

Doctrine of Mahdaviat and Pluralism

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Abstract:

This study attempted to explore the similarities and differences between pluralism and Islam. For this purpose the researcher tried to investigate the basic principles of both pluralism and Islam in detail. The comprehensive study through the related literature was done and the result revealed that from the point of view of Islam, religious pluralism is incorrect because it has clear proofs that Islam is the true religion and that the other religions cannot be on par with it. Also, the fact that the Noble Qur'an has not been tampered with and that Islam is the final and conclusive religion effectively amounts to the abrogation of the religions predating Islam.

Key Words: Religion, Pluralism, Islam, Mahdaviat

Introduction

Literally, pluralism means many and multiple and as an expression it refers to difference in viewpoints and plurality of the readings of a school. The term pluralism is not only used in religion but it is also used in other disciplines such as ethics, culture, law and politics. What is intended in this study is the religious pluralism which the present writer intends to examine briefly with the "doctrine of mahdaviat," a belief of Muslims and especially the Shiite Muslims.

The History and Origin of the Idea of Religious Pluralism

Western Christianity paved the way for compiling and developing the idea of religious pluralism. The unacceptable conduct and behavior of medieval Christians and also the non-Christians as the result of their inaccurate prejudices regarding their religions are among the reasons for understanding the gradual emergence of religious pluralism.

Of course, the foundation of this theory could be searched for in either political or religious liberalism. Despite the fact that liberalism in politics is

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notably connected in terms of both history and theory, the two should not be mistaken for each other. The term “liberalism” was used for the first time by a political ideology at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe. The movement in theology founded by Friedrich Schleiermacher was identified as liberal Protestantism at the same time. However, there are those liberal protestants who are not politically liberal and also political liberals who are not concerned with religious liberalism. The mentality among political and religious liberals in ethical, social and political terms is more often than not the reflection of the same basic beliefs and perspectives especially in terms of the relationship between religion and politics. (Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, p. 13)

Religious liberalism appeared along with political liberalism. In fact, it was a reaction to political liberalism. At first, political liberalism which was a reaction to wars and homicide emerged. A group of political thinkers revolted against prejudice and founded the political liberalism which is based on tolerance, forbearance and respect for individual freedoms and rights. Then religious liberalism appeared to politically justify the political liberalism. A group of Christian theologians including Schleiermacher defended this viewpoint theologically and philosophically.

Thus the historical record of religious liberalism is traced back to the nineteenth century, starting with Schleiermacher and rooted in political liberalism. Therefore, some of the features of religious liberalism or liberal Protestantism are the acceptance of modern and nontraditional interpretations of the Christian Holy Book, inattention to the intellectual method in theology, special attention to religious experience instead of intellect and intellectual reasoning as well as recognizing the religious experience and personal feeling as the basis and essence of religion. Thus Protestantism is the source of political liberalism which itself is the source of religious liberalism and, therefore, religious pluralism is the result of religious liberalism.

Religious Pluralism

There are various interpretations of religious pluralism. Here are some of the most important ones: 1. the true religion is only one but this one absolute truth is not received by one divine prophet. It has been revealed to every one of them in one form or another. In other words, each of the religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, etc. is one aspect of the different aspects of a single truth. The difference between the aspects is not that between right and wrong; rather the secret of difference between religions is that of difference in point of view. Therefore, all religions are the same in genuineness and to guarantee happiness for humanity. 2. The second interpretation refers to the claim that there are many and various truths. It recognizes all religions and human schools while it considers the truth of a religion different from that of other religions. In other words, it does not believe in a single “right path” but in multiple right paths. Thus it regards all human religions and schools, parallel to each other, genuine as well as a guarantee for human felicity and salvation.

