

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

**Inclusivism and Exclusivism among Muslims Today
between Theological and Social Dimensions**

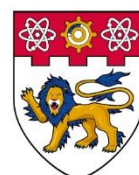
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INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

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**Inclusivism and Exclusivism among Muslims Today
between Theological and Social Dimensions**

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Abstract

Inclusivist views about people of other religions or no religion (non-Muslims) are crucial for harmonious interreligious relations in societies that are becoming increasingly diverse. However, in the case of Islam, achieving this is fraught with challenges. Within the Islamic tradition, there are long-held theologically exclusivist views about other *religions*, such as salvation is only available through Islam and religions other than Islam are invalid. These positions can be referred to as *theologically exclusivist* and are often difficult to challenge due to their pervasiveness and because they are generally considered key Muslim beliefs. The paper highlights some attempts made by a number of contemporary Muslim thinkers to adopt theologically inclusivist views that challenge such theologically exclusivist positions. However, their views are still seen as too radical for mainstream Muslims and are thus often marginalised. This paper argues that the challenges that theological inclusivists face should not prevent us from adopting inclusivist views about *people* of other religions or no religion. The emphasis then is on addressing negative ideas about people of other religions that have developed in the Islamic tradition, such as the inequality of non-Muslims to Muslims, and developing positive ideas, such as the equality of all people. Here the focus is on *social inclusivism* which appears to be a more feasible project. Such a shift from theological inclusivism to social inclusivism is likely to lead to better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Introduction

This paper focuses on Muslim scholars' current debates on theological inclusivism. After defining 'inclusivism' and 'exclusivism', I explore the following three theological positions on other religions that are widely held among Muslims and that several scholars have attempted to rethink: (a) salvation is possible only through Islam; (b) religions other than Islam are invalid; and (c) Islam is the only true religion. I argue that all three positions, because of their strong theologically exclusivist content, can be considered obstacles to promoting understanding between Muslims and people of other religions or no religion (non-Muslims). Given the current emphasis on interfaith dialogue and understanding, it could be argued that one of the potential benefits of rethinking these exclusivist theological positions is the promotion of better relations and understanding between Muslims and people of other religions. However, given their pervasiveness in Islamic theology, rethinking these positions can be very challenging. After highlighting some potential challenges that come with rethinking these positions, I argue that probably one of the most effective ways of promoting positive relations between Muslims and people of other religions is not necessarily through rethinking standard Islamic theological positions about other religions, but by rethinking several negative ideas and views about *people* of other religions that have developed in the Islamic tradition and replacing them with positive ones.

Defining Inclusivism and Exclusivism

The terms 'inclusivism' and 'exclusivism' are prevalent in the literature on interreligious relations today. While the equivalents of these terms may not have been used in Islamic systematic theology (*kalām*), they are frequently used by Muslim thinkers today.

The terms 'inclusivism', 'exclusivism', and 'pluralism' appear to have first emerged in Christian thought, particularly in the theology of religions literature.¹ Scholars such as Alan Race and Paul Hedges have made significant contributions to our understanding of these terms.² Briefly, exclusivists believe that only one true religion exists and that all others are false. Inclusivists see some truth in other religions, while pluralists consider that many religions may be true. Often, these terms concern the truth or validity of religions in salvific terms. In a Muslim context, Imtiyaz Yusuf states:

“Exclusivists hold that only their religion is true and all others are false, inclusivists believe that their own religion is true and others are included within its salvation plan as anonymous followers, and pluralists believe that all religions are true and to that I also add that in my view all religions are equal”.³

In this paper, I use the terms 'inclusivism' and 'exclusivism' slightly differently, and due to the confusion about the term 'pluralism' among Muslims, I avoid using it entirely.⁴

In this paper, the terms 'inclusivism' and 'exclusivism' refer to Muslims' attitudes towards (a) other *religions* or (b) *people* of other religions or no religion. A positive attitude would be inclusive, while a negative attitude would be exclusive. Therefore, *theological inclusivism* is characterised by a positive attitude towards other religions, while *theological exclusivism* is characterised by a negative attitude towards other religions.

¹ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, London: SCM Press, 1983.

² Paul Hedges, "Interreligious Engagement and Identity Theory: Assessing the Theology of Religions Typology as a Model for Dialogue and Encounter," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27 (2014): 198-221, 200.

³ Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism: Qur'an's Attitude towards Other Religions", PDF version is available at: <http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/PrajnaVihara/article/view/1301/1160>, 8.

⁴ 'Pluralism' is often understood in these discussions, with anti-pluralism *fatwas* framing it, as equivalent to the belief that all religions are equal and valid. This contradicts the Islamic theological position that after Prophet Muhammad, all religions other than Islam are invalid. Hence, the confusion in the use of the term 'pluralism'. For a discussion about the famous *fatwa* on pluralism in Indonesia by Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), see Piers Gillespie, "Current Issues in Indonesian Islam: Analysing the 2005 Council of Indonesian Ulama Fatwa No. 7 Opposing Pluralism, Liberalism and Secularism", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18.2 (2007): 202-40.

Similarly, a positive attitude towards people of other religions constitutes *social inclusivism*, while a negative attitude towards people of other religions constitutes *social exclusivism*. Both types of inclusivism and exclusivism can exist on a continuum from ‘strong’ to ‘soft’. For example, ‘all religions other than Islam are false or invalid’ constitutes a strong theologically exclusivist position, while ‘some religions other than Islam are false’ would be a soft theologically exclusivist position. Similarly, ‘all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, have the same dignity and are all equal’ constitutes a strong socially inclusivist position, and recognising this equality for some people would be a soft socially inclusivist position.

Table 1 summarises these points. I included ‘strong’ expressions of both exclusivism and inclusivism. For each item in the table, one can extrapolate a ‘softer’ expression.

