# Foreword

SOCIETIES TODAY PERHAPS more so than any time in the past are characterised by religious diversity. A great exchange of views is taking place, partly through interfaith dialogue but also across social media, in a climate of greater international integration – and marked hostility – which seeks to know Islam as never before. Peaceful co-existence is one thing, but tolerance of religious difference, that is of different religious traditions, although almost unanimously agreed upon as a necessary goal, is quite another, causing a dilemma. Whilst theoretically making sense, practical implementation is proving a little difficult, partly because much thought needs to be given to one's own convictions and moral truths in relation to those of others, and partly because, for Islam at least, the right path is clearly defined as belief in God and His Prophet, and this needs to be accommodated in all discussions.

Not surprisingly, some complex theological and other related issues have come to the fore, sparking at times heated debated, and focusing much attention on the field of religious pluralism and Islam's role in relation to not only simply living in tolerance with other faiths, but seeking to understand them through real, positive dialogue:

> But I don't believe that religious dialogue is ever advanced by denying difference. I think there is a kind of arrogance at times in the assumption that 'I can tell you what you really mean'; and I deplore the way in which some of those who use the language of religious pluralism are so ready to tell absolutely every practitioner of every faith on the globe what they're really about. And the recognition of difference seems to me entirely compatible

with deep mutual respect, with commitment to dialogue, sometimes costly
dialogue, and to co-existence.*

Religious pluralism has a variety of meanings and any active
engagement with those of other faiths would require at some
point discussion of one's worldview and religious truths in rela-
tion to those of others. Islam faces a particularly difficult posi-
tion. Aside from being tolerant and respectful of other faiths,
advocating freedom of faith, and peaceful co-existence for all
humanity, it has to intellectually engage on matters of religious
truth whilst defending the validity of its own Islamic tenets with-
out relegating to perdition all those who deny this. There is an
existence of extremes, of perennialist philosophy versus exclu-
sivist interpretation. That is not to say that we are to accommo-
date all truths relativistic fashion, and not point out error. Far
from it. Rather the encounter has to be a highly sophisticated
and intellectual one based on respect. Thus, if we separate out
what is Islamic from what is cultural or context-based interpre-
tation, we will discover that in the Qur'an we have a great and
honourable example of how to live in diversity, of powerful
scriptural tenets that lend themselves precisely to engagement
with those of other faiths, allowing valuable contributions to be
made to the field of religious pluralism. All that is required from
Muslims is careful study of these Qur'anic tenets to present them
accurately and as they are meant to be understood without pro-
jecting them through the filter of historical confrontation or
cultural misinterpretation.

Unfortunately, it is easier to be critical and exclusivist, than to
find common ground and present truly the inclusive message of
the Qur'an. The author criticizes this exclusivist view on the part
of certain theologians and scholars, locating their interpretation
of controversial Qur'anic verses such as the verse of the sword, in
the historical contexts of the Crusades and constant state of

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* Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism*
(Lambeth Palace, Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS UK), 2007).

defensive action, to argue that shaped in response to onslaughts of various sorts these political readings of Qur'anic texts do not accurately reflect the message being conveyed. Misleading *theological* conclusions, note *not Qur'anic* as is the contention of this study, emerged which were hardline in nature, claiming that Muslims had no obligations towards non-Muslims. Using a thematic, holistic approach to Qur'anic exegesis, as well as linguistically analysing key terms used in Qur'anic verses, he corrects much of this misinterpretation to offer a reading based on the meaning of the verses as they stand and in relation to the comprehensive message of the Qur'an and its humanistic view.

So, in the Islamic and Qur'anic context, we need to be extremely careful, and of course clear, with regards to discussion on religious pluralism and the attitudes Muslims should adopt in relation to this in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an.

There exist different types of religious pluralisms: *Normative Religious Pluralism* places emphasis on developing an ethico-behavioral pattern towards difference. *Soteriological Religious Pluralism* stresses salvation. *Epistemological Religious Pluralism* focuses on justification or rationality. Finally, *Alethic Religious Pluralism* concerns the nature of truth. According to the author unlike soteriological and alethic pluralism, whose issues are inherently irreconcilable for Muslims (and perhaps for those of other faiths and as such divisive) focusing on core aspects of religious truth and salvation which cannot be compromised on, normative religious pluralism concentrates on terrestrial dimensions and ramifications allowing for seeking genuine understanding, toleration, and peacebuilding. In other words normative religious pluralism does not demand synthesis of religious views, or compromise on matters of doctrine, which is not realistic and for many not feasible, but can foster understanding whilst respecting theological difference.

