the modern period, however, this concept has undergone major changes and developments. 'Abduh, Ṭabāṭaba'ī and Arkoun go beyond the classical exegetes in interpreting this significant concept, and using it in inter-religious dialogue.

Muḥammad'Abduh, for example, interprets this verse comprehensively. However, he is more interested in discussing the concept of monotheism *(tawḥīd)* than the term *ahl al-kitab* itself. Hence, he focuses on two kinds of monotheism: *waḥdāniyyat al-ulūhiyyah*[36] and *waḥdāniyyat al-rubūbiyyah,*[37] and states that Moses and Jesus, like Muḥammad had exhorted people to worship God alone, which according to him, is the original message of all prophets. However, this ideal injunction was later misinterpreted by the Jews who preferred their leaders' commands to those of God, and by the Christians who believed that their leaders could forgive their sins.[38] 'Abduh considers both these concepts as deviations that need to be corrected; hence the Qur'an calls both Jews and Christians to a common word.

With regards to the phrase *"fa'in tawallaw faqūlū-shhadū bi'annā muslimūn"* or "if they turn away from this call, then they should bear witness that

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[36] The phrase *allā na'buda illa-llāh* which was understood to mean *Waḥdāniyyat al-Ulūhiyyah,* was consolidated by the sentence *walā nushrika bihī shay'an.* See 'Abduh, *al-Manār,* 3:269.

[37] The phrase *walā yattakhidha ba'ḍunā ba'ḍan arbāban min dūni-llāh.* Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 3: 268.

[38] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 3: 270.

we are people who submit ourselves to God," 'Abduh believes that this verse suggests that those who worship God should not accept the opinion of anyone who is not protected from committing evil (*ma'ṣūm*).[39] Consequently, he maintains that in religious affairs, people should obey the rule of God as brought by the Prophet, who is infallible (*ma'ṣūm*); especially in dealing with what is allowed and not allowed *(ḥalāl* and *ḥarām)* and the performance of the *'ibādāt.* Nevertheless, when dealing with such mundane affairs as the running of the government, the legal system and other worldly problems, people are allowed to obey their leaders. In addition, he criticizes those Muslims who blindly adopt the opinions of the leaders of the particular schools of thought, thus rejecting God's Book. He considers this verse to be the foundation of religion since it was used by the Prophet in the propagation of Islam *(da'wah islāmiyyah).* The Prophet had translated this verse into action when he sent several letters to Heraclius, Muqawqis and others[40] inviting them to follow Islam. Therefore, by considering the historical background of this verse and its content, 'Abduh called this verse *āyat al-da'wah* (the propagation verse).[41] The following is a translation of the Prophet's letter to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, inviting him to embrace Islam:[42]

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[39] See "*Maksūm,*" in *Ensiklopedi Islam* (Jakarta: Ikhtiar Baru Van Hoeve, 1993) 3:133-135. This encyclopedia is written in Bahasa Indonesia.

[40] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 3: 270.

[41] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 3: 270.

[42] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān,* 2: 203.

> In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Muḥammad, the servant of God and His messenger to Heraclius, the King of the Byzantines. Peace be on those who follow the right guidance. Now then: Accept Islam, and you would have safety, then God would grant you a twofold reward (*yu'tika Allāhu ajraka marratayn*).[43] But if you refuse it, you will bear the sin of the *Arīsiyyīn.*[44] And Say: "O People of the book! come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God." If then they turn back say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will)."[45]

Commenting on this letter, Ibn Kathīr explains that it is probable that the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, dictated this verse in his letter before it was revealed; and that the Qur'ān later confirmed the concept inherent in the letter.[46]

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[43] In my opinion, the twofold reward refers to the reward of accepting Islam, and the reward of calling people to Islam. This consideration is based on the logical account that if the Byzantine Emperor accepted Islām, his people would follow him. The word *"marratayn"* was used to reinforce *(ta'kīd)* the promised reward, just as *tathniyah* in the Qur'ānic passage *"bal yadāhu mabsūṭatān"* was understood by Zamakhsharī to indicate that God is very generous. See Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Bayān I'jāzih* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968) 221.

[44] "The *Arīsiyyīn* according to the Islamic tradition were the Persian peasants and other menial servants who worshipped fire. They were employed by the Christians." See Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān,* 2: 203. *Arīsiyyīn* might be a loan word since it is not Arabic. It is not possible that the term is related to heretic Arius because Muslims accepted the Arian teaching that Jesus was not divine, and furthermore, Heraclius would not qualify for this term. The term could be linked to the Greek root of the word "heresy," meaning a heretic in general. As such, then, Muḥammad was justifying his campaign against Heraclius whom he considered a heretic. Source: Irfan Shahîd's Lecture on "The Prophet Muḥammad's Letter to the Byzantine Emperor: Prelude to the Arab Invasion,"at The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, November 5, 1996.

[45] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 3:270.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī prefers to apply this verse to the People of the Book in general, thus understanding the public address *(khiṭāb)* of the phrase "*yā ahl al-kitāb*" to refer to all *ahl al-kitāb.*[47] He interprets the phrase "come to a just word, common between us and you" as an invitation to a common agreement in which people would help each other reach the common term indicated by the word "*ta'ālaw*". Another possible meaning of this verse could be the adoption of a common term and its consequences, Ṭabāṭabā'ī declares.[48] He further argues that the Qur'ān, the Torah and the Gospels all agree on the just word, which is a word of divine oneness *(tawḥīd).*[49]

Tabāṭabā'ī believes that the term 'just word' implies the affirmation of divine oneness *(tawḥīd)* which in turn demands a refusal to associate anything with God, and to reject others as lords instead of Him. Moreover, the phrase "we worship no one except God" negates the worship of any being but God, thus implicitly making it an affirmation of the worship of God. This resembles the *shahādah* which insists that there is no god but God; thus implicitly making it unnecessary to assert God's existence because the Qur'ān takes it for granted.[50]

Ṭabāṭabā'ī is of the opinion that the universal and primordial call to obey God and to return to the primordial faith *(fiṭrah)* in the One and only God is

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[46] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm,* 2: 53-54.

[47] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 246.

[48] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 246.

[49] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 247.

[50] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 247.

issued to all humanity throughout history.[51] This is, moreover, the message of all the prophets of God. This primordial faith can exterminate violence, corruption and false authorities which attempt to destroy the foundations of happiness and truth.[52] Furthermore, the Prophet referred to this in his address at the Farewell Pilgrimage when he said, "Time has certainly returned to its original form when God created the heavens and earth."[53] By this he meant the return of human beings to primordial faith and Islam's strong position among people of religions.

In general, Mohammed Arkoun agrees that the term *ahl al-kitāb* refers to the Jews and Christians whom the Prophet met in Mecca and Medina.[54] He attempts to enlarge this term and to transform it into a flexible concept capable of illustrating a pluralist reading of the revelation manifested in the Qur'ān, a reading that aims at the integration of aspects of tradition, levels of reality, methods of analysis, and horizons of knowledge often separated in the positivist, specialized activities of modern reason.[55] Furthermore, from his reading of the Qur'ān, Arkoun understands *ahl al-kitāb* to mean those believers who are favored by God in the same way as the Muslims who accepted the new revelation.[56] He also finds it important to note the Qur'ānic declaration that Abraham was neither a Jew nor

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[51] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 247.

[52] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 248.

[53] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3: 50-51.

[54] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 82.

[55] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 82.

a Christian, but a pure "Muslim," or a believer totally devoted to God. On the other hand, he further acknowledges that other verses present *ahl al-kitāb* as people opposed to the Prophet and his Prophethood, refusing to accept the Qur'ān as the ultimate revelation of the Word of God, and accused of having altered the scriptures and perverted their meaning *(taḥrīf)*.[57] Thus, in response to this polemic, Arkoun elaborated a dogmatic definition of scripture based on the political and cultural climate of Medina from 622 to 632. He summarized the salient aspects of this definition, as derived from the Qur'ān as follows:

> (1) Jews and Christians are recognized as the addressees of the Book; but they refused to recognize in return the Qur'ān as the ultimate Revelation emanated from the Book. (2) The Book *(Kitāb)* is identified with the Qur'ān before it became an O.C.C.[58] *(Muṣḥaf)*, and later the *Muṣḥaf* will be assimilated to the Book. (3) Muslims are integrated into the spiritual Community called *Ahl al-Kitāb* in the new definition given in the Qur'ān, so that Muslims become the true representative of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, and *Islām* is the true religion, the one and only religion of the truth. (4) At the end of the Qur'ānic Revelation [*sūra* IX, Repentance] a definite separation occurs between Muslims and *Ahl al-Kitāb*, meaning Jews and Christians, who have distorted the Scriptures and who are bound to pay the poll tax: "Fight the ones among those who were given the Book, who do not believe in God nor the Last Day, nor forbid whatever God and His messenger have forbidden, nor profess the True Religion, until they pay the poll tax of their own accord and act submissive." (IX, 29). (5) A more rigid boundary is established between *Ahl al-Kitāb*, who are enlightened with the Knowledge (*'ilm*) delivered in the Book, and the "ignorant people" (*ummiyyūn, jāhiliyya*), who are pagans, not touched at all by the *'ilm*.[59]

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[56] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 82.

[57] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 83.