As Hick (), a Christian theologian and philosopher, postulates, “Pluralism implies acceptance of the perspective that the conversion of human beings from egoistic to truth (of God)-oriented attitude in different ways within all world religious traditions. In other words, there are various and plural ways for

happiness and salvation and not just one. (John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 36)

Of course, the theory of religious pluralism stands against religious “exclusiveness.” A theory introduced earlier is “inclusiveness” which claims that there is only one true religion. For example, from a Christian point of view, merely Christianity is the true religion but since followers of other religions have been looking for the divine will and submitted to it, they are actually harmonious with the spirit and message of Christianity, despite the fact that they have not known Christianity or knowingly repudiated it. Karl Rahner, an advocate of this theory has called such people “the unknown Christians.” (Ibid., p. 34)

The Principle of Salvation and Felicity

Another interpretation of pluralism is to regard it as a way of salvation and the creator of happiness. In other words, all divine laws in all ages are salvation-making. Therefore, it will be enough, for salvation to believe in God, be a follower of the divine laws and follow the precepts in practice.

To study this subject we should first realize that the idea of religious pluralism in Christianity, as a soteriological theory, is the result of special Christian beliefs about salvation and felicity. In other words, man can benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and find salvation merely through Christianity.

According to the traditional teachings of Christianity, there is no other way for salvation except through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Even the great prophets have to wait in Limbo for Jesus Christ to take measures and bring them salvation. A group of Christian thinkers who opposed this idea tried to find a way for the salvation of non-Christians. They have claimed that faith could be the cause of salvation. The faithful person, despite his or her religion, has accepted Christianity unconsciously and potentially, or there should be a faith of the common heritage of all great religious traditions of the world. Despite the differences among the Christian groups that are concerned with pluralism there is a common presupposition among them: according to John Hick and Rahner and also every dogmatist, an appropriate faith is the prerequisite for salvation. To open the gate of Paradise more, Rahner has extended the meaning of appropriate faith to include those people who live like Christians and who might have become Christians had they been subject to Christian teachings. However, Hick has taken a step further to emphasize the compatibility of the surface differences of world religions. (Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, p. 96.)

The principle of salvation and felicity in Christianity is a response to the problem of who would realize felicity and Paradise and who would be deprived of this privilege. Christian scholars including John Hick responded to the question in different ways: 1. exclusiveness; 2. inclusiveness; 3. religious pluralism.

The exclusivists believe that truth and felicity exist merely in one religion and that there is only one inclination to one religion through which one could reach felicity. That is through the belief in the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, forgiving of the sins of people and participating in the sacrifice is the only factor for felicity.

The adherents of inclusiveness believe that although Christianity is the only

way of salvation all could step in this path provided that they stick to the rules of the religion and sincerely tread on the path prescribed by it.

Even the unknown Christians that is the good doers who would probably be formally Christians provided that they receive the teachings of Jesus Christ are regarded as worthy of salvation. To explain this issue they resort to different justifications. One is that other religions are not absolutely void and have benefited somehow from truth and are benefited accordingly by the eternal felicity. Therefore, there is only one main road; other roads are blessed to the extent that they are close to the main road and the followers of the ways would be subject to salvation.

But religious pluralism or the pluralists believe that all religions could be a source of felicity and salvation. In other words, truth and felicity may be with all religions and all their followers might benefit from truth and felicity. In other words, all religions are different aspects of one truth and therefore they are different ways to a single truth. It is not true that the followers of other religions would be subject to punishment. Therefore, religious pluralism, in response to the principle of salvation, went beyond it and introduced the genuineness of non-Christian religions. The adherents of this attitude severely criticized the claim of the genuineness of a particular religion in order to open wide the gate of Heaven to followers of non-Christian religions. They believed that all religions are true and guide their followers into the true path of the final truth. Thus in the West, at the present age, the issue of religious pluralism is beyond the principle of felicity. Therefore, it is essential to elaborate on the Islamic idea about the two issues of “the principle of salvation” and “the genuineness of all religions” and with a look into the religion, study the two issues under the one title of “Islam and the genuineness of religions.” Islamic sources will be used to elucidate the Islamic idea in this regard. Then the relationship between this issue and the doctrine of mahdaviat will be analyzed.