Theological Exclusivism	Theological Inclusivism	Social Inclusivism	Social Exclusivism
All religions other than Islam are false/invalid.	All/most religions are true/valid.	All people have the same dignity and are therefore equal.	Only Muslims have the proper dignity; non-Muslims are lower than Muslims in terms of dignity.
Salvation is possible only through Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.	Salvation is also possible for all/many who do not follow Islam.	Muslims are required to maintain good social relations with all people regardless of their religious affiliation.	Muslims must not maintain good social relations with non-Muslims.
Scriptures of religions other than Islam, in their current forms, are invalid/corrupted.	All/most scriptures or fundamental sacred texts of other religions are valid.	Muslims should respect all people regardless of the choices they make with regard to religion/belief and should not denigrate them.	Muslims should openly denigrate the choices other people make regarding religion; anyone who does not follow Islam should be seen as unworthy of respect.
There is no theological basis whatsoever for working with non-Muslims.	The Islamic tradition theologically justifies working with non-Muslims.	Muslims should respect everyone’s right to follow whatever religion they choose.	Muslims should believe that everyone must convert to Islam.

*Table 1:
Inclusivism and Exclusivism: Theological and Social Examples*

Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Islamic Tradition: A Brief Overview

Several ideas associated with both theological and social inclusivism can be found in the Qur’ān, the traditions of the Prophet, and Islamic theological, juristic, and mystical thought. Thus, the concept of inclusivism is not entirely foreign to the Islamic tradition. For example, the Qur’ān includes a range of verses that considers Christians and Jews as ‘People of the Book’, says Jewish and Christian scriptures were revealed by God, and suggests that salvation is possible for those who do good deeds and believe in the one God and in the Last Day. Similarly, the Islamic theological position that God’s mercy covers all human beings and that God ultimately decides who will be saved on the Day of Judgement – regardless of their beliefs or religion – can be considered part of this inclusivism. Social inclusivism can be supported by Qur’ānic verses that emphasise the dignity of all human beings and the need for Muslims to maintain good relations with non-Muslims who are at peace with Muslims. However, in the context of Islamic theology, when summaries of Islamic beliefs (otherwise known as ‘Islamic creeds’) were developed in the third and fourth centuries of Islam, theologically inclusivist ideas such

as recognition of the validity of religions other than Islam and the possibility of salvation outside Islam were firmly rejected, and theological exclusivism was emphasised instead.⁵

Although a range of ideas and texts that can support both theological and social inclusivism exist in Islamic sources, as outlined above, they were de-emphasised in the development of Islamic theology and creeds. However, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a trend in Muslim thought emerged that revived and emphasised such inclusivist ideas and texts. Such thought was championed by prominent scholars such as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), his student Rashid Rida (d. 1935) and a number of their followers.⁶

While the inclusivist ideas of scholars like Abduh continued, during the second half of the twentieth century, there was a major shift in emphasis in the works of several Muslim scholars who began to put forward a more systematic set of ideas emphasising both social and theological inclusivism. While social inclusivism, including the belief that all humans possess dignity, all people are equal, and discrimination is wrong, appears to be largely supported by contemporary Muslims, theological inclusivism remains controversial. Strong forms of theological inclusivism, such as that all religions are valid and that salvation is possible for non-Muslims, present a serious challenge to established Islamic theological positions. Rethinking these positions would constitute a significant departure from standard Islamic theological positions that have persisted for centuries and are found in standard Islamic creeds in unambiguous terms.⁷

Despite this challenge, a few Muslim scholars continued to develop their ideas on theological inclusivism. For instance, Ismail Faruqi (d. 1986), a prominent US-based Islamic scholar, states that because God is the source of all revelations, there is no contradiction between His commands in the Qur'ān and those in older scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospel.⁸ Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), originally from Pakistan but later based in the US, argues that, in many verses, the Qur'ān confirms religious inclusivism and the salvation of other religious communities.⁹ In Indonesia, Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005) was one of the leading proponents of theological inclusivism. For him, the salvation of others is rooted in the Qur'ān, since many verses, such as Q. 5:48, accept religious diversity and consider it God's plan for humanity.¹⁰ Religions of all prophets, according to Madjid, can be considered a 'universal way' or path to God.¹¹ According to Asghar Ali Engineer (d. 2013) from India, "the sharia, the law, and the way of life [of different religions] may be different, but the essence of all religions – *din* – is the same".¹² This openness to other religions can also be seen in more recent works, such as those of Mohammad Hassan Khalil¹³ and Jerusha Tanner Lamptey.¹⁴

Interest in a more inclusivist view, particularly regarding *people* from other religions or of no religion, has become even more critical with the recent rise of violent extremism among some Muslim communities around the world in the form of 'jihad' groups and extreme elements of political Islamist movements, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, al-Qaeda, and more recently, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Ideas that many observers of Islam today see as 'extreme', such as 'loyalty and disavowal' (*al-walā' wa al-barā'*), which are often used by some Muslims to prevent or discourage Muslims from having positive social relations with

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, commentary on Q 3:19, available at: www.altafsir.com; Tim Winter, "The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9:2 (1999): 133-55, 146; Imām al-Taḥāwī, "Creed of Imām al-Taḥāwī," available at: <https://sunnahonline.com/library/beliefs-and-methodology/69-the-creed-of-imam-at-tahawi>. It may be noted that Mohammad Hassan Khalil argues that, at least as regards to the question of salvation, a number of otherwise quite conservative Muslim scholars in the medieval period were actually 'inclusivist', however, his usage of the terms differs from my usage of these terms. Also, while he focuses on some particular figures, the argument here focuses upon the wider theological trajectory. As such, notwithstanding his cogent arguments, I would assert that the mainstream theological impetus was exclusivist. See Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁶ For examples of Abduh and Rida's inclusivist ideas see Mohammad Gamal Abdelnour, "The Islamic Theology of Interfaith Marriages between Theology, Law, and Individual Ijtihad" *Interreligious Relations* 17 (June 2020), 5-6.

⁷ See footnote 5 for relevant references.

⁸ Ataulloh Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, London: Macmillan, 1997, 87.

⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*, Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, 136-138.

¹⁰ Nurcholish Madjid, "Interpreting the Qur'anic principle of religious pluralism", in *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Abdullah Saeed, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 209.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Asghar Ali Engineer, *Rational Approach to Islam*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2001, 149.