[58] Official Closed Corpus (O.C.C.) is the Word of God which in the cultural context has three implications: the transformation from oral discourse to text; the extention of sacred character of the text to the book; and the book which becomes the foundation of another fundamental change in the societies of the Book. See Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 75-76.

[59] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 83.

Arkoun believes that the five points under discussion had emanated from the political and social issues extant in Mecca and Medina and that they were later included into the sacred scripture. Consequently, he deems this to be a "sacralization and transcendentalization of profane history,"[60] which in turn, leads him to propose two inter-related questions: "Should we consider this as a current practice of men in society who sublimate ordinary events to show the way to the absolute? or is it legitimate to come back to the positive history and to demythologize religious history as was attempted by Bultmann and others in the historicist climate of western culture since the 19th century?"[61] However, Arkoun leaves these rhetorical questions unanswered and focuses his discussion on the Societies of the Book, with the aim of establishing the basis of scriptural function in society. He thus took the Bible as an example and declared that as a Book, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and hence spoke of the human need for the Absolute in all societies. Moreover, as a written text, it initiated a common cultural, social and political dimension that has formed the basis for collective life. Furthermore, on a cultural level, it functions as a book, as a text and as a language. And on the political level, it functions as both *corpus* and writing linked to the new states and their ideologies, as well as seeking to define ethical, juridical and

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[60] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 83.

[61] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 84.

intellectual norms. Finally, in the social context, it regulates a variety of readings, groups and collective rituals.[62]

Accordingly, Arkoun maintains that the Qur'ān is akin to the Bible since it had and still has the same functions in all the societies which adopted it as the last revealed Book.[63] Arkoun also suggested that the concept of *ahl al-kitāb,* which recurs many times in the Qur'ān, is a living concept which can be developed into the concept of "the societies of the book." If Muslims succesfully reevaluate their own revelation, they will undoubtedly discover new horizons in their approach to the concept of Jewish and Christian revelations as well, he argued. However, in order to achieve this goal, several methods have to be devised. First of all, Muslims have to find the vocabulary, techniques, and intellectual attitudes relevant to the presentation of the concept of revelation in the Qur'ān and in classical Islamic thought. They must be careful, however, lest they become prisoners of the dogmatic, so-called 'orthodox' positions. In other words, Muslims need to examine the fundamental teachings of Muslim tradition in the context of the requirements of modern historical analysis, the philosophical evaluation of the implicit or explicit postulates of these teachings, and the benefit of modern rationality and scientific thought.[64]

Hence, one may observe that in the modern period, the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* is more universal, and extends beyond historical boundaries and

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[62] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 86.

[63] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 86.

literal meanings. Moreover, it bears a contextual and futuristic sense of its ability to meet the challenges of a multireligious, pluralistic world.

B. Qur'ānic Approval of the People of the Book.

The Qur'ān clearly extols the good among the People of the Book in three verses, namely, *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3):113-114 and 115, which exegetes have interpreted in a variety of ways. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, treats these verses piecemeal. First of all, he understands the phrase *laysū sawā'an* to indicate two groups among the People of the Book, namely the faithful and those who reject faith. He believes that they are not equal but are very different in terms of righteousness and corruption, goodness and evil.[65] Moreover, *laysū sawā'an* refers to the two groups mentioned in sūra 3:110, ... *minhumu l-mu'minūna wa aktharuhumu l-fāsiqūn.* In my opinion, al-Ṭabarī's treatment of this verse is correct because the verse uses parallel concepts to talk about the two groups amongst *ahl al-kitāb.* The first group is the wicked group later discussed in sūra 3:111-112 as follows:

> They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance; if they come out to fight you, they will show you their backs, and no help shall they get. Shame is pitched over them (like a tent) wherever they are found, except when under a covenant (of protection) from God and from men; they draw on themselves wrath from God, and pitched over them is (the tent of) destitution, this because they rejected the signs of God, and slew the prophets in defiance of right; this because they rebelled and transgressed beyond bounds.

The second group is the good group, described in sūra 3:113, 114 and 115 which explicitly praise those People of the Book who defend the right, observe the signs

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[64] Mohammed Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 63.

of God all night long, prostrate themselves in adoration, believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and hasten in emulation of all good works. Accordingly, the Qur'ān places them in the ranks of the righteous (*ulā'ika mina ṣ-ṣāliḥīn*),[66] and in the subsequent verse we read: "Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for God knoweth well those that do right" (*wamā yaf'alū min khayrin falan yukfarūhu wa llāhu 'alīmun bi l-muttaqīn*).[67] This is to show that the Qur'ān respects sincere faith and true uprightness in whatever form they occur.

Al-Ṭabarī elaborates that the phrase *ummatun qā'imatun* refers to those Jews who have converted to Islam, and whose practice and faith in Islam is upright. This argument is based on a tradition reported by Ibn 'Abbās explaining the verse's meaning in terms of the character of three Jews, 'Abd Allāh ibn Sallām, Tha'labah ibn Sa'yah, Asad ibn 'Ubayd, who became Muslims and subsequently believed in, trusted and liked Islam.[68] He also mentioned another tradition declaring the members of the *ummah qā'imah* to be the followers of Muḥammad only. This latter tradition thus suggests that this verse describes the followers of Muḥammad as those who stand upright, in contrast to *ahl al-kitāb.* Al-Ṭabarī, however, prefers the first opinion.[69]

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[65] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7:118.

[66] Sūra 3:114.

[67] Sūra 3:115.

[68] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 120-121.

[69] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 122.

Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that *ummah qā'imah* refers to those people who are consistently trying to remain on the right path *(jamā'ah thābitah 'alā al-ḥaqq).*[70] He also takes the phrase *"laysū sawā'an"* (yet they are not all alike) to be an independent general statement describing the two groups within the People of the Book, and the rest of the verse as another statement referring to a particular group of people.[71] Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the word *qā'imah,* meaning *'ādilah,* was debatable. Whereas some traditionists had understood the term *qā'imah* as a reference to those who firmly hold to the Book of God and follow its contents, others have stated that *qā'imah* means those who are loyal or obey (*qānitah, muṭī'ah*).[72] Responding to this debate, al-Ṭabarī insists that the true interpretation of the term *qā'imah* in the context of the verse is: among the *ahl al-kitāb* are a group who hold firmly to the Book of God in steadfast adherence to it, and to a firm commitment to its admonitions as well as what the Prophet had described (*min ahl al-kitāb jamā'ah mu'taṣimah bikitābi llāh mutamassikah bihi, thābitah 'alā l-'amal bimā fihi wamā sanna lahum Rasūlu llāh.*[73]

The other exegetes coming after al-Ṭabarī tend to agree with his opinion to some extent, either concerning the occasion of revelation or the meaning of the verse. However, al-Ṭūsī, tried to explain the phrase *laysū sawā'an*

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[70] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 122.

[71] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 118.

[72] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 123.

[73] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* 7: 124.

in the sense of the inequality and superiority of the faithful *ummah* vis-a-vis its unfaithful counterpart *(lā tastawī ummah hādiyah wa ummah ḍāllah).*[74] On the other hand, al-Zamakhsharī supported al-Ṭabarī's contention that the pronoun implied by the *ū* of *laysū* refers to a different group of *ahl al-kitāb,* namely, the righteous group or the People of the Book who stand upright (*ummah qā'imah*). This explanation is based on the meaning of other Qur'ānic verses bearing the same style such as "enjoining what is good" which was used to explain "you were the best *ummah*" in sūra 3:110. According to Zamakhsharī, the righteous community is a just and upright community and hence must be a reference to those members of the *ahl al-kitāb* who have converted to Islam.[75] He also argues that the contents of the verse divide *ahl al-kitāb* into two groups: those who were touched by the Qur'ān and prayed to God and those who did not convert to Islam, did not recite the Qur'ān and did not pray. Moreover, al-Zamakhsharī quotes a report on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd stating that one day the Prophet went out late to perform the *'ishā'* prayer, and as he went into the mosque said: "No followers of (other) religions are remembering God at this hour (the time of *'ishā'* prayer) except you, and then he recited this verse."[76] Accordingly, al-Zamakhsharī declares that the previous Qur'ānic acclaim can only be addressed to those *ahl al-kitāb* who have become Muslims.

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[74] al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 2:563.

[75] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1:402.

[76] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* 1:402.

The classical period defined the good people among the People of the Book as those Jews who had converted to Islam. Nonetheless, modern exegetes continue to debate this issue. Muḥammad 'Abduh divides *ahl al-kitāb* into two categories: those who believe (a very small number) and those who are *fāsiq* or vicious (the majority of the *ahl al-kitāb*). To support his opinion, he cites a tradition on the authority of Qatādah mentioning that not all [People of the Book] are lost; indeed, in the eyes of God, there remain some good people [among the People of the Book] (*laysa kullu l-qawmi halak qad kāna li llāhi fihim baqiyyah*).[77] Moreover, when commenting on the phrase *ummah qā'imah,* he quotes al-Rāzī's opinion that there are two types of *ahl al-kitāb:* 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām and his companions, and all people from other religions whom God gave the Book. Thus, based on this opinion, Muslims can be included in the term "People of the Book."[78] Consequently, 'Abduh criticizes the majority of Qur'ān exegetes who hesitate to describe *ahl al-kitāb* as believers in God and people who do good deeds, even though such a description is clearly mentioned in the Qur'ān. Subsequently, 'Abduh explains that this Qur'ānic injunction indicates that God has only a single religion, revealed to all the prophets and that those who accept it with submissiveness, practice it with sincere devotion, command people to perform good deeds and forbid them from practicing evil are the truly virtuous people.[79]

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[77] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 2:59.