Islam and Genuineness of Religions

According to Islam, the issue of salvation and felicity is different from the genuineness. The concept of salvation and felicity in Islam is beyond the scope of genuineness. It includes a wide scope. Firstly, it includes all the followers of Islam since the time of the Prophet (SA) until the end of the world, who believed in him and did good deeds; secondly, followers of every divine religion during pre-Islamic periods and belief in what was revealed to them by God, including good deeds; thirdly, those who did not intentionally ignore to study religion and truth provided that they had intellect and above the age of puberty; those who essentially had no access to religion; or despite their access they could not understand it, such as children, those weak in mind and the mad. The Holy Quran exempts such groups from God’s punishment (Asra: 15, The Poets: 208, 209, The Story: 47, Taha: 134). Otherwise they would be subject to the divine punishment. Simply, if they reach some divine evidence and intentionally repudiate it, or when they could, do not do their best to achieve the evidence.

It should be mentioned that each religion has saved its followers at its age. They did not work parallel to each other; otherwise, there would be no difference between Islam and other religions. It would be contrary to what is mentioned in the Quranic verses where Judaism and Christianity are invited to Islam or the verses which reprimand because they refute the Quran and the

prophecy of the Prophet of Islam. The Quran introduces punishment for those who refute. (Cattle: 20-21)

Therefore, the belief that all religions are true or each of them carries a part of the truth and thus they are a source of salvation for their followers even at the present age is not acknowledged by Islam. Islam does not recognize all religions as true. Islam condemns the exclusive claim of the Jews and the Christians. This fact has been mentioned in various verses of the Holy Qur'an including the Quranic chapter of The Cow: 111: "The Jews said that only the Jews would enter Paradise and the Christians said only the Christians. This is only a void wish of theirs; say to them bring evidence if you are truthful." Nevertheless, Islam is exclusive in terms of genuineness but its exclusiveness is different from that of Judaism and Christianity, because the exclusive attitude of Islam in terms of genuineness implies that after the Muhammad (SA) was called to prophethood whoever received his message and could realize the content then he or she is supposed to surrender to the invitation to Islam. The Holy Quran, in The Cattle: 19, quotes the Prophet of Islam: "God is witness between me and you, and this Quran has been revealed to me that I may warn you thereby, and whomsoever it may reach."

Other divine laws such as that of Abraham, that of Moses and that of Jesus Christ have been valid at their own time. (Nevertheless, they were distorted later.) It can be said that Islam could be applied to all of the divine laws since Islam, generally, has two different meanings: one is the special law of the Prophet of God Muhammad (SA) which is called the particular Islam; the second type means surrender to God which is interpreted as the general Islam. General Islam incorporates all the revealed religions revealed to the great prophets by God. (*Mabani-e Ma'refat-e Dini – Principles of Religious Knowledge* – Muhammad Husseinzadeh, p. 139)

Therefore, the truth of all divine religions is one which is revealed to all prophets who possessed a law. What has been revealed and crystallized to them is the assertion of God's Unity and submission to the Absolute One. So it is not true that the truth of religions has absolutely been out of the reach of the prophets and that the religions have not been completely revealed to them. Neither is it true that when there is a difference or opposition among the divine religions it is due to difference of point of view of the prophets and the variety of the aspects of the truth. However, the secret to such differences is that the growth and the capabilities of the minds and also the cultural and social conditions as well as the needs and ways of human life have been different. Additionally, the difference among the followers of early divine laws and the distortions they are subject to are among the other causes for renewing the divine laws. (*Majmueh Asar (The Complete Works)*, Mortaza Motahhari, vol. III, pp. 154-157)

Basically, the study of religions shows that their multiplicity is not contrastive but that which creates ambiguity that is the divine religions share many aspects such as the doctrinal, ethical, legal and jurisprudential aspects. Nevertheless, they have different stations: some are complete while others are more complete. There are two issues here: ambiguity in external facts and human sciences and the no exit for relativity in external facts and human sciences. Relativity does not have any meaning in external realities since they are factual as they are. In other words, an abstract entity is abstract while the material thing is material and

it does not change by means of comparison and measurement. Human sciences also are not subject to relativity that is they are true, provided that they are according to facts. In case they are not according to facts then they would be false; they would not change through comparison. Therefore, neither external realities nor human sciences in this sense are relative.