¹³ Khalil, *Islam and the Fate*.

¹⁴ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016; Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others*.

non-Muslims, are often criticised.¹⁵ This specific context has led many Muslim scholars to argue against extreme interpretations of relevant Islamic ideas and for an emphasis on more inclusivist interpretations. Moreover, much emphasis has been put on positive interreligious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, Asma Afsaruddin states:

“The rise of extremism in most faith communities today has rendered ‘pluralism’ an urgent global shibboleth. Inclusivist readings of foundational religious texts that promote a pluralist worldview are thus imperative for people of faith who wish to combat intolerance in their midst”.¹⁶

Some contributors to the discourse on a more inclusivist interpretation of Islam at times appear to be interested in revamping important theologically exclusivist ideas in Islamic theology. The assumption seems to be that rethinking these exclusivist ideas would provide the basis for better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. While continuous reflection on important theological positions is needed, it is probably unrealistic to expect rapid radical departures from the established standard Islamic theological positions at the heart of this discourse. However, this does not mean that it is not feasible for Muslim scholars to rethink some key ideas that developed in the Islamic tradition about *people* of other religions, which may be less challenging from a mainstream theological perspective – be it Sunni or Shi’a – as manifested in the dominant Muslim theological schools. Such rethinking, I contend, is likely to lead to more positive relations between Muslims and *people* of other religions without necessarily discarding important Islamic theological positions about other religions. The distinction I am making is between important theological ideas about other *religions* and those negative views that developed in the Islamic tradition about *people* of other religions. The former has been fundamental to mainstream Muslim theology, which can be found explicitly mentioned in standard Islamic creeds. By contrast, views such as the second-class nature of the membership of non-Muslims in a Muslim polity in earlier times are not part of standard Islamic theological positions and therefore can be reinterpreted or, if necessary, set aside today. Such reinterpretation and rethinking are taking place on a large scale, as evidenced by the wide range of arguments put forward by Muslim scholars in the modern period about the need to consider all people as equal today and to treat all citizens of a modern state as equal, as outlined later in this paper.

Relevant Classical Islamic Theological Positions

While Qur’ānic texts about other religions, such as those about the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), their scriptures, and their salvation, are often read and interpreted differently by commentators on the Qur’ān (*mufasssīrūn*), classical Islamic theology (*kalām*) in the first three centuries of Islam arrived at some clear theological positions about such matters: Islam, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad, is the only true and valid religion; the religions of the People of the Book (Christianity and Judaism in particular) were valid before the Prophet Muhammad, but after the advent of Islam, they became invalid; religions that are not based on divine revelation are invalid; the scriptures of the Jews and Christians (the Torah and the Gospel or *injīl*) in their ‘original’ form, were revealed by God but were distorted and corrupted over time, and the original revelations are no longer available; and to find salvation, a person must follow Islam, the religion taught by the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁷

Despite the possibility of reading the many passages in the Qur’ān about these theological issues from an inclusivist or exclusivist perspective, classical Islamic theology took a firm stance on these issues. As the Islamic tradition developed its theological systems and beliefs, taking such clear-cut and robust positions on what were seen as ‘fundamental’ matters was perhaps considered normal. Fluidity in critical theological matters,

¹⁵ Mohamed Bin Ali, *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala’ wal Bara’*, London: Imperial College Press, 2016.

¹⁶ Asma Afsaruddin, “Celebrating pluralism and Dialogue: Quranic Perspectives”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42.3 (2007): 389-406.

¹⁷ See, for example, Asma Afsaruddin, “The Hermeneutics of Inter-Faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Quranic Exegeses”, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37.2 (2009): 331-54, 351; Munim Sirry, “Compete with One Another in Good Works: Exegesis of Quran Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20.4 (2009): 423-38, 425.

if left unrefined, could have led to confusion for the average believer and divisions within the community, as can be seen in the earliest theological disputes on the definition of terms, such as 'Muslim', 'believer', and 'non-believer' in the first century of Islam.¹⁸

For two to three centuries after the inception of Islam, Muslims debated *inter alia* the definitions of such terms, the basic beliefs of a Muslim about God, salvation, and how a Muslim should understand Islam's relationship to other religions. The positions reached after extensive debates and disputes over a three-century period can be seen in various Islamic creeds, such as the Creed of Imām Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 933).¹⁹ These statements provided ordinary Muslims with a clear understanding of the fundamental beliefs they must adopt to be 'proper' Muslims, theologically speaking. The statements removed ambiguities inherent in the relevant Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* texts, and simplified the complex debates that had taken place among Muslims at the time. Once developed, they remained standard for over a thousand years, and even today, they function as summaries of what Muslims should believe.

In short, these credal statements were *theologically exclusivist* as defined in this paper. In fact, there was a high degree of unanimity among Muslim theologians and scholars about this theological exclusivism, and this unanimity persists among Muslims even today. Challenges to theological exclusivism have been rare in the Islamic tradition among both mainstream Sunni and Shī'a Muslims. Exceptions, however, can be found via more inclusivist readings of some mystical works of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) and Jalāluddīn Rūmī (d. 1273), for example.

Amid this high degree of unanimity among Muslims, we are now witnessing the emergence of a trend in Islamic theological thought that is beginning to challenge several crucial classical Islamic theological positions about other religions. The number of theological inclusivists promoting these ideas today may not be large, but they are increasing in visibility. Examples include Mahmoud Ayoub,²⁰ Imtiyaz Yusuf,²¹ Asma Afsaruddin,²² Abdolkarim Soroush,²³ Jerusha Lamptey,²⁴ and Abdulaziz Sachedina.²⁵ While no umbrella term can sufficiently cover the wide range of Muslim scholars putting forward arguments to challenge theologically exclusivist positions, it seems that 'theological inclusivism' could be used for this purpose, though these scholars may not necessarily describe themselves as such. In what follows, after a brief reference to the concept of 'inclusivism' in the Qur'ān, I briefly explore three positions that have been the focus of theological inclusivists: salvation, the validity of the scriptures of Jews and Christians, and the validity of other religions.