This work discusses the legitimacy of using normative religious pluralism in relation to the normative teachings of Islam to argue that the former's principles are not alien to Islamic teachings so long as we distinguish between the Qur'an and Sunnah of

the Prophet (ṢAAS),* and opinions derived by scholars which are rooted in political contexts or military defence. In terms of the Qur'an analysis is to focus on the commands/teaching contained in the verses, the context of the command/verse, the occasion of revelation, its relation to the overall comprehensive message of the Qur'an (using a thematic approach), and the role of the Sunnah to explain the meaning further. This is the methodology adopted by the author throughout the study.

In doing so the author corrects some highly controversial mis-quoted, mistranslated, and/or quoted out of context verses of the Qur'an, including as mentioned the verse of the sword and the idea of not taking non-Muslims as friends. In reality, the Qur'an calls for freedom of faith and peaceful co-existence, but con-demns oppression, religious persecution, and those who initiate hostilities. *In this way it not only invokes human dignity, but restores it when it is violated.*

> And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe. (Qur'an *Yūnus* 10:99)

> There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. (Qur'an *al-Baqarah* 2:256)

The establishment of a just society which respects all human beings and their rights is essential. In addition, note evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah does not support the implemen-tation of a capital punishment for apostasy (*al-riddah*). Rather, textual study points to freedom of belief including the act of rejecting the faith.**

This allows the author to approach the issue of religious plu-ralism from a strong, clear Islamic perspective which lends much

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*(ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*. May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.
** See Taha J. Alalwani, *Apostasy in Islam, A Historical and Scriptural Analysis* (London: IIIT, 2011). Also AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, *Apostates, Islam and Freedom of Faith: Change of Conviction vs Change of Allegiance* (Occasional Paper 22),(London: IIIT, 2013).

needed clarity to a subject that can quickly lead to confusion in understanding the intrinsic nature of religious diversity, tolerance, and religious truths – and the interplay between them – especially in relation to religious inclusivist and exclusivist positions. The Islamic perspective also calls for genuine engagement not based on false diplomacy or political correctness and makes no false claims to neutral understanding or to blanket relativism.

Dates cited in the work according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) are abbreviated AH, otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and abbreviated CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered contemporary. English translation of quotations taken from original Arabic sources are those of the author unless specified.

Since its establishment in 1981, the IIIT has continued to serve as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts, based on Islamic vision, values and principles. The Institute's programs of research, and seminars and conferences, over the last thirty years, have resulted in the publication of more than four hundred and fifty titles in both English, Arabic and other major languages.

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# Introduction

We live in a fairly unique time, an age of unprecedented human development. Unlike previous civilisations, marked by clear-cut cultural and religious boundaries, humanity today lives in a vastly diverse world of cultures, ethnicities and faiths. Globalisation has so networked the world and made it inter-dependent and inter-related, that no one person can live in isolation from the next or be indifferent to what goes on elsewhere. It is also said to be an age of secularism. Yet, despite this and despite all the philosophical predictions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with regard to the demise of religion, religion in the third millennium has in fact emerged afresh, to play an essential role in shaping and affecting people's conscience and behavior across the world.

Given the fact of globalisation and the revival of religions in a milieu where everyone is practically on everyone else's doorstep, it is vitally important for theologians from all faiths to derive from their own religious sources conceptions of religious pluralism corresponding to the reality of the present world. In other words today's inter-faith issues cannot be solved by resorting to out-of-date conceptions. New efforts are needed in the field of theology to develop up-to-date patterns for peaceful religious co-existence and inter-faith dialogue.

This study is a response to the urgent need and challenge for an effective and positive way to interact with the religious other. It explores the Qur'anic conception of normative religious pluralism with a view to providing answers to questions such as whether the Qur'an itself regards normative religious pluralism

as a value system or simply a method through which the Qur'anic worldview can be actualised. What is the main purpose of the Qur'anic endorsement of normative religious pluralism? Is normative Islam always identical with the actions of its adherents? Does an extant negative attitude towards normative religious pluralism emerge from the teachings of Islam or from the context of surrounding circumstances?