[78] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 2:59.

[79] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* 2:59.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī supports the above-mentioned opinions. He also argues that the phrase 'from the People of the Book' (*min ahli l-kitābi*) denotes the People of the Book mentioned in this verse who are not a single group enjoying the same position.[80] Rather, some were good, acted rightly according to the principle of monotheism, while others were not.[81] According to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the true meaning of the debated phrase *'ummah qā'imah'* is to incorporate the whole, which are: those who are consistent in the command of God, those who are just, and those who possess the straight path, and he mentions that 'the Book and the upright action' refers to those who are consistent in faith and loyalty.[82] However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not provide any comments on the good people among the *ahl al-kitāb*.

We have learned from these Qur'ānic verses and the responses of the Muslim exegetes to *ahl al-kitāb*, particularly in their interpretations of sūra 3:64, 113, 114 and 115 that there is a growing feeling among Muslim exegetes that the concept of *ahl lal-kitāb* has scope for wider applications. Mohammed Arkoun has suggested a convincing methodology for transforming the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* into a more universal concept of the Societies of the Book. It is, I believe, a challenge to debate this concept in the light of inter-faith dialogue in this multireligious, pluralistic world.

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[80] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 3:385.

[81] al-Ṭabāṭaba'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 3:385.

[82] al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, 3:385.

CHAPTER III

AHL AL-KITĀB: A QUR'ĀNIC INVITATION TO INTER-FAITH CO-OPERATION

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):64, 113, 114 and 115 of the Qur'ān suggest a concession that good people exist among *ahl al-kitāb.* This scriptural recognition affords Muslims a theological basis of approach to people of other religions, those regarded by the Qur'ān as *ahl al-kitāb.* In the foregoing chapter, we discussed this issue as it pertains to Jews and Christians, with possible extension to the adherents of other world religions. This theological foundation has acquired new relevance in our religiously pluralist world today, bringing fresh hope that all people of faith will find a common destiny.[1] In this thesis, the term "People of the Book" will be taken in its widest possible sense, embracing all those peoples among whom prophets were raised in the past, and no community was without its share of prophets.[2] If this Qur'ānic concept is of universal import, it should apply to every faith. However, for the purpose of this study, the present author will limit the scope of the current discussion to relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims throughout Islamic history, and to the Qur'ān's attitude toward these specific People of the Book, but in the light of religious pluralism.

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[1] Charis Waddy, "The People of the Book," 199.

[2] Dawud O.S. Noibi, " 'O People of the Book!'," 47.

A. *Ahl al-Kitāb* and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism

Much has been said concerning the phenomenon of pluralism. As a new theme and a new reality, it poses an interesting challenge to the followers of all religions. The term "pluralism" signifies heterogeneity. It presupposes an environment where world politics, economy and finance play an essential part in determining peoples' regional, national and international destiny.[3] In practice, a global network has come into being which allows economists to speak of a world society and sociologists of a world civilization. Both suggest a field of interaction in which every sphere of activity is involved, either directly or indirectly.[4] Yet a world civilization coming into being in a technical sense in no way implies a single world culture, religion or even aesthetic sense. A world civilization can include a multiplicity of cultures and religions.

Commenting on the phenomenon of religious pluralism, Wilfred C. Smith states that "future historians will look back upon the twentieth century not primarily for its scientific achievements but as the century of the coming-together of peoples, when all mankind for the first time became one community,"[5] and united in one world history.[6]

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[3] Hans Küng, "World Peace--World Religions--World Ethic," in *Islam: Challenge for Christianity,* edited by Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994) 130.

[4] Hans Küng, "World Peace," 130.

[5] See Wilfred C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither--and Why?" in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. by Mircea Eliade and J.M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959) 33.

A religiously pluralistic world is also one where faith is more personal. Therefore, the acknowledgement of God has become a personal prerogative.[7] No longer is it self-evident for Islam, any more than for other religions, that people will automatically follow their parents' beliefs. However, no one can justifiably claim to believe what he believes without reason, any more than one can love one's spouse without knowing why.[8]

Every civilization needs some degree of unity and consensus on norms and values. Philosophy and religion transmit the norms and ideals which the members of any society need to understand one another.[9] And the mutual understanding of different religious communities is of critical importance to a pluralistic society.[10] Social harmony can be achieved through multidialogue.

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[6] Owen C. Thomas, ed. *Attitudes Toward Other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 7. In the beginning of his first chapter, Peter Ipema quotes this idea to introduce the emerging of global society. See Peter Ipema, "The Islam Interpretations of Duncan B. MacDonald, Samuel M. Zwemer, A Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred C. Smith: An Analytical Comparison and Evaluation" Ph.D. Dissertation, Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, 1971.

[7] Muhammad Abdul-Ra'uf, "Judaism and Christianity in the Perspective of Islam," in Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faith* (Herndon: International Insitute of Islamic Thought, 1991) 25.

[8] Hendrik Vroom, *No Other Gods: Christian Belief in Dialogue with Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.* Translated by Lucy Jansen (Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eermans Publishing Company, 1996) 2.

[9] Hendrik Vroom, *No Other Gods,* 3.

[10] Hendrik Vroom, *No Other Gods,* 3.

The pluralist vision found in each religion, though given less emphasis than self-understanding, needs to be reactivated now more than ever.[11] It is perhaps more clearly evident in Islam, with its designation of Jews and Christians as fellow *ahl al-kitāb*. The Qur'ān insists that "to God belong the East and the West: withersoever ye turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-pervading, all knowing,"[12] and that "God doth guide whom He will to His Light."[13]

In the Jewish tradition, the Hebrew Scriptures likewise exhibit universal and pluralistic features. According to these scriptures, the world begins with God's creation of the progenitor of humankind. Much later in time, God admonishes the children of Israel to serve humanity. It is mentioned in Isaiah 49:6 that "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."[14] Again, a pluralistic conception is implicit in Malachi 1:11, "My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among nations,"[15] This pluralism which becomes more explicit in the oft-cited Rabbinic dictum that "the righteous of all

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[11] John Hick, "Trinity and Incarnation in the Light of Religious Pluralism," in John Hick and Edmund S. Meltzer, eds. *Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989) 198.

[12] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):115.

[13] *Sūrat al-Nūr* (24):35.

[14] *The Holy Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: International Bible Society, 1993) 656.

[15] *The Holy Bible*, NIV, 852.

nations will have a place in the world to come."[16] A theological basis for pluralistic life is thus discernible in Jewish teachings.

In Christianity, a pluralistic conception is recognizable. One can find the theological basis of its pluralism in John 1:9, stating: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."[17] According to John Hick, "some of the church Fathers regarded the 'rightest of all nations' as in effect Christians without knowing it -- in Karl Rahner's contemporary phrase, 'anonymous Christians'."[18] Moreover, modern Christian theologians assert the independent reality of salvation within the other great world traditions.[19] From this, we infer that Jews, Christians and Muslims have their own theological basis for responding to the phenomenon of religious pluralism, and all are positive. It is thus incumbent upon them to translate this concept into action.

Harold Coward suggests that a level of "religious literacy" is essential to living together in a pluralistic world. It furnishes the foundation on which people of faiths can approach each other with sincere tolerance.[20] Harold Coward introduces three basic aspects to respecting religious belief in a way that promotes

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[16] John Hick, "Trinity and Incarnation," 198.

[17] *The Holy Bible*, NIV, 942.

[18] John Hick, "Trinity and Incarnation," 198.

[19] John Hick, "Trinity and Incarnation," 198.

[20] Michael Bird, "A Response to Harold Coward," in M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1989) 19.

such tolerance:[21] first is the necessity of a deep personal commitment to a particular religion. This point emphasizes the "bottom line" of one's religious experience which covers full commitment. Therefore, being a Muslim for instance, one should be fully-committed to the Islamic *sharī'ah* and should know the universal messages of his Scripture. Consequently, there is no "half" or "maybe" Muslim. By committing oneself to a certain religion, one can find that one's religious teaching does recognize the existence of others. From personal commitment, then, one can expect increased tolerance. The latter is critical to acceptance and moral compassion. Religious tolerance does not suggest that committed-believers should give up critical awareness; on the contrary, it should stimulate them to a constructive critique of others in a good manner. This is why people are warned to realize that modern pluralism is not something to fear but an opportunity for creative growth.[22] A careful study of each religion shows that the most creative periods were those marked by the challenge of pluralism. The creative tension generated by the experience of true difference has often been the catalyst for new insight and religious development. It was in the midst of the Meccan admixture of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Manicheans and others that Islam through its Prophet Muḥammad emerged.

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[21] Harold Coward, "Can Religions Live Together in Today's World? Intolerance and Tolerance in Religious Pluralism," in M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Pluralism,* 15-18.

[22] Harold Coward, "Can Religions Live Together in Today's World? Intolerance and Tolerance in Religious Pluralism," in M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Pluralism,* 15.