Inclusivism in the Qur'ān

One of the key propositions of theological inclusivists is that there are different ways of reading and interpreting the texts in the Qur'ān (as well as the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) about other religions or people of other religions. The same texts can often be interpreted from an inclusivist or an exclusivist perspective.

From an inclusivist perspective, the teachings of the Qur'ān, in particular, appear to affirm an inclusive worldview and, thus, a set of theological positions that function as an inclusive framework. The following are uncontroversial positions among Muslims that are based on the Qur'ān, be they exclusivist or inclusivist: A merciful and just God created humanity from one soul (*nafs*) (Q 39:6). God guided human beings through a

¹⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973.

¹⁹ Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2009.

²⁰ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "The Qur'an and Religious Pluralism", in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 273-81.

²¹ Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism". *Prajñā Vihāra* 11.1 (2010) PDF version is available at: <http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/PrajnaVihara/article/view/1301/1160>.

²² Asma Afsaruddin, "Celebrating Pluralism and Dialogue: Quranic Perspectives", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42.3 (2007): 389-406.

²³ Abdolkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*, trans. Nilou Mobasser, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 119-52.

²⁴ Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

²⁵ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'ān and Other Religions", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 291-309.

series of prophets sent to all corners of the world with the same basic message, albeit applied with different rituals and rules (*shir'ā* and *minhāj*) (Q 5:48). Muslims are expected to believe in all prophets and all scriptures, and all prophets taught the same essential message or followed the same way (*dīn*) (Q 42:13). This means that Muslims should believe in what was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and what was revealed to other prophets before him (Q 2:4). Even if most people do not follow God's path, they cannot be forced to believe in God or His way because there should be no coercion in matters related to faith (Q 2:256). Theological inclusivists would argue that the points mentioned here provide a good starting point for understanding theological issues in the Qur'ān concerning other religions and people of other religions.²⁶ While this kind of broad understanding of inclusivism would be familiar to most Muslims and may even be easily promoted among Muslims, when it comes to the more specific theological positions below, significant challenges arise.

Three Examples of Theologically Exclusivist Positions

a. *Salvation only for Muslims or with three necessary conditions rather than for a specific religious group*

In Islamic theology, the most widely held position on salvation – in the sense of being saved from Hellfire on the Day of Judgement – is that after the Prophet Muhammad, one has to follow the Prophet's teachings in order to achieve this salvation. Although the Qur'ān recognises the validity of other monotheistic religions, Islamic theology, in general, takes the position that this validity is only up until the arrival of Prophet Muhammad with a new religion.

Theological inclusivists, in contrast, argue that the Qur'ān emphasises that every believing, God-conscious person is likely to achieve salvation if they fulfil two other conditions: belief in the Last Day and doing good deeds. Those who support this view often cite Qur'ānic verses like 2:62:

Indeed, those who believed and those who are Jews or Christians or Sabeans – those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness – will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.

Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), a modern commentator on the Qur'ān, says that this refers to people of any religion and that anyone who holds true belief (i.e. maintains the existence of God and the Last Day) and acts righteously will be saved.²⁷ The same meaning is conveyed by another almost identical verse (Q 5:69), and both verses state only three conditions for salvation. From a theologically inclusivist perspective, these verses do not specify whether this applies only to those who existed before the Prophet Muhammad. Given that the content of these two verses was revealed in Medina, that is in the final ten years of Prophet Muhammad, theological inclusivists seem to understand it to apply to followers of the religions mentioned in the verses *before* and *after* the Prophet Muhammad.

Commenting on Q 2:62, Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953) says: "The point of the verse is that Islam does not teach an exclusive doctrine, and is not meant exclusively for one people".²⁸ Affirming this view, Muhammad Asad, in his commentary on Q 2:62, states:

"The above passage – which recurs in the Qur'ān several times – lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of 'salvation' is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous action in life".²⁹

Asad, among others, makes the point that this verse was revealed in the context of claims made by certain Jewish people about their special relationship with God and that as long as a person is part of their

²⁶ Murad Wilfried Hoffmann, "Religious Inclusivism and Islam in a Polarised World", in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Inclusivism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 235-45, 239.

²⁷ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, commentary on Q 2:62, available at: www.altafsir.com.

²⁸ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān Translation*, commentary on Q 2:62, available at www.altafsir.com.

²⁹ Asad, *The Message*, commentary on Q 2:62.

community, and regardless of their beliefs or righteous deeds, such a person will be saved.³⁰ The point is that, rather than a particular religious label, such as ‘Jew’, ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’, from the perspective of the Qur’ān, only the three conditions matter. If any one element is absent, whether the person is labelled Muslim, Jew, Christian, or Sabean, salvation will not ordinarily be attainable.

Yusuf Ali goes on to say that Q 5:69 “underscores the importance of true and genuine faith, which is to be judged by a sincere belief in Allah and man’s accountability to Him backed by a righteous conduct rather than by mere forms or labels”. He further says that “it is through sincere belief and righteous conduct rather than pretentious claims that man can win his Lord’s pleasure and achieve ultimate success”.³¹

Abdulaziz Sachedina has written extensively on Islam and theological inclusivism and argues also in favour of the salvation of righteous monotheists who do not affirm the Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood. He argues that “anyone who holds true belief and acts righteously is entitled to God’s reward and protection from punishment, as promised in Q 5:9”.³² Sachedina focuses on monotheists and Abrahamic traditions but also observes that ‘the fate of non-monotheistic traditions, such as particular South and East Asian religions, is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur’ān’, concluding that the door to salvation is even open to non-monotheistic traditions.³³

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) also refers to several Qur’ānic verses to argue that salvation belongs not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims (for example, Q 2:62 and Q 5:69). According to Rahman, “In both these verses, 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”.³⁴ For Rahman, “In conformity with strong rejection of exclusivism and election, the Qur’ān recognises the existence of good people in other communities – Jews, Christians and Sabaeans – just as it recognises the people of faith in Islam”.³⁵