The most important key to answering all these questions is Qur'anic exegesis or *tafsīr* which has a decisive religious impact on Muslim consciousness and is a vital prerequisite for Muslim understanding of interfaith relations. The problem is that where once the Qur'anic text was viewed dynamically, allowing for a renewed understanding of religious co-existence and thus preserving the religious identity of Muslims whilst keeping pace with universal human values, this progress over time slowed. Understanding and engagement became historically burdened with methodological and socio-political problems which have carried to this day. These developments include for example, the emergence of certain ethical conceptions from the Qur'anic text in historical contexts different from the present, the usage of the atomistic approach,[1] the excessive implementation of the abrogation claim in relation to some ethical norms towards non-muslims, the exclusive restriction of the general meaning of certain Qur'anic verses referring positively to non-Muslims on the grounds that the general sense of these verses was specified for Muslims only, etc. All these methodological and socio-political circumstances have resulted in exegesis producing meanings which are in reality exclusive with respect to interfaith relations. And these exclusive interpretations have in turn led to the neglect of the humanistic approach[2] with regard to Qur'anic exegesis and hence to the deterioration of religious co-existence.

The main purpose of this study has therefore been to derive from the Qur'an a coherent conception of normative religious pluralism and thus, on the one hand to investigate a progressive way of understanding the Qur'an not only in terms of its own

textual and historical contexts, but also in the context of universal human values, and on the other hand, to emphasise both the humanistic approach as well as the dynamic and creative nature of Qur'anic exegesis, *tafsīr*. For this reason, and since the study's area of focus is the Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), will be consulted only to the extent required by the exegetical process, and not as main research areas.

As the classical atomistic approach historically applied to the Qur'an as a main exegetical tool has failed to produce a thematic coherent picture of the organic unity of the Qur'an, the current study uses another approach known as the thematic exegetical method. The purpose of this method is to crystallise coherently the Qur'anic comprehensive conception of a given topic.[3] This is done by gathering together thematically relevant Qur'anic verses in order to study them historically, linguistically and contextually to develop thereby a logical construction[4] presenting clearly the Qur'anic conceptual unity of a topic. Historical analysis of the selected verses concentrates on the authentic occasion of their revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the authentic interpretations of the Prophet, his Companions and the elderly among the Successors, as it also concentrates on the socio-political environment of the revelation: Makkah or Madinah. By elderly is meant the first generation of successors, they were closest to the time of the Prophet and gained their knowledge from the Companions. This type of analysis ensures that the research does not transgress any authentic, prophetic explanations whilst at the same time providing firm ground for critical examination of historical claims i.e. such as abrogation, for determining abrogation cases in the Qur'an is not based on reasoning, but on authentic, prophetic evidence.[5] Linguistic study of Qur'anic verses reconciles, through syntactical, morphological and rhetorical analysis, the variety of possible meanings with respect to indefinite Qur'anic verses, *mutashābih*. Contextual study of Qur'anic verses involves observation of the particular textual context of a verse being interpreted, the overall Qur'anic context thematically related to

the interpreted verse and also the context of the reality of present world, namely human experience. This type of analysis prevents the exegetical process from partial selectivity, since the relevant thematic linkages keep the topic coherent as well as comprehensive and in accordance to universal human values.

The validity of the thematic approach stems from the Qur'an itself, for it is well-established fact among scholars that the revelation itself does not present any given topic, in complete form, in one specific place. Rather, elements of it are fragmented and scattered throughout the text. For this reason, the Prophet himself is reported to have made different references to the Qur'an in order to clarify a given issue or meaning, known as the explanation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. However, the earliest seeds of the thematic approach to Qur'anic exegetical analysis seem to have been sown in the early 9th century, for well-documented evidence to support this claim can be found in Arabic literature dating from the period. For example, in his encyclopaedic work, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, al-Jāḥiẓ explains and explores various different ideas i.e. that of fire, thematically, that is through a thematic collection of relevant verses on the topic.[6] Use of the thematic method with regard to Qur'anic exegesis can also be traced, to some extent, in later works such as: *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī; *Al-Kashf ʿan Manāhij al-Adillah fī ʿAqā'id al-Millah* by Ibn Rushd; and *Risālah fī Lafẓ al-Sunnah fī al-Qur'ān* by Ibn Taymiyyah, etc.[7]