In a pluralist world, one inevitably has to encounter the beliefs of others. The wish for a single world religion is fanciful and the fear of the contrary unrealistic.[23] The main reason why religious pluralism might be a challenge to the adherents of religion is the fear that this will endanger one's claim to finality and absoluteness.[24] Many people fear that an affirmation of religious pluralism will lead to a vicious relativism and, finally, to a self-defeating skepticism. They see it as a viewpoint that will undermine their religious commitment.[25]

The reactions to religious pluralism may be classified into three major attitudes: first, there is the view that the members of other religions are rivals to be rejected and converted; second, that other religions are parallel and that, therefore, one should honour them; and third, that one ought to recognize others with greater openness.[26] William Ernest Hocking and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are two illustrious examples, of contemporary thinkers who emphasize that religion is universal and inherent in all humankind.[27] As the Japanese express their openness to other religions:

Though paths for climbing a mountain

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[23] Hans Küng, "World Peace, 130

[24] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) 20.

[25] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue,* 20.

[26] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue,* 21.

[27] See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), particularly Chapter 1 and 8. See also William Ernest Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1940) 26 and 265-66.

From its foot differ,
We look up at the same moon
Above a lofty peak.[28]

These diverse attitudes toward other religions should be seen as positively capable of producing the self-consciousness to understand and to learn from each other,[29] in essence understanding other beliefs the way their adherents understand them.

Being the youngest of the world religions, Islam had to acknowledge and live with the other religions of mankind. It did so by recognizing Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and others as the creatures of God. As a reaffirmation of the Semitic religious tradition, Islam had to correlate itself to other Semitic religions. It had to find its connection with Judaism and Christianity and it stood in closest proximity to them.[30]

If we observe life in the world today, we might discern at least three great religious "river systems," with their sources surpassing the individual streams -- the nations and cultures of the world. First, the religions of Semitic origin of prophetic character, they always begin with a contrast between God and human beings. Second are the religions of Indian origin: they essentially have a mystical orientation, tending towards a unionist conception. The early Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, are the major branches. Third, the religions of the

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[28] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue,* 22.

[29] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology,* 154.

[30] Muhammad Abdul-Ra'uf, "Judaism and Christianity," 24.

Chinese tradition. These are characterized by the key ideas of wisdom and harmony and are represented by Confucianism and Taoism.[31]

Within this categorization, Islam is of course with the other Semitic religions -- Judaism and Christianity. As the late Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli of the Vatican stated, these three great Semitic traditions are heirs to the religion of Abraham, "the father of our faith."[32] This link may be explored through their respective teachings on monetheism. Their histories are linked by divine purpose, mentioned in *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3):81 as follows:

> Behold! God took the covenant of the Prophets, saying: "I give you a book and wisdom; then comes to you an apostle, confirming what is with you, do ye believe in him and render him help." God said: "Do you agree, and take this my Covenant as binding on you?" They said: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.

Here the whole history of revelation may be seen at a glance and internal links brought out by way of a covenant handed down by prophets at the dawn of history. This covenant binds those prophets to confirm other prophets who followed, for they have prepared the way for subsequent messages from God.[33]

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[31] Hans Kung, "World Peace," 130

[32] Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, "The Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim Faiths: Trialogue of Three Abrahamic Faiths," in Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991) 1. This keynote address was delivered by the Cardinal in the convention of The Muslim-Jewish-Christian Conference organized by the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in New York, 1979.

[33] Ahmed Shafaat, "The Abrahamic *Ummah*," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 189.

Leonard Swidler has proposed four convincing reasons why the three great traditions -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- are bound together. First, all three religions come from the same root and claim Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. "The historical, cultural, and religious traditions all flow out of one original source, an *Urquelle*."[34] Second, they are religions of ethical monotheism. They claim that there is only one loving, just, creator God who is the source, sustainer, and goal of all things. God expects all human beings, as images of God, to live in love and justice. In other words, belief in one God has ethical implications for oneself, other people, and the world in general. Third, the three religions are historical religions; "they believe God acts through human history and communicates through historical events and particular human persons" -- especially Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad.[35] Three events illustrate this well: the Prophet Muḥammad's migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina in Islam, the crucifixion in Christianity, and the exodus in Judaism. Fourth, these three traditions constitute a religion of revelations; God has communicated religious teachings through particular persons for the enlightenment of humankind. "In all three religions this revelation has two special vehicles: prophets and scriptures."[36] It may be explained that God has sent the Prophet Muḥammad with the Qur'ān to the Muslims, Jesus with the Gospel to the Christians, and Moses with the Torah to

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[34] See Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: the Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 122.

[35] Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute,* 122.

[36] Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute,* 122-23.

the Jews. That is why the Qur'ān uses the term *ahl al-kitāb* to include Jews and Christians in the religion of divine scripture. Mahmoud Ayoub is of the opinion that the term *ahl al-kitāb* suggests certain equality of faith among all three traditions.[37]

Therefore, there is a theological foundation for relations among the adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to be maintained. In the last part of his essay, Hans Kng, a Christian theologian from Tübingen, correctly assessed relations between Islam and Christianity by citing a German handbook of the Protestant Church entitled, *Christen und Muslime im Gespräch* (published by J. Micksch and M. Mildenberger, 1982) as follows:[38]

> The most important point of all is that Christians and Muslims live in the same world and have to prove their faith. They will not always react in the same way to all the challenges of this world. Yet despite all the differences, both are obliged by their faith to live responsibly before God and to serve the human community. In full respect for one another, they cannot fail to provide evidence of their faith for each other (German edition, pp. 12ff).

Pignodeli, Leonard Swidler and Hans Kng have emphasized the importance of relations among the followers of religions in order to work for harmony and peace in the world. How can the followers of the Abrahamic faith condemn each other if

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[37] See Mahmoud Ayoub, "*Dhimmah* in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5 (1983): 178. In this article, Ayoub studies the designation of Jews and Christians as *ahl al-dhimmah*. The study shows that "*dhimmah* as a concept was first used to designate moral and spiritual relations among communities of faith, but was later reduced to a mere name or designation of subordinate communities" (see his article on p. 172).

[38] See Hans Kng "Christianity and World Religions: The Dialogue with Islam as One Model," *The Muslim world* 77 (1987): 95.

religion is destined to guide people to the same God, allowing for satisfactory responses to the essential problems of contemporary life. In order to avoid conflict among the adherents of religion, universal teachings ought to be favored over theological difference and conflict.

Interreligious relations can find more complete fulfillment if Jews, Christians and Muslims can come closer together as a single *ummah,* worshipping the one true living God in their own ways but living in peace.[39] An open Muslim *ummah,* whilst globally indivisible, will accept and respect diversity. Historically, this *ummah* existed during the Medinan period, after the Prophet called on people of diverse tribes and faiths to be bound together in the unity of the *ummah.* This unity later found expression in the Constitution of Medina.[40]

Throughout its history, Islam has progressed within a multiconfessional world, encountering pagan communities as well as Jews and Christians. In the Arabian Peninsula, there were several scattered Jewish communities, and some

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[39] Ahmed Shafaat, "The Abrahamic Ummah," 195.

[40] Christian W. Troll, "The Qur'ānic View of Other Religions: Grounds for Living Together," *Islam and the Modern Age* 18 (1987): 17. Discussions on *ummah* in the Constitution of Medina can be found in: Arent Jan Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina,* with an excursus *Muhammad's Constitution of Medina* by Julius Wellhausen, edited and translated by Wolfgang Behn (Freiburg im Breisgau: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975) 129-139; Uri Ubin, "The Constitution of Medina, Some Notes" (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986) 5-23; Frederick Mathewson Denny, "*Ummah* in the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1977) 39-47; Abdullah al-Ahsan, *Ummah or Nation, Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Leicester: U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 1992), especially Chapter One; A. Guillaume, *Muḥammad, a Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), particularly Part Three.

people were at least nominally Christians.[41] Meccan merchants used to trade in Gaza and Damascus in the region of the Byzantine empire, which was Orthodox Christians.[42] They also had contact with the Abyssinian or Ethiopian empire which was Monophysite Christian.[43]

The Prophet was born, moreover, in a society deeply involved in the political, religious, and economic rivalries between the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. Arabia was an important trade route for goods coming from the Far East and Africa, and had strategic importance for all concerned. Around fifty years earlier, a Christian Monophysite army from Abyssinia, allied with Byzantium, defeated and replaced the last Jewish kingdom in Southern Arabia allied with the Persians.[44]

At the time of Muḥammad's birth, some Meccans had abondoned Arabian polytheism to adopt monotheism in a Jewish, Christian, or nonsectarian form. These individuals were known as *ḥanīfs,* implying Jewish or Christian origin. From the Qur'ān and other evidence, it is clear that Meccans were conversant with the general principles of Judaism and Chrsitianity and knew many

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[41] Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985) 46.

[42] W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today: A Contribution to Dialogue* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 1.

[43] W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity,* 1.

[44] Gordon Newby, "Muslim," 424. See also Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 1: 187-188. And F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 83-84.

details of their worship, practice, and belief. Muḥammad met Christians and Jews on several occasions. At its most basic level, two experiences of the Prophet Muḥammad's meeting with the Christians lay the foundation for Muslim-Christian relations. The first occurred when the young Muḥammad, accompanied by his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, went on a trading mission to Syria. Half way to its destination, the caravan stopped near the hermitage of the Christian monk Baḥīra. The monk recognized the boy, who bore the scriptural seal of prophethood between his shoulder-blades.[45] The second encounter was Muḥammad's meeting with Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian monk in Mecca, who affirmed that Muḥammad's prophethood was based on the Christian Scripture.[46] Ibn Isḥāq reports that a Christian uncle of Khadīja recognized his mystical experience in the cave of Ḥirā' as divine revelation.[47]

The significance of these two stories lies in their implication that the Christian role is not to teach or correct or even share knowledge; rather, the Christian role is to confirm the Prophet's fulfillment of scripture.[48] In Islamic tradition, Baḥīra represents Judeo-Christian Scripture as, simply, a prelude to the

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[45] See Ahmad von Denffer, *Christians in the Qur'ān and the Sunna* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1979) 7-10. See also "Baḥīra," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 1960 ed.