However, the generally accepted view among Muslim scholars, the theologically exclusivist position, is that the verses Q 5:69 and Q 2:62 have to be read in light of Q 3:85 (‘And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him’) and also in light of the following *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said:

“By Him in Whose hand is the life of Muhammad. He who amongst the community of Jews or Christians hears about me, but does not affirm his belief in that with which I have been sent and dies in this state [of disbelief], he shall be but one of the denizens of Hell-Fire”.³⁶

Theological exclusivists use such texts to support the view that salvation after Prophet Muhammad is only attainable if one follows the religion of Islam as taught by Prophet Muhammad.

b. *Validity of Other Scriptures*

The dominant view among classical Muslim scholars is that the scriptures of People of the Book as they exist now have been distorted or falsified, though there are disagreements about the nature of this distortion.³⁷ As Denny argues, ‘The corruption of scripture is not a major or sustained topic in the Qur’ān although it became an important and abiding theological as well as textual controversy in later relations between Muslims and the People of the Book’.³⁸ Theological inclusivists deal with this issue by looking at the terms that the Qur’ān uses for the notion of falsification, such as *taḥrīf*. Many Muslim scholars, both in the past and present, understand

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, commentary on Q 5:69.

³² Sachedina, “The Qur’ān and Other Religions”, 305.

³³ Ibid, 306.

³⁴ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 166.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, “The Book of Faith”, available at <https://sunnah.com/muslim:153>.

³⁷ Abdullah Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures”, *The Muslim World* 92.3-4(2002): 419-36.

³⁸ Frederick Mathewson Denny, “Corruption”, *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* Vol.1, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 439-440.

tahrīf and related terms, such as *tabdīl*, to mean the intentional changing of the words of the scriptures to suit peoples' needs.³⁹

For classical Muslim scholars, scriptural falsification constitutes one of the most significant polemics against Jews and Christians. As Kate Zebiri notes, the doctrine of falsification of previous religious scriptures was "virtually unchallenged" for many Muslim scholars.⁴⁰ Camila Adang provides a range of views among classical Muslim scholars about this falsification: Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) believed that "it was not only the Jewish Scriptures that were falsified; the very religion of Jews in no way resembles the original Mosaic faith".⁴¹ Other early scholars such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) and al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) reportedly supported the theory of falsification (*tahrīf*), arguing that previous scriptures, i.e. the Torah and the Gospel, were tampered with in such a way that the original Torah and Gospel are no longer accessible.⁴²

However, today's theological inclusivists argue that the term *tahrīf* does not always mean changing the words of scripture; they adopt a broader understanding of the term.⁴³ For them, it can also mean just changing the meaning of words. Therefore, the words of the scripture could be unchanged, but their meanings might be understood or interpreted differently or in a distorted fashion. Those who hold this view cite several Qur'ānic verses to emphasise that the Word of God (which is revealed in scriptures) cannot be changed; however, the meaning of the Word of God may be misinterpreted or misunderstood.⁴⁴

This notion of the falsification of scripture (*tahrīf*) – that is, in interpretation – is emphasised, for example, by the Indian Muslim scholar Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958). He argues that *tahrīf* takes place in the realm of interpretation, not in the biblical text itself. The problem with the Jewish community, according to him, is not the unreliability of their scripture: "their basic weakness lies in the fact that they had ceased to possess a correct knowledge of their scripture and had ceased to act righteously in consonance therewith."⁴⁵ Therefore, when dealing with the concept of *tahrīf*, Azad states that it should not be seen as the textual corruption of the Bible. He believes that there is no conflict between the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Gospel, for example: "The injunctions of both scriptures are the same. Only the style employed in expression and the occasion for the utterance varies".⁴⁶

Farid Esack, a defender of theological inclusivism (though he uses the term 'religious pluralism'), argues that when the Qur'ān accuses the People of the Book of having 'distorted' their scripture, this accusation is directed at 'some' of them, and we should not assume that all People of the Book have distorted their scriptures or that their scriptures are now wholly inauthentic. Esack states that if the latter were true, the Qur'ān would not ask People of the Book to 'judge' according to the Torah and the Gospel (Q 5:43-47).⁴⁷ For him, although there is only one true *dīn* (as the Qur'ān states in Q 3:19), this should not be taken to mean a specific religion. The Qur'ān itself states that God has "appointed [different] acts of devotion for every community to observe" (Q 22:67).⁴⁸

Theological inclusivists also argue that the Qur'ān states that Jews and Christians stand upon nothing unless they refer to and uphold their scriptures (Q 5:47). On other occasions, they argue that the Qur'ān asks Jews to go back to their scripture and to apply its rules; the same is asked of Christians (Q 5:43). From a theologically inclusivist perspective, the Qur'ān treats the scriptures of the Jews and Christians with reverence, as the Word of God. They are God's messages, and therefore there are, for theological inclusivists, substantial grounds for a more balanced, that is inclusive, understanding of the concept of falsification. For them, the scriptures of Jews and Christians as they exist today should be seen as reliable messages from God.

³⁹ Camila Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures", in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 143-59; Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, Leiden: Brill, 1996.

⁴⁰ Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 50.

⁴¹ Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics", 153.

⁴² Ibid, 143-159.

⁴³ Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion".

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Munim Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'ān and Other Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 105.

⁴⁶ Cited in Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics*, 106.

⁴⁷ Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 169.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 174.

c. *Islam is the only true religion*

Two important Qur'ānic texts are often used by theological exclusivists to support the view that religions other than Islam are invalid: Q 3:19 ('Indeed, the religion [*dīn*] in the sight of God is *islām*.'), and Q 3:85 ('And whoever seeks a religion [*dīn*] other than *islām*, it will never be accepted of him'). In the most common usage of the term, '*islām*' refers to the religion that the Prophet Muhammad taught. If so, these verses seem clear in that, for God, there is only one acceptable religion – namely Islam.