Despite these early steps the thematic method as such was not regarded with much interest nor developed further until the 19th century,[8] when certain western scholars began to apply it with the aim of understanding Qur'anic themes coherently. Thus in 1840 a monograph appeared in Paris entitled *Le Koran: doctrines et devoirs*, containing thematic selections from the Qur'an. This was followed by other similar works.[9] The use of the thematic exegetical approach by western scholars seems to have attracted the attention of some Muslim intellectuals raising their awareness of its significance as an accurate exegetical tool for

understanding the organic unity of the Qur'an. For instance, it is thought that Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī was acquainted with one of the earliest thematic studies of the Qur'an, *Le Koran Analyse* written by Jules Le Beaume and published in Paris in 1878.[10] The book was translated by Muhammad Fuad Abd al-Baqi in 1924 and published for the first time in 1935 in Cairo under the title *Tafṣīr Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm*. It is very likely that al-Afghānī attempted to promote the thematic approach among Muslims because, according to some scholars, a copy of *Tafṣīr Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm* was later found with his disciple Muhammad Abduh. In addition he is reported to have been criticised by some authorities of Al-Azhar university for his adoption of the thematic exegetical method.[11] Indeed, Al-Afghānī's disagreement with the traditional mindset of some Muslim scholars is a well-known fact. For example, in a lecture entitled *Lecture in Teaching and Learning*, given in 1882 in Calcutta, five years after publication of *Tafṣīr Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm*, he states:

> The strangest thing of all is that our ulama [scholars] these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation, and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science. ...The Islamic religion is the closest of religions to science and knowledge, and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith.[12]

Resistance to the idea however could not prevent its further development in modern times and thus the first official call for the adoption of a thematic method in the field of Qur'anic exegesis is assumed to have been made by Amin al-Khuli in the 20th century.[13] Consequently, the first PhD work dedicated to the thematic study of the Qur'an was undertaken by Muhammad

Mahmud Hijazi under the title *Al-Waḥdah al-Mawḍūᶜiyyah li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, [The Topical Unity of the *Qur'ān al-Karīm*], in 1967 at the university of Al-Azhar. From that point onwards, the thematic approach has gradually gained recognition in the field of Qur'anic exegesis all over the world to such a degree that it has been added to the university curricula in many countries resulting in a great deal of thematic research being conducted on a rich variety of Qur'anic topics.

However, the issue of normative religious pluralism has not been thematically studied in its entirety within the Qur'an despite the substantial significance of the subject in the modern era. And whilst it is true that some elements of Qur'anic normative religious pluralism have been studied, they have only been done so as fragmented units, which cannot present an overall coherent picture of Qur'anic guidance with regards to the ethico-behavioral pattern towards non-Muslims. In other instances, authors have often sought to explore broadly Islamic perspectives on religious pluralism as a socio-political phenomenon through approaches differing from the thematic exegetical method. Of course, all these works have positively contributed to the current research either thematically or methodologically. For example, in *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* (1997), Farid Esack in an attempt to understand the Qur'anic position towards non-Muslims in the socio-political context of the Apartheid regime in South Africa sought to strike a balance between two contradictory approaches: the first, used by some liberal scholars, has simply ignored Qur'anic verses denouncing certain features of non-Muslims, whereas the second, characteristic of some conservative scholars, has resorted to exegesis producing exclusivist meanings with respect to interfaith relations. Thus Esack, despite a frequent disregard for the Qur'anic context – a key exegetical tool for disclosing comprehensively the inner thematic structure of a topic – emphasises the valuable idea that Qur'anic exegesis should work in accordance with both the environmental context of an interpreter and universal human values.