However, ambiguity and stations are present in both external realities and human sciences since everything takes its own particular station. Some matters become the causes while others become the caused. Some are more virtuous while others the virtuous. Thus external realities are ordered in an ambiguous way. Human sciences also have ambiguous stations since if human sciences correspond to this reality they would be sincere and true; otherwise they would be false and null. The plurality which exists in religions and divine laws and sources is not relative but ambiguous, the ambiguity of external facts and the ambiguity of human sciences; because the divine laws, depending on the needs of people of different periods, are revealed as various facts in many laws, while common at the same time. Such is the case of prescribing different kinds of medicine for a patient at different stages. A good doctor prescribes a particular medicine at each stage. Each medicine in turn has its special effect. It is not the case that some medicine is useful and some other is useless. Therefore, the difference among the divine laws is related to the ambiguity in external reality. In human sciences too since understanding is actually the result of different degrees of understandings of realities, knowledge becomes ambiguous and the differences of opinion among interpreters in interpreting a text is of the same kind. (*Dinshenasi*, Javadi Amoli, p. 205-206)

According to the Holy Quran, all the monotheistic religions are actually one religion while all prophets invite people to one religion that is Islam. We read in the Quran: The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - which We have sent by inspiration to thee - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein. (Counsel: 13) In The Cow: 132, The House of Imran: 67, and other verses we can find the same theme treated.

Anyway, the truth of Islam in this sense is the submission in heart to the divine commands.

Thus Imam Ali (AS) defines Islam: Islam is submission which is certitude which is acknowledgement which is admission which is fulfillment which is to act. (*Nahjulbalaghah*, the Short Sayings, no. 125)

Thus the general Islam which is submission that appears in the form of Abraham's law at the time of Abraham, Moses's law at the time of Moses, Jesus's law at the time of Jesus and it appears in the form of Muhammad's law at the age of the seal of the prophecy.

Now the meaning of Islam at the time of each of the above-mentioned prophets is that the prophet of the time and also earlier prophets should be obeyed. People should have faith in the prophet of the time and also earlier prophets. Otherwise, he or she would not have obeyed the divine commands. At the present time when Muhammad's law is to be followed since it is the crystallization of the general Islam, every sane person should follow and respond to him when hearing his message. At the present time people are not allowed to follow other divine laws when they are addressed by the law of

Islam. Following other laws at the present time which is outstandingly that of Islam is out of the question. They should have been followed at their own times but now with the advent of Islam their time has expired. This, of course, does not imply that the righteousness of the divine laws, prior to their distortion and change, is to be repudiated; on the contrary, belief in Muhammad's law brings about belief in and respect to the past divine laws.

Mohi din al-Arabi, a well-known mystic, also believes in the superiority of one religion (Islam) over other religions. He insists on exclusiveness too since he regards earlier religions as stars compared to the sun of Islam. He explicitly speaks of the expiration of the laws (*Al-Fotouhat Al-Makiah*, Mohi din al-Arabi, vol. III, pp. 152, 311). In other sources he describes Islam as "the soul of religions," "the true of the truths," "the greater and the clearer truth" where he is explicit in the idea of the superiority of Islam over other religions. (*Tafsir al-Quran*, Mohi din al-Arabi, vol. I, pp. 90, 79)

The true interpretation of exclusiveness and the superiority of the religion of Islam imply that the existence of a law as the true law in every period of the periods in human history is an undeniable matter which should be taken for granted. The true law at our time is Islam. The soul and essence of all divine laws is the same monotheism in terms of belief and acting. The common basis of the invitation of all divine prophets has been monotheism, worship of the absolute one and submission and surrender to the commands and forbidding of God. Some of the commands and forbidden matters are common among religions while some are related to cultural and social conditions and corresponding to the capabilities of human communities at different periods. Therefore, the religions contain common as well as individual points but with the advent of Islam which contains comprehensively the perfect divine laws and which is the outcome of the historical development of other divine laws, and which as the last law is responsible for the guidance of human communities until The Resurrection, supported by the outstanding characteristics embedded in the laws of Islam which amounts to its responsiveness to human needs at every time and place, all past laws are to be regarded as ended.