However, from a theologically inclusivist perspective, the word *dīn* in these verses does not necessarily refer to 'religion' but more broadly to the 'way' or the 'right path', and the word *islām* here refers to 'submission to God'⁴⁹, not necessarily a specific religion called 'Islam'. For theological inclusivists, *islām* as 'submission to God' is the religion of all prophets throughout history. It is in this sense that the Qur'ān speaks of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and their followers as following *islām* or labelling them as '*muslim*'. It does not mean that all people of faith from the beginning of human history until the coming of Islam in 610CE observed the rituals of Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad and lived by the principles and practices of the religion of Islam.

Theological inclusivists often find that their understanding of what *islām* is in these Qur'ānic verses is supported by some key classical commentators on the Qur'ān. While not all commentators interpret the word *islām* as used in these verses in a general sense, some prominent commentators do. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) interprets *islām* in Q 5:3 as 'surrendering to My commands and obedience to Me' (*al-istislām li amrī wa al-inqiyād li tā'ātibī*).⁵⁰ For al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), *islām* in Q 3:85 is a reference to 'the unity of God and surrendering oneself to Allah Almighty' (*al-tawhīd wa islām al-wajhi lillāh ta'āla*).⁵¹ Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) interpreted *islām* in Q 3:19 as 'faith and acts of obedience' (*al-īmān wa al-tā'āt*).⁵² Such interpretations of the word *islām* give theological inclusivists a justification for interpreting the word *islām* today in a more general sense as simply 'submission to God'.

A related issue is the labelling of followers of other monotheistic religions, such as Jews and Christians, as *kāfirūn* (unbelievers) or associating them with '*kufr*' (unbelief). If followers of these monotheistic religions follow their religions, then they should be considered believers in the one God and thus cannot be called unbelievers (*kāfirūn*). For example, Q 5:17 and 5:72 appear to accuse Christians of being unbelievers. According to Esack, this is not a 'purely doctrinal' matter.⁵³ He argues that the Qur'ānic notion of *kufr* (usually translated as 'unbelief') is intrinsically linked to the rejection of morality and justice. Therefore, Christians guilty of *kufr* are not those who have simply rejected Islam but those who have maintained an antagonistic attitude towards Muslims. More broadly, for Esack, *kufr* is used in the Qur'ān in a number of ways: it 'was connected to the active and violent opposition to the prophets of God and a determination to destroy their mission';⁵⁴ or in relation to those who attempted to actively engage in acts like the assassination of prophets in verses such as Q 4:155, Q 5:70, and Q 8:30; or to a refusal to spend one's wealth on the poor (as in Q 2:254, Q 3:179, Q 9:34, and Q 41:7). A *kāfir* is someone who also oppresses the weak and does evil (Q 4:168 and Q 14:13) or remains silent in the face of oppression and evil (Q 5:79).⁵⁵ While in the Islamic theological tradition, *kufr* is often associated with 'theological unbelief' – that is denial of the Prophet Muhammad, the revelation of the Qur'ān, or the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and not just denial of God – theological inclusivists like Esack are keen to associate the notion of *kufr*, particularly of those from monotheistic traditions such as Judaism and Christianity, with hostility towards Muslims and unjust and oppressive practices against them. Such a view of *kufr* is also attributed to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī by Mohammad Fadel.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 114. For a discussion of the issue in relation to the wider study of religion, see Paul Hedges, *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021, 21-22, 304-305, 306 box 13.2.

⁵⁰ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, commentary on Q 5:3, available at www.altafsir.com.

⁵¹ Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, commentary on Q 3:85, available at www.altafsir.com.

⁵² Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, commentary on Q 3:19, available at www.altafsir.com.

⁵³ Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 137.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ Mohammad Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam: Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism", 21 November 2010, available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1712972>.

In contrast, theological exclusivists, both in the past and present, often adopt narrower interpretations of verses such as Q 3:19 and Q 3:85. They take the word *islām*, as used in these verses, to refer to the religion taught by the Prophet Muhammad. For these exclusivists, based on this narrow reading of the verse, religious traditions that may have been valid in the past or have come before the Prophet Muhammad, such as Judaism, Christianity, and other monotheistic traditions, are now considered invalid in the sight of God. Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), in his commentary on Q 3:19, summarises this classical theologically exclusivist position:

“Allah states that there is no religion accepted with Him from any person, except Islam. Islam includes obeying all of the Messengers until Muhammad who finalised their commission, thus closing all paths to Allah except through Muhammad. Therefore, after Allah sent Muhammad, whoever meets Allah following a path other than Muhammad’s, it will not be accepted of him”.⁵⁷

As Tim Winter observes, ‘the jurists and *kalām* theologians maintained a consensus that the earlier versions of faith have now been rendered invalid (*bāṭil*)’⁵⁸. Winter attributes this position to a range of early theologians, including al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) and al-Nawawī (d. 1277), and mentions an essential phrase in the Creed of Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (d. 1631), a summary of Islamic beliefs that students of Azhar University even today are expected to memorise⁵⁹: “Islam’s supersession [*naskh*] of other faiths has taken place inescapably; May God abase those who deny this”⁶⁰ which summarises the position of the classical jurists and theologians that is still widely followed.⁶¹ The Creed of Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī, which is another widely followed creed, makes the same point in a more general sense: “There is only one religion of Allah in the heavens and the earth and that is the religion of Islam”.⁶²

A Critique of Theological Inclusivism: The Example of Yasir Qadhi

Yasir Qadhi, a leading contemporary scholar, argues that the idea that the Qur’ān supports theological inclusivism (what he refers to as ‘religious pluralism’) is highly problematic and that an honest reading of the Qur’ān simply cannot support it. For him, those who argue that the Qur’ān supports theological inclusivism have come to this conclusion by reading certain ambiguous verses in a selective way while ignoring other verses that stand in contrast. Qadhi states that adopting this kind of theological inclusivism essentially entails rejecting the Prophet Muhammad’s message. He believes that those Muslim thinkers who support this understanding of theological inclusivism are blinded by their judgement of what they believe the Qur’ān should say or by their relationships with non-Muslims that have led to personal feelings towards them.⁶³

Qadhi cites some classical Qur’ān commentators to argue that Q 2:62 cannot be taken to imply the salvation of Jews, Christians and Sabaeans simply on the basis of belief in God, the Last Day, and good deeds. First, he notes that many of these commentators declared the verse had been abrogated by other verses.⁶⁴ Second, he notes that some commentators have said that, in the verse, the phrase ‘those who believe’ refers to hypocrites in Medina who pretended to have genuine faith but in fact did not. Therefore, the hypocrites, along with the Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans, are all encouraged to ‘take the important step of professing true faith in God if they wish to achieve His pleasure’⁶⁵ This will be by believing in the Prophet Muhammad and his teaching.