[46] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977) 40-41.

[47] Bert F. Breiner, "Christianity and Islam," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 1:280.

[48] Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, 1990) 1: 6.

coming of Muḥammad. While in Christian polemical writings, the same figure is used to denounce the Qur'ān as fraudulent. Baḥīra was portrayed as a heretic who taught Muḥammad all that is true in the Qur'ān, while imbuing it with much that is erroneous.[49]

The migration (*hijra*) of the Prophet's community to Abyssinia provides us with vital evidence of the practical nature of classical relations. It is to Abyssinia that the Muslim community fled when faced with Quraysh's persecution. Ibn Hishām reports that the Prophet and his early followers believed that Muslims would be safe, both from persecution and from the danger of apostasy, in a country ruled by Christians. According to Ibn Sa'd whose report on the *hijra* to Abyssinia is much shorter, the *muhājirūn* affirmed that in this Christian country they were allowed to practice their faith and live free of harassment.[50] Ibn Sa'd claims that upon the second wave of migration to Abyssinia, Quraysh sent the Negus a message requesting the return of the refugees to the Ḥijāz. In a moving speech the leader of the *muhājirūn* Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib pleaded his community's case by expounding on the Prophet's religion before an assembly of Abyssinian clergymen. A passege from *sūrat Maryam* was then recited to the Negus by the Muslims, leading him to remark: "Of a truth, this and what Jesus brought have come from the same niche."[51] When the crucial question surrounding the nature of Jesus was put before the Muslims, they openly declared

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[49] "Baḥīra," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 1960 ed.

[50] Ahmad von Denffer, *Christians in the Qur'ān and the Sunna,* 11.

Jesus to be "the servant of God, and His apostle, and His Spirit, and His word, which He cast into Mary, the blessed virgin." The Negus, taking up a stick from the ground, replied: "By God, Jesus, Son of Mary, does not exceed what you have said by length of this stick."[52] When the Negus of Abyssinia sent a delegation to the Prophet, *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):85 was revealed. It reads:

> Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "we are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.

Ahmad von Denffer employs a historical contextual analysis to interpret the verse. In his view, the passage does not connote an immutable judgment characterising Christians as being nearest to Muslims. Rather, he argues, the *tafsīr* indicates a very particular group of Christians that is here referred to, namely, a delegation sent by the Negus of Abyssinia, consisting of twelve persons, seven of them known as *ruhbān* and five *qissīsūn* [53] (*wa kāna minhum sab'atu ruhbānin wa khamsatu qissīsīn*).[54] It is also worth noting, however, that *sūrat Āl Imrān* (3): 199 informs us that among the *ahl al-kitāb* are those who believe in God and will not

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[51] Ahmad von Denffer, *Christians in the Qur'ān and the Sunna,* 12.

[52] A. Guillaume, *Muḥammad,* 150-154.

[53] *Qissīs* (priest) might be a foreign word, possibly Abyssinian rather than Syriac. It might refer to the Abyssinian Christians. See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān,* 268, footnote 790.

[54] See Ahmad von Denffer, *Christians in the Qur'ān and the Sunna,* 13. See also Yaḥyā Muḥammad ibn Sumādiḥ al-Tujībī, *Mukhtaṣar min Tafsīr al-Imām al-Ṭabarī,* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Ta'līf wa al-Nashr, 1970/1390) 1: 152-153.

forsake the signs of God for a miserable gain. In sūras 3: 113, 114 and 115 good people among the *ahl al-kitāb* are also recognized. However, following the precepts of classical exegesis, Ahmad von Denffer argues that one cannot interpret *ahl al-kitāb* to signify a select group of righteous believers among the Christians (or a party of *ahl al-kitāb*) for although this verse is said to refer the delegation of the Negus, it is arguable that they are mentioned here because, as al-Ṭabarī puts it: "They had already believed (*wa qad kāna āmana*)."[55] It is difficult to maintain Denffer's interpretation in this case, since he only cites al-Tabarī's interpretation from al-Tujībī's summary of Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* (*al-Mukhtaṣar*). In Chapter Two, the present author has argued that good people exist among the *ahl al-kitāb* based on six exegetical works, including al-Ṭabarī's.

Another early Muslim-Christian relation might be illustrated by the incident of the Christian delegation from Najrān having gone to the Prophet's mosque in Medina. This Christian delegation was permitted free use of the mosque for their prayers by the Prophet. Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. al-Zubayr reports:[56]

> When they came to Medina they came into the Apostle's mosque as he prayed the afternoon prayer clad in Yamanī garments, cloaks, and mantles, with elegance of men of B. al-Ḥārith b. Ka'b. The Prophet's companions who saw them that day said that they never saw their like in any deputation that came afterwards. The time of their prayers having come, they stood and prayed in the Apostle's mosque, and he said that they were to be left to do so. They prayed towards the East.

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[55] Ahmad von Denffer, *Christians in the Qur'ān and the Sunna*, 13. See also al-Tujībī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 2: 97.

[56] A. Guillaume, *Muḥammad*, 271.

Although later in life Muḥammad debated with a Christian delegation from Najrān about the doctrine of Incarnation, this delegation was invited to pray in the Prophet's mosque.[57] Permitting the Christians to pray in the mosque remains one of Muḥammad's gracious, but enigmatic gestures. The event remains, nonetheless, an illustrative example of early Muslim-Christian rapport. The Qur'ān itself credits Christians with a solid theological foundation, particularly, where it addresses the place of Christianity among other monotheistic faiths.

Muḥammad understood well that his prophetic mission was the continuation and fulfillment of Jewish and Christian biblical tradition in the form of *tawḥīd.* Therefore Muḥammad had a great respect for those traditions, illustrated by the fact that Muslims prayed in the direction of Jerusalem when he was in Mecca. After his migration to Medina, the Prophet ordered the direction of prayer to be changed to Mecca, where the Ka'ba is situated. But the Jews did not want to receive this command and refused to accept Muḥammad as their political leader of the one community of God.[58]

Having seen this event, the associaters (*mushrikūn*) as well as Jews disliked Muḥammad. The former hated Muḥammad for his declaration to fight against idolatry, while the latter were angered by Muḥammad's change of the direction of prayer. The Prophet was firm with the idolaters, but much kinder

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[57] Hani Fakhouri, "Christianity and Islam," 1:280.

[58] J. A. Hutchinson, *Paths of Faith* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981) 339.

with the Jews and the Christians. The latter were not idolaters, but the followers of previous prophets or adherents of some form of revealed, scripturally-based religion.

His attitude toward Jews and Christians can be seen from the story of his life in the Meccan period, when the Prophet Muḥammad was accepted neither by the idolaters, nor by the Jews and Christians, whom he referred to as *"al-aḥzāb* or sectarians, partisans, people whose views disrupt the line of prophetic succession."[59] His only demand, however, was that the Jews implement the Torah and live by its standards; and that Christians live by the *Injīl.* However, the followers of both traditions were still invited to Islām. During the Medinan period, the attribute of "sectarians" was finally dropped, since both Jews and Christians were recognized as "community" (*ummah*). Although they were religious, but socially and culturally autonomous, the Qur'ān invited them to Islam using the term *ahl al-kitāb.*[60] In 622 C.E. Muḥammad promulgated the "Constitution of Medina," which was signed by all parties including the Jews. But later, in the course of three major battles that took place between the Muslims and the Meccans, the Jews decided to support the Meccans. That is why the Qur'ān constantly accuses the Jews of breaking their pact and violating their promises. The Prophet finally expelled one of the three Jewish tribes from Medina.[61]

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[59] Fazlur Rahman, "Islam's Attitude Toward Judaism," *The Muslim World* 72 (1982): 4. See also Appendix II of Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994) 164.

[60] Fazlur Rahman, "Islam's Attitude Toward Judaism," 5 and *idem, Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* 165.

In the thirteen and half centuries thereafter, the relationship between Muslims and Jews was fruitfully cooperative. There was cultural-symbiosis,[62] a give-and-take co-operation at the socio-cultural level in Baghdād and Spain. Muslims, Christians and Jews produced a brilliant multinational and multifaith culture which was to contribute materially to the renaissance of Europe.[63] Good relations existed between Muslims -- especially traders, sufis -- and the followers of other religions in India, Burma, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Sumatra and Java), resulting in the spread of Islam in these areas.[64] Between the 16th and 19th centuries, there was more tension between Muslims and Christians. The expansion of Western sea trade demanded frontier settlement in the most important regions of the Muslim world. The Islamic Moghul empire had dominated India, most of which was Hindu. The expansion of Islam into Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Central Asia proceeded apace with many encounters with the religions of those areas. From the 19th century onward, there were other periods of tension, mostly political in nature, between Islamic states and the expanding West. During these centuries, there were Muslim conflict with Christians, Hindus, and Jews. And

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[61] Fazlur Rahman, "Islam's Attitude Toward Judaism," 6. See also F.E Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam,* 192 and 222-224.