Thus Islam in the sense of the divine law of Prophet Muhammad (SA) and in terms of genuineness is exclusive. In other words, as the seal of the prophecy, only this law will be genuine and following it as fundamental. Other divine laws not only have expired and been replaced by a new and comprehensive religion called Islam but they have been also subject to distortion and superstition. The Holy Quran, the heavenly book of Islam, is the only one not distorted, since God has promised to guard it from corruption (Stoneland: 9). As a matter of fact, this book is not limited to a particular time and place; on the contrary, it should be followed until the Day of Resurrection and throughout the world.

Therefore, for the present time as well as the future ages, general Islam is to acknowledge Muhammad's law as the last divine law and also Muhammad (SA) as the last divine prophet. Earlier laws were limited and temporary. With the advent of Islam, the divine religion has reached a state of perfection. Thus that would be the last prophet appointed by God. (The Clans: 40)

Therefore, the principle of exclusiveness from the perspective of genuineness has a particular interpretation in Islam: it is the submission before the commands of the Almighty God. The fact that some People of the Book have been severely criticized in the Holy Quran is because they insisted on their way and path and

did not submit to the command of God, despite the fact that they possessed certitude about God's command and their responsibility towards it. Although they knew that the Prophet's sayings are true and knew him as well as they knew their own children and could find in him the signs given by the Old and New Testament (The Cow: 146), they did not submit to the truth; on the contrary, they tried to hide the truth. However, the Holy Quran and the law of Muhammad were meant to guide the People of the Book (such as the Christians and the Jews) too. It is only through this new revelation that they could find guidance into the straight path. In other words, the religions of Judaism and Christianity, though they were the light leading to the straight path, following them now is to be regarded as darkness and divergence from truth.

In this regard, the Holy Quran explicitly states: O people of the Book! There hath come to you our Messenger, revealing to you much that ye used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary). There hath come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book, - Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and led them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light, guides them to a path that is straight.

Mahdaviat and Belief in Genuineness and Eternality of Islam

As mentioned earlier, "religion" is one essence in all periods and is not described as plural. In other words, religion is beyond expiration and is not subject to addition or deduction. Religion is one matter; thus religion is used only in the singular form (religion or /di:n/ in Arabic) and not plural (religions or /adian/ in Arabic). It is because religion does not admit plurality and its truth is the admission to the one God who is worthy of worship. Thus the Holy Quran states: The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will). (The House of Imran: 19) Islam is the only acceptable religion: If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good). (The House of Imran: 85). Of course, this divine command is not restricted to the time of the Prophet but it is applicable in other ages as well. We read in the Holy Quran about the prophet Abraham: Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but he had submitted to the religion of Islam; he had not committed polytheism. (The House of Imran: 67) The meaning of this verse is nothing but the belief in plurality and variety of divine laws or religions since religion is the belief in the oneness of God and the unquestionable submission to Him and worshipping His Holy Essence which is the common aspect of all religions advertised and promoted by all prophets.

Therefore, the mission of Imam Mahdi (AS) is nothing but the promotion of religion (Islam) that is the one religion promoted by all divine prophets and its developed and comprehensive form under the title of "religion of Islam" as a perfect set of teachings and beliefs including all aspects at the two individual and social levels. It was revealed to the divine prophet Muhammad (SA) while time and place have no role in it. So it is to be followed until the Day of Resurrection. Among the heavenly laws mentioned in the Holy Quran, there is a statement merely about Islam saying that it is not revealed for a particular time or place but it would include all nations and all periods. Instances include: We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not. (Saba: 28)

Also this verse from the Holy Quran: We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures. (The Prophets: 107)