⁵⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* Ibn Kathīr, commentary on Q 3:19, available at www.altafsir.com.

⁵⁸ Winter, “The Last Trump Card”, 146.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 133-155.

⁶² Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī, “Creed of Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī”, .

⁶³ Yasir Qadhi, “The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?: Revisiting Classical and Medieval Sunni Approaches to the Salvation of Others”, in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 109-121, 117.

⁶⁴ Qadhi, “The Path of Allah”, 116.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

Qadhi rejects many of the arguments that scholars use in support of the Qur'ān's theologically inclusivist positions about other religions. For example, he disagrees that there is 'a larger faith called "islām" with a small "i"'.⁶⁶ He argues that this position rejects those verses of the Qur'ān that appear to suggest the very opposite, such as Q 2:137 and 2:145, which contrast the beliefs of Jews and Christians with those of Muslims.⁶⁷

Having critiqued virtually all key aspects of theological inclusivism of today and arguing that adopting this kind of inclusivism amounts to a rejection of the entire Islamic theological tradition and mainstream Islamic views on what Islam is and what it means to be Muslim, Qadhi, like many other Muslim theologians, adopts the view that the fate of human beings in the Hereafter is a matter for God. It is only God who can decide whether a particular person will be saved or not or whether a person will go to heaven or hell. No one can legitimately claim that they know the fate of another person, regardless of the religious label with which that person is associated.⁶⁸

While strongly maintaining the position that, as a matter of principle, after the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, a person is expected to follow the Prophet in order to achieve salvation, Qadhi leaves open the possibility of salvation for others based on several considerations: God's mercy, lack of knowledge of the teachings of God's messengers, and a lack of proper communication of God's teachings in a way that enables a person to reflect on and follow those teachings. He concludes by affirming that only God can assign a person to heaven or hell, no matter how 'evil' or 'good' a person is perceived to be.⁶⁹ Therefore, a Muslim should never declare that a specific person is going to face punishment in the afterlife or receive a reward because it is 'God alone [who] judges individuals.'⁷⁰ Emphasising this point in relation to Muslims, the Creed of Imām al-Ṭahāwī states:

"We hope that Allah will pardon the people of right action among the believers [Muslims] and grant them entrance into the Garden through His Mercy, but we cannot be certain of this, and we cannot bear witness that it will definitely happen and that they will be in the Garden".⁷¹

From Theological Inclusivism to Social Inclusivism

The critique of theological inclusivism by Qadhi and many other Muslim scholars highlights the need to move beyond a focus on theological inclusivism, particularly in its strong form (e.g. the idea that all religions are valid, as discussed above). For most Muslims, adopting this form of theological inclusivism constitutes a dilution of the fundamental beliefs of Islam and is thus likely to be resisted by both scholars and ordinary Muslims. If one of the objectives of theological inclusivism is to develop a better understanding and more positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, a better strategy would be to explore other more feasible options.

To promote such positive relations, I believe we may need to shift our focus from theological inclusivism to social inclusivism, as defined earlier. Many contemporary Muslim scholars, such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī,⁷² 'Abd Allah bin Bayyah,⁷³ Hamza Yusuf,⁷⁴ Yasir Qadhi,⁷⁵ Tariq Ramadan,⁷⁶ and Tim Winter⁷⁷, who appear to hold theologically exclusivist views, have also developed a range of ideas in their works for this purpose. We

⁶⁶ Ibid, 116.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Qadhi, "The Path of Allah", 119.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ al-Ṭahāwī, "Creed of Imām al-Ṭahāwī".

⁷² For al-Qaraḍāwī's ideas, see Christine Schirrmacher, "Let There Be No Compulsion in Religion" (*Sura 2:256*): *Apostasy from Islam as Judged by Contemporary Islamic Theologians*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016, 127-285.

⁷³ For his ideas, see Hisham A. Hellyer, "Minorities, Muslims and Sharia: Some Reflections on Islamic Law and Muslims without Political Power", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18.1 (2007): 85-109.

⁷⁴ Hamza Yusuf, "Who Are the Disbelievers?", *Seasons: The Journal of Zaytuna Institute* 5 (2008), 31-50.

⁷⁵ Yasir Qadhi, "Does the Quran Forbid Becoming Friends with Non-Muslims?" (Lecture), available at: <https://muslimcentral.com/audio/yasir-qadhi/>.

⁷⁶ Tariq Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*, London: Allen Lane, 2010.

⁷⁷ Tim Winter, "Pluralism from a Muslim Perspective", in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, ed. Norma Solomon, Richard Harries and Tim Winter, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2006, 202-11.

can also see this in some of the most important declarations and statements by a large number of Muslim scholars around the world over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, such as the *Marrakesh Declaration*,⁷⁸ the *Letter to al-Baghdadi*,⁷⁹ and *The Common Word*.⁸⁰ These declarations provide detailed arguments based on the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and Islamic theological and juristic ideas in support of socially inclusivist positions, demonstrating the widely accepted nature of such views among Muslims around the world. Thus, in this paper, I do not repeat those arguments.

Unlike theological inclusivism, which focuses on rethinking important theological positions about other religions, social inclusivism is concerned with a range of ideas that developed in the past about people, particularly in the domains of social and political thought in the Islamic tradition over the course of its first 300 years or so. Examples include the notion of *dhimmi* (a protected non-Muslim in a Muslim state), the second class nature of non-Muslims under Muslim rule in the past, the notion of special taxes that non-Muslims were expected to pay to Muslim governments (for example, *jizya*), the restrictions on the religious freedom of non-Muslims under Muslim rule (e.g. when building places of worship or manifesting their religion), the idea that non-Muslims may not hold senior positions in the administration of Muslim states, the belief that a Muslim should not have good social relations with non-Muslims, or that a Muslim should enjoy a certain kind of superiority vis-à-vis the non-Muslim in certain cases of Islamic law. All of these can be considered ideas that are associated with social exclusivism, as defined in this paper.