[62] Cultural symbiosis also means: living together to the mutual advantage of both parties. An elaborative study on the Jewish-Muslim cultural symbiosis is found in Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) 1-14.

[63] Fazlur Rahman, "Islam's Attitude Toward Judaism," 6-7.

[64] Quoted in Harold Coward, *Pluralism, Challenge to World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985) 48.

Islam has had to defend itself against nonreligious ideologies such as Marxism, socialism, communism and so forth. This militancy within Islam was a response to both secularism, and the militancy of other religions.[65] This cursory overview should prove that no single religion can live in isolation without interacting with other religions.

Today, religious pluralism demands mutual understanding if harmony is to be achieved. In modern times, religious pluralism has stimulated serious debate among scholars in religious studies.[66] However, it is also true that there are huge cultural gaps separating the different religious communities. This, in turn, produces misunderstanding and tends to disrupt inter-faith dialogue. Sometimes, the followers of a particular religion -- Muslims are no exception -- misinterpret their own scriptures. This does not mean that there is no concept of absoluteness in Islam. The Qur'ān nevertheless, offers a highly appreciative outlook of the others.

The bearers of the Qur'ān, therefore, need to reconstruct their understanding closer in line with the Qur'ānic message and be ready for fresh, new interpretations of their revelation. The Qur'ānic message concerning Jewish, Christian and Muslim relations should be drawn from the formative context of the Meccan and Medinan periods. It must be understood from within the overall framework of the Qur'ānic message and the broad principles of its moral

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[65] Harold Coward, *Pluralism, Challenge,* 48.

[66] Joseph C. McLelland, "A Theory of Relativity for Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 1 (1991): 1.

teachings.[67] If the tenets of the Qur'ān are universal and transcend historical time in all circumstances, then, the interpetation of the Qur'ān, particularly its approach to other religions, should go beyond historical contingency.

B. The Qur'ān's Pluralist Vision

The Qur'ān articulates its pluralist vision in many verses, for example, those which refer to Jews and Christians as *ahl al-kitāb*. Indeed, the Qur'ān promises a degree of religious toleration that is much needed today in both East and West. The Qur'ānic tolerance of others as legitimate socio-religious communities is recognizable from its acceptance of the spirituality of others and even their salvation.

The Qur'ān's pluralist vision is discernible in the verses which criticize the narrow religious exclusivism, which appears to have characterized the Jewish and the Christians communities Muḥammad encountered in the Ḥijāz.[68] According to the Qur'ān, many Jews and Christians in Arabia at that time believed that they have a special relationship with God, that their covenant with Him elevates their

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[67] Syed Vahiduddin, *Islamic Experiences in Contemporary Thought*. Edited by Christian W. Troll (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986). See also Christian W. Troll, "The Qur'ānic View of Other Religions: Grounds For Living Together," *Islam and the Modern Age* 18 (1987): 15.

[68] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997) 158.

status above all other people.[69] The Qur'ān also takes them to task for claiming that they are the children of God and His beloved,[70] and for considering themselves pure.[71] It also assails some People of the Book for laying claim to the afterlife, to the exclusion of other people,[72] that the fire of hell would only touch them for a limited number of days,[73] and that everything will be forgiven them.[74] The Qur'ān, furthermore, takes a dim view of the insistence that their creeds are the only ones of consequence. While the Qur'ān does not accuse the Christians of claiming to be free of any moral accountability in their behaviour towards non-Christians, they too, according to the Qur'ān, held that they enjoyed a special status of beloved with God.[75]

The Qur'ān, however, suggests bridges of understanding with the followers of other religions. Of course, it does so by inviting all people to Islam. It seeks to liberate mankind from the vain divisions of race[76] and ethnocentricism.[77]

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[69] *Sūrat al-Jum'ah* (62):6.

[70] *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):20.

[71] *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (4):49.

[72] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):94.

[73] *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3):24.

[74] *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (7):169.

[75] *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):18.

[76] *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* (49):13.

[77] Anis Ahmad, "Toward Cooperation among Peoples of Different World Religions" in Abdul Monir Yaacob *et. al.* eds., *Towards a Positive Islamic*

Although universal, it tries to create a closer relationship with other religions. The Qur'ān does not hold that acceptance and exchange are conditional on being Muslim. Still, there is need to dynamize the divine concept of *ahl al-kitāb.*

Although the Qur'ān specifically recognizes the People of the Book as legitimate socio-religious communities, Muslim scholars later extended this recognition to various other religious communities living within the borders of the expanding Islamic domain.[78] The Qur'ān devotes considerable attention to the associaters and the People of the Book as two distinct categories. However, there are several problems in focusing on the People of the Book as a distinct contemporary religious group, in the belief that this is the same referent as that in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ānic position on the People of the Book, and even its understanding as to who constitutes the People of the Book, went through several phases. There is agreement that the term has always applied to the Jews and Christians whom Muḥammad encountered during his mission. The Qur'ān naturally dealt only with the behaviour and beliefs of those of the People of the Book with whom the early Muslim community was in actual social contact.[79] Therefore, to employ the Qur'ānic category of People of the Book in a sweeping

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World-View: Malaysian and American Perceptions (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia, n.d.) 81.

[78]Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism,* 159-60.

[79]The history, stages and nature of this encounter have been discussed extensively by both traditional and contemporary scholarship. W. Montgomery Watt gave a brief but comprehensive analysis; see his translation of al-Ṭabarī's work *The History of Al-Ṭabarī': An Annotated Translation,* Vol. VI - Muḥammad at Mecca (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); *idem, Muhammad at Mecca;* and *idem, Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

manner which identifies all Jews and Christians in contemporary society is to avoid the historical realities of Medinan society, as well as the theological diversity among both earlier and contemporary Christians and Jews.[80] To avoid this simplistic generalization requires a clear assessment of those Christian and Jewish beliefs which the early Muslims had encountered. Despite the paucity of information in this area, one cannot search for a group with corresponding doctrines today.[81]

The Qur'ānic vision of *ahl al-kitāb* rests on the unity of the Biblical heritage. It holds the promise of a common struggle to bring humanity to a state of justice and peace. The Qur'ānic dialogue, both critical and supportive of Jews and Christians, presupposes a framework of free and equal communication which demands a socio-political structure capable of sustaining it. A theocratic state presupposes political inequality among the Peoples of the Book, and hence undermines the Qur'ānic perspective on the "dialogical" relationship among the Abrahamic faiths. Thus it is necessary to look elsewhere for models which do justice to the Qur'ānic vision. What is required instead are justice, peace, and service.[82]

The Qur'ānic invitation to interfaith dialogue among Jews, Christians and Muslims has only occasionally been needed in the history of their relations.

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[80] See for example *sūrāt an-Nisā'* (4):171-73 and *al-Mā'idah* (5):72-3.

[81] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān,* 152.

[82] See Hasan Askari, "Religion and State," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed. *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 187.

Very quickly the Qur'ānic appeal--"why confound ye truth with falsehood, and knowingly conceal the truth"-- came to be interpreted by Muslim exegetes as a reference to a wilfull falsification of Scripture (*taḥrīf*) by Jews and Christians. Whether the alleged falsification was literal *(lafẓī)* or interpretive *(ma'nawī),* it assumed pride of place in Muslim polemics againts Jews and Christians.[83]

Islamic scholars have presented a detailed analysis of the superior status of the Qur'ān in relation to other srciptures. Islam also maintains the idea of a prophetic succession from Adam through the Hebrew Bible and the Christian scriptures to Muḥammad and the Qur'ān.[84] The messages spoken by the different prophets-- Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others--all emanate from a single source called variously by the Qur'ān, the "Mother of the Book,"[85] and the "Hidden Book."[86] Because all the prophetic messages come from a single source, Muḥammad felt that it was incumbent on all people to believe all divine messages.[87] Thus, the Qur'ān registers Muḥammad's declaration to the effect that

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[83] Quoted by David Kerr from Utomo B., "The Concept of *Taḥrīf* in the Qur'ān and Muslim Exegesis," unpublished MA Thesis, Birmingham, 1982. See David Kerr, "The Prophet Mohammad in Christian Theological Perspective," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed. *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths,* 122.

[84] Harold Coward, "Can Religions Live Together in Today's World? Intolerance and Tolerance in Religious Pluralism," in M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1989) 6-7.

[85] *"Ummi l-kitāb," sūrat az-Zukhruf* (43):4.

[86] *"Kitābin maknūn," sūrat al-Wāqi'ah* (56):78.

[87] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994) 163-64.

he believes in the Torah and the Gospel, and "in whatever Book God may have revealed."[88]

In the Qur'ānic perspective, God's truth and guidance is not limited, but is universally available to other people. The Qur'ān clearly states that there is no nation wherein a warner has not come,[89] for every people a guide has been provided.[90] Furthermore, the word "*kitāb*" or "Book" is not always used to denote the Qur'ān but the totality of divine revelations.[91] Thus, in the Qur'ānic perspective, there is only one divine "Mother Book" in heaven, as it were, of which all the earthly scriptures are copies. However, according to Muslims, only the Qur'ān is considered to be complete and correct. Scholars who agree with this notion argue that scriptures which came down before the Qur'ān were abrogated (*"mansūkh"*) with the coming of the Qur'ān and that the preceding scriptures were later corrupted.[92] Scholars like Fazlur Rahman, however, reject the idea of abrogation. How can God's promise be abrogated, while other parts of the Qur'ān clearly affirm universality? This debate has been discussed in Chapter One.