## Introduction

*Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* could be seen as the practical application of conclusions and recommendations drawn by Jane D. McAuliffe in her work *Qur'anic Christians* (1991). McAuliffe regards Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), as the most important key to the Muslim understanding of Christians. However, discovering that interpretation of a Qur'anic text can be a combination of the interpreter's own mind preoccupied with its own socio-political context, McAuliffe suggests that there is an urgent need for creating new interpretive strategies, a conclusion reached after examining a significant part of *tafsīr* literature. In her opinion Christian self-definition, at both sociological and theological levels, does not match the Muslim understanding of Christians. And, according to McAuliffe, the lack of correspondence between the Qur'anic Christians and the living community of people who call themselves Christians is mainly rooted in Qur'anic interpretations, which have a decisive religious impact on Muslim consciousness. Thus, the importance of McAuliffe's study appears in the idea of re-examining the Qur'anic text, which "remains malleable to the interpretive touch, ready to reveal new insights and intimations, ready to generate renewed understandings of these scriptural sources of Muslim-Christian rapprochement."[14] However, it is obvious from the work, that the idea of a thematic approach to the Qur'an is not expressed as a solution able to rectify the inability of classical *tafsīr* literature to create a reasonable model of interfaith relations. Moreover, the author's suggestion for creating new interpretive strategies in accord with a socio-political context, might cause methodological concerns if understood that the Qur'anic text needs to be enforced until it produces a meaning which matches a socio-political status quo.

David Marshall in *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (1999) also analyses the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Qur'an. Marshall attempts to prove that it is instinctive to God's sincere worshipper to seek to emulate in attitude and in action the divine mind, the problem being that

according to him in the case of Islam this declares war on "unbelievers." Is this the model he feels is set forth for Muslims? His implication is clear. However, the simplistic conclusion drawn in this schematic study is misleading as the linguistic indications of the verses are ignored and no account is taken of the historical circumstances which help determine the motivation behind the fighting. Despite this the author advances a significant approach in using thematic observation of the development as well as the improvement of personalities in the Qur'an through constantly changing circumstances.

Unlike Marshall, who draws a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers on grounds of the classical divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, Izutsu (2002) shows in his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* that the two terms of belief (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufr*) have very complex semantic structures. These structures are constituted by a wide range of other words and notions that convey subtle shades of meanings; both positive and negative meanings, which depict belief and unbelief respectively, can be manifested in different groups among humans and on different levels of social behavior. Accordingly, the definition of believers and unbelievers in terms of Izutsu's semantic analysis of these two concepts, is not as simple as it appears in Marshall's work. However, the essential thematic point made by Izutsu is observation of two different levels of relationships: between human beings themselves and between human beings and God. The author makes a distinction between them and names the former horizontal relationships related to social ethics, and the latter vertical relationships related to religious ethics. Although Izutsu himself admits that "Islamic thought, at its Qur'anic stage, makes no real distinction between the religious and the ethical,"[15] the divide of relationships into horizontal and, figuratively speaking, vertical relationships is an important formula for understanding the Qur'anic conception of religious pluralism. This is largely because there are a number of key concepts in the Qur'an which are characteristic in the

vertical relationships between human beings and God. Applying these concepts to the horizontal relationships between human beings inevitably leads to tensions between them. One example in this regard is the judgement on people's beliefs which, according to Islam, is left exclusively to God, and no one among humanity must possess such a right including the prophets.

Another important study exploring the Qur'anic worldview towards religious diversity is *The Qur'an and the West* by Kenneth Cragg (2006). Basing his argument on the fact that the Qur'an's ambiguous texts are much more numerous than its definitive ones, Cragg's work suggests that certain passages from the Qur'an can be interpreted in different ways whereby the Qur'anic worldview can be accommodated within universal human values. Applying this theory mainly to twelve chosen Qur'anic passages, the author concludes that the Qur'anic sphere concerning humanity is the broadest as well as the most central to the Qur'anic concept of human relations. Thus, Qur'anic passages that seem contradictory to universal ethical values such as mercy and compassion must be interpreted in the light of that broad human sphere in the Qur'an. At this point it is important to notice how Cragg's thematic approach to Qur'anic study differs from that of Marshall (1999).