Interestingly, while these negative ideas about non-Muslims were historically dominant in many Muslim societies, today, their importance is declining. Almost all Muslim majority countries today have devised laws that have done away with most of these negative ideas, at least as far as their legal systems are concerned. Muslim states by and large have also accepted, at least in theory, the notion of equality of Muslims and non-Muslims. This can be seen in the acceptance by Muslim states of a vast array of the United Nations' conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which affirm this equality. However, at a social level and in Islamic religious discourses, these negative ideas still resonate among certain sections of Muslim communities and movements. What the ISIS did to non-Muslims under their rule in parts of Iraq and Syria is an example of this, albeit an extreme one.

From a strictly theological perspective, these negative ideas about *people* of other religions do not constitute, in my view, fundamental theological positions that Muslims are expected to adopt as part of their basic belief system, and they do not feature in any of the widely used standard Islamic creeds, such as the Creed of Imām al-Ṭahāwī. Thus, with regard to the possible acceptance of ideas that counter these negative views about people of other religions today by Muslims, we can argue that there is a significant difference between theologically exclusivist ideas and socially exclusivist ones. While the former is still considered a fundamental part of the Islamic belief system, the latter is not. Therefore, my argument is that it is possible to rethink almost all of these socially exclusivist positions and negative ideas today and adopt more inclusivist positions vis-à-vis the religious 'other' without touching what many Muslims consider to be key Islamic beliefs. In fact, many current debates on inclusivism among Muslims are about adopting ideas such as the dignity of all people regardless of their religious background, equality, non-discrimination, equal citizenship, and the need for cooperation between people from different religious traditions, which are socially inclusivist ideas. Such ideas are not only supported by theological inclusivists but also by many scholars who firmly hold theologically exclusivist positions concerning *other religions*. For example, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, one of the most influential Muslim scholars today, maintains theologically exclusivist positions while strongly arguing for socially inclusivist ideas, even though this entails the rethinking of significant areas of classical Islamic law as far as Muslim and non-Muslim relations are concerned. For al-Qaraḍāwī, it is possible to adopt a position that allows a Muslim to cooperate with people of other religions, given that (a) all human beings have the same dignity regardless of their religion, colour, or race; (b) religious differences should be seen as part of God's plan; (c) all human beings have the freedom to believe or not to believe in God or Islam; (d) justice and fairness are important Qur'ānic concerns; and (e) relations with people of other religions can be based on justice and fairness.⁸¹

⁷⁸ The Marrakesh Declaration, available at: <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>.

⁷⁹ Letter to Al-Baghdadi, available at: <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>.

⁸⁰ A Common Word between Us and You, available at: <https://www.acommonword.com/>.

⁸¹ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fatāwā Mu'āshira*, Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2003, 151-191; see Fadel's summary of al-Qaraḍāwī's views, Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam".

This emphasis on social inclusivism, I believe, is the most feasible option for developing positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Some might argue that rethinking socially exclusivist positions may also require a significant reworking of many ideas Muslims have held about people of other religions in Islamic theological and juristic debates. However, the fact that these socially exclusivist positions do not seem to be *fundamental* beliefs in Islamic theology makes them more amenable to rethinking and reinterpretation. Rethinking such positions is unlikely to dilute the fundamental Islamic beliefs and theological positions followed by mainstream Muslims, whether Sunni or Shīʿa. Therefore, it is possible to argue that social inclusivism is less threatening for the average Muslim and the scholar alike and is more promising in terms of promoting better social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. While on the theological front, such rethinking may seem feasible, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges it may pose to traditional Islamic legal positions, such as those that were widely accepted in Islamic legal schools before the modern period. Examples include the famous Pact of Umar, which historically provided a broad set of rules for managing Muslim–non-Muslim relations in a Muslim state. These rules included several restrictions on the manifestation of religion by non-Muslims under Muslim rule, as well as practices that emphasised the inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims in some respects. Other examples include restrictions traditionally upheld with regard to equality before the law, such as the weight given to the testimony of a non-Muslim vis-à-vis that of a Muslim in an Islamic court of law. While some of these traditionally held positions, such as the rules of the Pact of Umar, are largely ignored in practice in much of the Muslim world today, there is still much work to be done in current Islamic legal thought to rethink the traditional Islamic laws that pertain to non-Muslims and affect them negatively. In the discussion above, I have pointed out examples of the rethinking of Islamic juristic thought that is taking place, such as the rethinking of traditional citizenship rules called for in the Marrakesh Declaration (2016) by 300 or so Muslim scholars. These new ideas are likely to support the social inclusivism argued for in this paper. However, such rethinking, whether of Islamic legal or theological issues, is likely to provoke some conservative members of Muslim communities to respond negatively and argue that it will ultimately lead to the dilution of Islamic norms and, therefore, must be resisted.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted some significant challenges facing theologically inclusivist positions about other religions that are promoted by a relatively small but vocal group of Muslim scholars today. The paper has argued for the need to shift our focus from attempts at reworking what most Muslims consider to be fundamental Islamic beliefs about other *religions* to rethinking and addressing negative ideas that developed in the Islamic tradition about *people* of other religions. The position this paper has taken is that rethinking negative ideas about people of other religions may be more feasible theologically, as it does not require abandoning what most Muslims consider to be fundamental beliefs that have become standard, which also feature in important Islamic credal statements that list key beliefs a Muslim should have. By taking this position, the paper is not attempting to deemphasise the need for Muslim theologians, philosophers, and scholars to reflect on what have become fundamental Islamic theological beliefs about other religions and see whether Muslims might become more theologically inclusive as well. This, however, appears to be a rather long-term project, and in my view, promoting better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims by rethinking negative views about the *people* of other religions should take precedence.

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