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[88] *"Āmantu bimā anzala llāhu min kitābin," sūrat ash-Shūrā* (42):15.

[89] *Sūrat Fāṭir* (35):24.

[90] *Sūrat ar-Ra'd* (13):7.

[91] *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):213.

[92] See Harold Coward, "Can Religions Live Together in Today's World?," 7. See also Jacques Waardenburg, "World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam," 256.

Some modern Muslim thinkers have taken a defiant and analytical look at contemporary problems through the Qur'ān. Pakistani philosopher Fazlur Rahman, who until his death in 1988 was for many years at the University of Chicago, proposed a historical-critical method to understand the correct meaning of the Qur'ān. He argued that the text of the Qur'ān can only be understood in context.

> The Qur'ān is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia. ... It is literally God's response through Muhammad's mind (this latter factor has been radically underplayed by the Islamic orthodoxy) to a historic situation (a factor likewise drastically restricted by the Islamic orthodoxy).[93]

In addition, Fazlur Rahman denied that any particular interpretation of the Qur'ān can be unqualifiedly absolute. He argued that the Companions of the Prophet themselves interpreted the text of the Qur'ān in different ways. The Prophet himself also confirmed it.[94] Rahman further denied the necessity of accepting previously established interpretations of the Qur'ān, since truth is an ongoing process.[95] Hermeneutically speaking, there must be room for new interpretations which fulfill the need of human beings in the contemporary world. This unavoidably requires pluralistic conditions to be workable.

This opinion is supported by Sudanese Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāhā, whose thought is continued by his follower, Abdullahi Ahmed El-Naiem. Ṭāhā is of the opinion that the shift from the earlier principles of Mecca to the later ones

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[93] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 5-8.

[94] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 144.

of Medina is, in principle, reversible. The Meccan principles are fundamentally open, liberal and liberating, whereas the Medinan principles are specific and restrictive. The shift was made because under certain conditions both external and then internal, the Meccan principles could not yet be fully implemented in all their openness. They were the ideal, on the way to which Medina was but a waystation; "it is now time for the Muslims to leave the Medinan waystation and to move forward toward fulfilling the liberating Mecca ideal."[96] However, I do not think that the Medinan principle is less liberal than the Meccan one. It is all a matter of historical interpretation. In my view, Medinan principles are more suitable to be implemented in the modern era, with new interpretation. In Medina, there were many religious groups and the Prophet tried to accommodate them, even regarding the Jews as *ummah.*

Another futuristic thinker of the Qur'ān, Asaf A. A. Fyzee, the Indian Muslim, suggested that:

> For me it is clear that we cannot 'go back' to the Qur'ān. Rather, we must go forward with it. I want to understand the Qur'ān as the Arabs of the time of the Prophet did only in order to interpret it anew, in order to apply it to my living conditions and to believe in it insofar as it speaks to me as a human person of the twentieth century. [97]

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[95] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity,* 145.

[96] Abdullahi Ahmed El-Naiem, "A Modern Approach to Human Rights in Islam: Foundation and Implication for Africa," in *Human Rights and Development in Africa,* edited by Claude E. Welch Jr. and Ronald I. Meltzer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984) 75-89.

[97] Cited in Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute,* 127.

Thus, for him, a new interpretation of the Qur'ān is needed in order to provide a new outlook on contemporary problems.

Harold Coward has pointed out that the Muslims probably had a far greater knowledge of other religions than any other community during the Middle Ages and were certainly more "objective" than medieval Christians in their representations of other faiths.[98] Modern Muslims have better opportunities than did many of their forefathers to reformulate an enlightened response to other religions. The problem is that not all Muslims have practiced this tenet properly. The cause may have been their excessive attention to the legal aspects of Islam rather than its universal teachings. Moreover, their reading of the Qur'ān has been often unfair, arbitrarily taking certain verses to judge other religious communities rather than interpreting them contextually and harmonizing them with verses offering a more symphathetic view. This is, I believe, only one of many reasons why Muslims perceive the followers of other religious communities in a negative light.

The way that certain modern Muslim scholars read the Qur'ān can be a good example for Muslims to follow. Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī believes that Islam is the only religion which addresses itself to non-believers without first condemning them, and feels that its emphasis on works rather than faith illustrates its spiritual egalitarianism, since works have merit with God regardless of religious allegiances. Salvation is based on no more than such merit can earn.

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[98] Harold Coward, *Pluralism,* 48-49.

Judaism and Christianity have a special place in the Islamic scheme of things. Islam's acceptance of the Jewish prophets and of Jesus Christ has reduced every difference to a relatively minor variation of opinion due more to human capacity for comprehension than to God or the religion of God.[99]

Another modern Muslim reader of the Qur'ān, Fazlur Rahman, has discovered an egalitarian ethos in the Qur'ān, by referring to a passage which contains the well-known verse: "the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one most possessed of *taqwā.*"[100] This is usually taken to refer to Muslims only. However, Rahman states that the Qur'ān removes all distinctions among people except in righteousness and morality. He argues that the Qur'ān is openly against exclusivism. Its rejection of the doctrine of election, and its recognition of the good in every religious community are two of many examples of Qur'ānic teachings which deal with pluralism. This, I believe, is to suggest that Muslims should read the Qur'ān in a comprehensive manner rather than selecting elements from it according to their own temporary needs.

We also find a prominent Shi'ite scholar, Mahmoud Ayoub, who believes that the Qur'ānic vision of religious harmony was transformed into an exclusivist view in the hands of the theologians, jurists, and exegetes.[101] Ayoub's view is supported by the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb.* Although the concept

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[99] Kate Zebiri, *"Relations Between Muslims,"*259.

[100] *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* (49):13.

[101] Kate Zebiri, *"Relations Between Muslims,"*265.

of *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān is far-reaching in theory, Muslims have reduced this concept to *ahl al-dhimma* in practice, thereby limiting the rights of Jews and Christians. In the present era, I think it is possible for Muslims to restore the concept of *ahl al-kitāb.* Indonesian Muslims have restored this concept, acknowledging that other religious communities possess the same rights and duties as Muslims to practice their own faiths as well as to implement the social, cultural, political and other aspects of religion in their lives. This recognition is explicitly mentioned in the National Constitution of 1945 and the Five Principle of Indonesian State Ideology (*Pancasila*): Belief in One Supreme God, humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy, and social justice for all. [102] It would be interesting, I believe, to discuss the Indonesian concept of religious pluralism which originated in a country where five official religions live together under the umbrella of *Pancasila.* However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Thus, what we can discern from the Qur'ānic concept of the People of the Book is an invitation to interfaith dialogue. This kind of dialogue does not involve a mere exchange of ideas while avoiding critical questions. Rather, such dialogue concerns the search for truth and includes analysis, questions, answers,

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[102] Discussion on religious pluralism in Indonesia can be found in Judo Poerwowidagdo, "Living Together in a Majority Muslim Population," in *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity,* edited by Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994) 23-8. See also Tarmizi Taher (Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia), "Pancasila Heading Toward the 21st Century for the Enhancement of Religious Harmony," an address presented as a public lecture at Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, USA, March 6, 1997. Also Tarmizi's paper on "The Future Trend of the Muslim World Toward Harmony of

objections, and judgments. Three aspects might be offered in this religious critical dialogue: "Investigation of that which others actually believe, articulation of one's own belief, readiness to learn from one another."[103] The practice of these aspects by all believers will produce openness among them.

The People of the Book argued on numerous occasions with the Prophets; however, the Qur'ān does not encourage idle disputation. The emphasis is always on the deeper unity.[104] In the Qur'ān, *sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (29):46 explicitly commands Muslims not to argue with the People of the Book because they share the same God. While *sūrat an-Naḥl* (16):125 encourages Muslims to debate with them in a good manner. Moreover, *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):47-8 allow Muslims to let the People of the Book judge themselves according to their own scriptures, for God has appointed every religious community a divine law and a well-trodden path.

Besides, the Qur'ān also invites people to interfaith dialogue by offering the metaphor of the believers racing forth to perform goodly deeds as it is indicated in two sūras, *al-Baqarah* (2):148 and *al-Mā'idah* (5):51.[105] We may

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the East and the West, an Islamic Perspective from Indonesia," presented in the same event at Hartford Seminary.

[103] Hendrik Vroom, *No Other Gods,* 3.

[104] Charis Waddy, "The People of the Book: A New Chapter in Co-Operation," *The Islamic Quarterly* 23 (1979): 195.

[105] Excellent studies on the Qur'ānic metaphor: *Fa-stabiqū l-khayrāt* have been undertaken by Issa J. Boullata, *"Fa-stabiqū l-Khayrāt:* A Qur'ānic Principle of Interfaith Relations," in Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995) 43-

assume that, like any competition, the one described in the Qur'ān should be based on fairness and impartiality.[106] Ernest Hamilton has discovered nine elements inspired by the Qur'ān, which he believes to be important for a fair racing competition:[107]

> (1) there is more than one participant in the race; (2) all participants are equally qualified to enter the race; (3) the rules and requirements of the racing competition are both reasonable and realistic; (4) the performance of each competitor is fairly and impartially evaluated; (5) there is an established course for racing; (6) there is a set goal to reach; (7) an impartial judge decides on the outcome of the race; (8) there are rewards for observing the rules of the race and the penalties for violating them; and (9) there is a reward for winning the race.