Thus the religion of Islam recognizes no time or place; neither is it limited to a particular age, group or race. It belongs to human nature and all human beings may draw on its guiding commands. According to Shiite and Sunni traditions, Imam Mahdi (AS) will command on the basis of the Quran while his religion will be the religion of Islam and will take measures towards establishing the great Muslim world. He will surmount all obstacles on the way of this great mission and bravely introduce the genuineness of Islam. He will eliminate the division created through the long ages among the Islamic Ummah and unite all human communities on the basis of the great religion of Islam. As Imam Reza (AS) (the eighth Imam of Shiites), in a prayer addressed to God about Imam Mahdi (AS) recites: Oh God! Through him (Imam Mahdi) turn the Ummah's dispersion to continuity and division to unity; annihilate oppression and establish justice. (Muhammad Muhammadi Reyshahri, *Ahl al-Bayt in the Holy Quran and Hadith*, vol.II, p. 789) Therefore, the plan of the promised Mahdi (AS) for the world is to implement Islamic rules; he will call people to no religion but Islam. Logically, it goes without saying that it is not possible in any other way since the essence of religion is the same for all nations and races for the following reasons: firstly, no religion except Islam will be accepted by God; secondly, the truth of man who is created by God is an unchangeable one; thirdly, God is responsible for the development of this truth; fourthly, God will never be subject to ignorance, negligence and mistake but He is eternally aware of all truths. Therefore, God does not have two religions and does not issue two sets of commands. This fact is mentioned in the Holy Quran in both affirmative and negative forms. (The House of Imran: 19, 85) Of course, the use of the word religion in the plural form (/adian/) by the faithful in the sense of the perfection of religion is condescending. It is the manifestations of religion that are perfected. It is not true to say that religion had been defective and then it was perfected, finding its ultimate and ideal shape. In other words, the truth of religion is one; sometimes its lower stages are revealed; other times its middle stages are shown; while at other stages its ideal is crystallized and ends with this statement: This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as the best religion. The conditions of an age too change only the subsidiary rules of religion not the general rules and the principles of religion.

On the other hand, one might say since human being is a combination of soul and body, his soul depends on the metaphysical world which is stable throughout the ages and not affected by the passage of time. Thus the causes and elements of its development should be looked for in metaphysics. However, his body is rooted in nature and place and since human beings have diverse capabilities and a developing process of different natures and impacts, human needs are various in terms of the natural territory and capabilities and should receive various responses. Therefore, the laws which are related to the changing dimension of man are themselves diverse and changing. The principles of religion and the general guidelines of ethics, laws and jurisprudence, prescribed for the stable part of human beings are stable themselves because man is of a stable nature. But the laws which depend on the conditions and ways of human life are changing and various. (Ibid., p. 191)

The Renaissance of Islam and its Inclusiveness

The Shiite believes that Islam will be revived with the appearance of Imam Mahdi (AS). He will also miraculously revive Islam as well as the tradition and the true way of the life of the prophet of Islam. Of course, this does not imply that other religions were not true even at their own times. So it is essential to mention one point here that is every religion was right at its time. Thus the religions introduced by the prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ (AS) were all true at their own ages. In terms of influence in human communities, all divine laws were chained together; every religion is a precedent to another one in terms of their influence. Additionally, the general guidelines of these religions named unity of God, general prophecy and eschatology have not changed. The Holy Quran asserts: "The Quran acknowledges earlier heavenly books." (The House of Imran: 3) Thus the prophet of Islam has acknowledged the earlier heavenly books and divine laws as Jesus Christ has acknowledged the teachings of Moses while the latter has acknowledged the sayings of Abraham (AS). Every prophet used to predict the coming of the following prophet; finally, Jesus Christ predicted the coming of Muhammad (SA). Therefore, all heavenly religions have been true; otherwise, a prophet would not acknowledge the earlier prophet and predict the following one. Thus every religion has been true in its own time.

Thus all heavenly religions have been true at their own ages and had to be followed and implemented but with the advent of Islam earlier laws lost their validity due to the seal of the prophecy and the universality of the prophet of Islam. The Holy Quran is explicit in this sense: Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things. (The Clans: 140) Otherwise the seal of the Prophet and the universality of his religion which are emphasized by the Holy Quran and traditions would be meaningless.