Doubtless, these works are only examples of some Qur'anic research on issues related to interfaith relations and many other works exist elaborating on different, fragmented elements of normative religious pluralism. Nevertheless, it seems that Muslim scholarship of the Qur'an has been limited, and to some extent reluctant, to research the subject of religious pluralism. One possible reason for this might be the term itself, which is a relatively recent notion that has emerged in the western context as an ideology for reconciliation between conflicting Christian denominations. This implies that a notion or a theory from outside the Qur'anic content be brought to the Qur'an in order to study the Qur'an according to that theory. Such an inductive process, which seeks to understand the Qur'anic position, or

infer certain principles from it, moving from external reality to the Qur'anic texts, however has been controversial among Muslim scholars when it comes to the implementation of the thematic exegetical approach. For instance, in his research on the thematic study of the Qur'an, Abd al-Sattar Said appears to suggest that the topic should emerge from the Qur'an itself and the title of the topic be extracted from the Qur'anic words or their derivatives and not be substituted by or confused with modern terms.[16] In comparison, Baqir al-Sadr vividly emphasises the need for conducting a thematic analysis by starting from reality, from human experience, and then moving towards the Qur'anic text. This inductive movement, according to the author, allows on the one hand, examining the Qur'an on religious, social and scientific matters related to actual and contemporary human life, and on the other bringing human experience to the Qur'an for assessment and rectification in the light of the divine guidance.[17] It would appear to be merely a disagreement of emphasis between scholars where one group underlines the Qur'anic text without rejecting the importance of reality, whereas the other places much significance on reality as a way of better understanding the text. In this case, the right approach would seem to be implementation of a thematic analysis of the Qur'an in a twofold process or movement: "To go from reality, from real issues and problems to the sources, and from the sources back to reality. In other words, both inductive and deductive methods should be employed together."[18] This double movement can be recognised in the work of Muhammad Diraz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, where the thematic study of the Qur'anic ethical system appears to be a response to moral concerns emerging as a result of grasping the value of freedom as an unlimited notion in the western context. For this reason the author shows that, according to the Qur'an, morality and the whole ethical system collapse without obligation and responsibility.[19]

In fact, the approach of the twofold movement is supported by the Qur'an, where some verses prescribe observation of the

universe with the aim of exploring it and drawing lessons from human experience on an inductive basis, whilst other verses provide guidance from the text itself on a deductive basis. In the same way, some Qur'anic verses were revealed as a response to the real issues and problems which occurred during the time of the revelation, whereas others were revealed independently without occasions for their revelation.[20] Thus, in the case of the former, the process commenced from reality, from human experience, which was the occasion for the revelation (*sabab nuzūl al-āyah*) and ended as revealed divine guidance in the form of text. As for the latter, it initially appeared as divine guidance in the form of text to be utilised in reality. Actually, the harmonious relationship between the universe and the Qur'an is something natural, since the Creator of the universe is the One Who revealed the Qur'an, and hence they are both ways of discovering the truth. The first leads to the truth by discovering the divine unchangeable laws (*al-sunan al-ilāhiyyah*) in the universe through human historic, scientific, empirical and socio-political experience in the civilisational process, whereas the second leads to the truth through the divine revelation.

Therefore, applying a thematic approach to the Qur'an to study normative religious pluralism is an attempt to examine the Qur'an for divine guidance in this matter. Although the term religious pluralism has only recently emerged, its implications and associated problems are ancient, dating back to the dawn of humanity. Similarly, it should be pointed out that although the term religious pluralism does not exist in the Qur'an itself, elements and implications of the term do exist throughout the Qur'anic text. Accordingly the current thematic analysis of the Qur'an is a study of a whole process rather than a single notion, since it explores a variety of ethical issues, structural elements and objectives in respect of normative religious pluralism. For this reason, the analysis focuses on the core of the verses related to different issues of normative religious pluralism and thus presents coherently the universal ethical system of the Qur'an in this regard.

## The Qur'an and Normative Religious Pluralism

To explore the Qur'anic conception of normative religious pluralism on a thematic basis, it is significantly important to understand first the human intellectual experience of religious pluralism in general. This is done by extracting from the current debate on the matter main aspects, problematic areas, suggested solutions and some historical practices.[21] The first chapter therefore, examines current debate on religious pluralism illustrating the complexity of the notion as well as the fact that many other terms are used interchangeably with it. It reveals the existence of different types of religious pluralism; some related to the issues of religious truth and salvation and thus having eschatological dimensions and ramifications; some linked to the ethico-behavioral model towards religiously different people and accordingly based on terrestrial dimensions expressing significance for the peace-building process; others with a reference to religious sources and hence concentrating on the epistemological consequences of religious pluralism. However, the analysis shows that the relevant type of religious pluralism in the Qur'anic content is normative religious pluralism based on an ethico-behavioral pattern towards religiously different people. The chapter also provides some historical practices of normative religious pluralism in order to underline its important aspects.