Ernest Hamilton's nine elements of competitive racing in goodness are rightly based on the Qur'ānic verses. The most important one is that the Qur'ān invites all religious communities to compete in goodly works at both the interpersonal and the intercommunal levels. The case of Zachariah and his wife as mentioned in *sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (21):90 for example, might be considered as an interesting illustration of the interpersonal level of competition. The verse employs the term *yusāri'ūna* in *"innahum kānū yusāri'ūna fī lkhayrāt"* to describe the competition between Zachariah and his wife in prayer, asking God for a child, *Yaḥyā,* who later became his successor. While *sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):148 and *al-*

53; and Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of Good Works: Exploration of a Qur'ānic Metaphor," *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 72-81.

[106] Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of Good Works," 73.

[107] Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of Good Works," 73-74.

Mā'idah (5):51 illustrate an intercommunal race.[108] The word *likullin* in both *likullin ja'alnā minkum shir'atan wa minhājā* (5:51) and *wa likulli wijhatin huwa muwallīhā* (2:148) is interpreted by al-Ṭabarī as *likulli ahli millatin* which means unto every religious community.[109] Therefore, the Qur'ānic command of *fa-stabiqū l-khayrāt* in both sūras refer to all religious communities. They all are invited to enter the race.

I think Jews, Christians and Muslims are qualified to enter the race as long as they are consistent in practicing their divine "rules of the game," and compete fairly with one another to reach the final destiny, that is God Almighty.

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[108] Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of Good Works," 74.

[109] Issa J. Boullata, *"Fa-stabiqū l-Khayrāt,"* 46.

CONCLUSION

Chapter One of this thesis has discussed the significance of the Qur'ān for Muslims. One of its roles is to guide people to the right path, which includes proper dealings with non-Muslims. The Qur'ān identifies three categories of people: Muslims, People of the Book and unbelievers. The unbelievers, unequivocally condemned, are repeatedly warned of hell-fire as a consequence of their polytheism or associating partners with God, considered the only unforgivable sin in Islam. Jews and Christians are explicitly designated as People of the Book, a category in which some modern scholars would also place Sabeans, Magians, and the followers of other world religions. Muslims themselves are regarded as a party of *ahl al-kitāb*, since they have divine Scripture. One of the modern Muslim thinkers, Mohammed Arkoun, goes further by transforming the term "People of the Book" into "Societies of the Book."

The Qur'ān presents the People of the Book in two ways: (a) confrontational or critical references and (b) irenic or complimentary ones. Although the former outweigh the latter, Muslims scholars believe that the critical verses cannot abrogate the irenic one.

Chapter Two presents four of the irenic verses: *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3): 64, 113, 114 and 115 with references to both classical and modern Muslim exegetes from different schools of thought. Classical exegetes do not suggest any development of the Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* referred to in sūra 3:64

whereas the modern commentators do. However, both classical and modern exegetes agree that the People of the Book are invited to three basic monotheistic principles that are supposed to be common to all: worshipping none but God, ascribing divinity to none besides Him, and taking no human being as lord besides Him.

According to Qur'ān exegetes, sūra 3:113 suggests a positive recognition that "good people" exist among the People of the Book. However, Muslim exegetes debate the phrase *"min ahli l-kitābi"* and *"ummah qā'imah,"* mentioned in sūra 3: 113. To some scholars, these verses refer to Jews converted to Islam, such as 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām. Other scholars believe that the phrase does not refer to converted Jews at all but to a small group of the People of the Book who are consistent in their religious practices. They are decribed as those who believe in God and in the Last Day, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, compete in goodness and attain the high station of the righteous *('ulā'ika mina ṣ-ṣāliḥīn)* -- God will accept the good that they do.

Based on the Muslim exegetes' analysis of the above verses, my own view is that, from the beginning, the Qur'ān has established the theological foundation of interfaith co-operation which Muslims have had to realize and implement in their daily life, since Muslims live side by side with people of other faiths.

In the contemporary world, this concept meets the challenge of religious pluralism. In Chapter Three, my discussion of religious pluralism as the modern condition of *ahl al-kitāb*, should be seen as an attempt to contextualize the

Qur'ānic concept in modern life. I emphasized the three Abrahamic faiths -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- or *ahl al-kitāb,* in response to the challenge of pluralism in all aspects and I called for co-operation in solving problems on a human scale, with different religious communities supporting each other in good deeds. Thus, in a religiously pluralist world, the theological concept of the People of the Book takes on a social significance. At the very least, it should motivate Muslims to adopt an appreciative view of others and even stimulate them to co-operate, with a view to establishing a new civilization, one reminiscent of that of medieval Baghdad and Spain.

Sharing a global existence with the adherents of diverse religions demands an open-minded attitude toward others. We may sometimes find that the followers of our own faith are no better in action than those of other faiths. The latter may be more helpful, more pious, and even more civilized. The Qur'ānic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* allows people of different faiths, including Muslims, to come together in a common formula for co-operation. The Qur'ānic word *ta'ālaw* is a polite, mild but emphatic call upon people of faith for dialogue to maintain mutual understanding and mutual assistance, supporting each other in goodness. Thus the Qur'ānic metaphor of *"fa-stabiqū-l-khayrāt"* ("compete [you all] in good works") may have had the foresight -- or *ḥikmah* (wisdom) -- of depicting matters from our religiously pluralist world.

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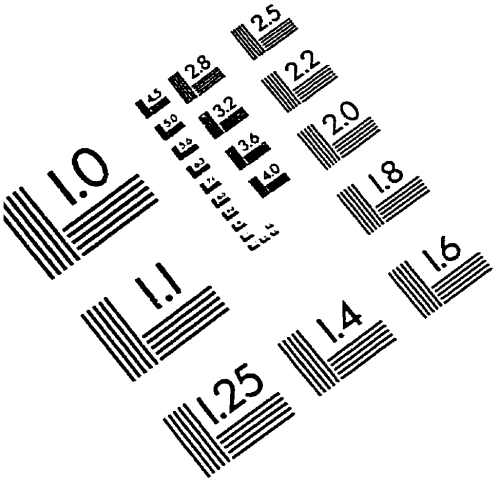
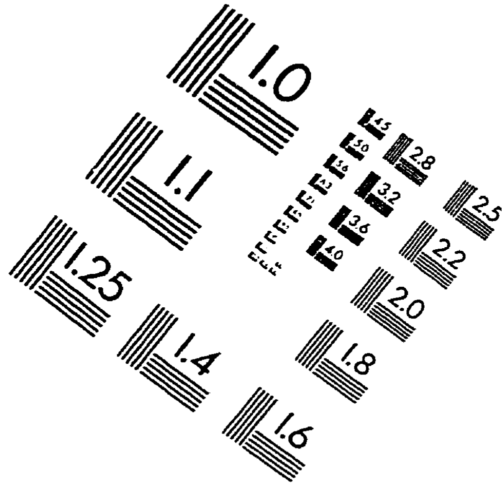
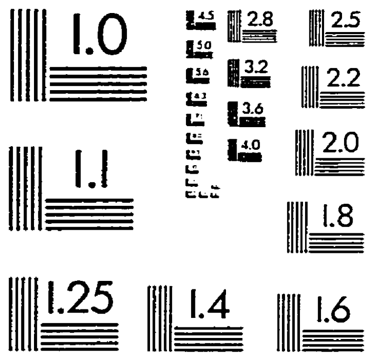

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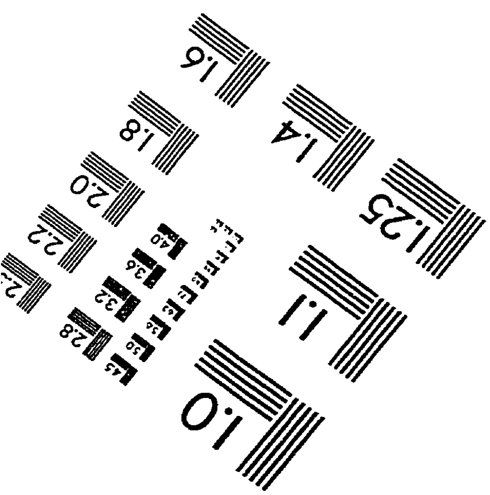
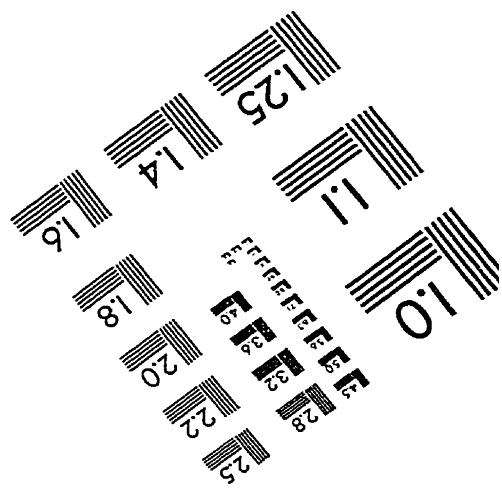

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