The second chapter explores thematically some ethical foundations of normative religious pluralism in the Qur'an. These are freedom of belief, human dignity, integrity, the prohibition of reviling what is sacred to others, and forgiveness. By examining the Qur'an's stance towards these ethical foundations, feasible ground is established on which the legitimacy of normative religious pluralism can be based. The chapter's main argument is that these ethical elements are universally prescribed and penetrate the inward dimensions of human behavior thus allowing neither the adoption of exclusivism nor application of normative religious pluralism on the basis of false diplomacy or any hidden strategies of embrace. In other words, the chapter asserts that the universality of the Qur'anic ethical system goes against the claim

of exclusivity with regards to one's ethico-behavioral pattern towards religiously different people.

The third chapter examines the Qur'anic view on the three dialectical and most central elements of normative religious pluralism: commonality, diversity, and constructive conversation. The chapter argues that both commonalities and particularities are presented in the Qur'an as facts of nature. On the other hand, the author shows that the Qur'an advances the constructive conversation as an essential means of communication, which is expected to strike the right balance between religious commonalities and particularities, and thus prevent the process of religious pluralism from alternating between one extreme and another. In fact, the chapter provides the second argument against exclusivism as an approach to interfaith relations.

The fourth chapter explores the main objectives of normative religious pluralism in the Qur'an. It is argued that the Qur'an points to four universal objectives of the human relationship: mutual understanding (*taʿāruf*), mutual engagement (*taʿāwun*), mutual contribution (*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*), and mutual support (*tadāfuʿ*). Presented only in the Madinan chapters, as well as in the textual context of religious diversity, the four objectives can be employed to serve as main objectives of normative religious pluralism and hence can be used to construct a compelling argument against exclusivism.

Chapter five focuses on some cases and circumstances which seemingly contradict the Qur'anic ethical system and normative religious pluralism in particular. More precisely the chapter examines the root cause as well as the scope of two Qur'anic prescriptions: that of fighting against non-Muslims and not taking them as "friends" (*awliyā'*). It is argued that the basis of the imperative to fight is not the belief system of others, but rather their oppression and initiation of war on innocent people. Thus, the scope of the Qur'anic imperative to fight is only in relation to people of war. With regard to examining the Qur'anic prescription of not taking the Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* this is

analysed and restricted to two aspects: the first purely theological related to the issue of apostasy; the second pertaining to any involvement in partisanship with the Jews and Christians against Islam. The chapter argues against the exclusivist's claim that the differing belief system of others is reason to fight or isolate them.

The case made in this work is logically constructed based on conclusions drawn from collected Qur'anic verses, as important ethical and structural elements of normative religious pluralism, following a thematic approach to the study of the Qur'an. Otherwise, as Diraz importantly points out, the research would appear "as collections of subjects that are unrelated and without structure,"[22] which actually is the case in many thematic studies of the Qur'an.

The final point worth mentioning is that even though a thematic exegetical approach is employed to derive conceptions from the Qur'an, this cannot work independently of the classical atomistic method which concentrates on linguistic as well as historical analysis of Qur'anic verses, for the two approaches are complementary. For this reason and because the research concerns Qur'anic exegesis, the study focuses mainly on three formative and fundamental classical sources of *tafsīr* literature: al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* which provides a rich narrative corpus essential for the historic analysis of the verses; al-Zamakhsharī's *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl* which forms the core of the exegetical literature in terms of the linguistic analysis of the Qur'an; and al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* which provides theoretical and conceptual explanations of the verses. The three classical sources are frequently compared to three modern sources of *tafsīr* literature: 1) Ibn Ashur's *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* which to some extent can be perceived as being the evolved form of al-Zamakhsharī's *Al-Kashshāf*. 2) Tabatabai's *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, which is very useful in respect of the thematic linkages provided between the verses and also in providing good conceptual conclusions. The work is

methodologically similar to al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. 3) Al-Sharawi's *Tafsīr* which is one of the latest exegetical works in the modern era offering a deep linguistic as well as analytical analysis of Qur'anic verses. However, since the main aim of the study is to examine the Qur'anic conception of normative religious pluralism, and not the conception of certain *tafsīr* literature, the scope of the exegetical sources is broadened in some cases.