So it is clear that the call for a religion other than Islam by Imam Mahdi (AS) contradicts the content of the verses and the practice of the prophets since, according to the Holy Quran, Islam is the last religion and Muhammad (SA) is the last divine prophet who is logically and legally responsible. People are commanded to follow the most perfect and comprehensive religion which is essentially based on eternity, as well as the most virtuous prophet, together with the miracle of the Holy Quran, as commissioned by God to guide human communities. The Shiite believes that the flag of Islam ultimately will be waved by the son of the last prophet – Imam Mahdi (AS) – throughout the world. A huge number of traditions have been narrated on the part of Imams and prophets. The following verse, for instance, is known as an outstanding case in this regard: It is He Who hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it). (Repentance: 33)

To illustrate this, here are some traditions interpreting the above-mentioned verse:

Abu Basir, a friend of Imam Sadiq (AS) states: I asked the Imam about this verse. He responded this way: I swear by God that the interpretation of the verse has not been realized yet. I asked: when will it be realized, sir? He responded: when the will of God is fulfilled and Imam Mahdi (AS) appears. When he appears, the infidels will be worried about his appearance.... (Mahajjeh Bahrani,

p. 86)

It is narrated from Imam Baqir (AS) who has said: The Imam will be victorious because of the fear (in the hearts of the enemy). He is supported by God; the earth will be trodden for him; the treasures of earth will be uncovered to him; while his sovereignty will cover the East and the West of the world. God will make His religion overcome all schools of the world though the infidels will be unhappy and opposing. He will rebuild the ruins of the earth while Jesus Christ will stand behind him for prayer (*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 52, p. 191.)

It has been narrated from Imam Sadiq (AS) who stated: My father (Imam Baqir) was asked about the verse and he responded in this way: the verse is not to be interpreted yet; when Imam Mahdi (AS) rises those who are alive then will realize the interpretation of the verse. Then the religion of Muhammad will change as if from night to a true day. There will be no trace of polytheism then as stated by God in the verse. (*Tafsir-e Ayyashi*, vol. II, p. 56)

Here it is likely to mention a few points about the Shiite belief in the absolute sovereignty of Islam throughout the world by the last Imam, the realization of the divine ideals and a world government founded on justice, peace, coexistence of all human races and nations together with kindness in the light of the Holy Quran. There should also be some points about the fact that only a son of the prophet of Islam and a member of the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family) named Mahdi – according to the traditions received from the Prophet and the Shiite infallible Imams will materialize the promise of God. According to the Shiite, one might conclude from these points the oneness of religion, the genuineness of Islam, the seal of the prophecy, the eternality and inclusiveness of Islam, the negation of pluralism and religious multiplicity, the repudiation of the idea of the genuineness of all religions as well as the felicity and happiness of the followers of all religions and divine laws:

1. It has been emphasized in Shiite resources that those who replace the Prophet and rulers of the Islamic society after the Prophet are twelve in number and all descend from the Quraish clan. (*Sahih-e Bokhari*, Kitab al-Ahkam, vol. V, tradition no. 165) Of course, the same matter is present in the books of the Sunnis like "*Sahih-e Moslem*", "*Tarmazi*", "*Sonan-e Abi Davoud*" and "*Mosnad-e Ahmad*." Many traditions with the same content are included in the famous Shiite books such as *Osoul-e Kafi*. One such instance is the late Koleini who narrates from Imam Baqir (the fifth Shiite Imam) with an authentic document: God has sent the Prophet Muhammad (SA) for the human being and the jinn and assigned twelve Imams. (*Osoul-e Kafi*, vol. I, p. 532) In the same book there is a narration descended from Imam Baqir (AS) who has said: We are twelve Imams including Hassan and Hussain and then Imams who descend from the sons of Imam Hussain (AS). (*Osoul-e Kafi*, vol. I, p. 533)

According to Sunni and Shiite resources the Imams after the Messenger of God descend from the family of Muhammad, the first one being Imam Ali (AS). For instance, Ibn Abbas narrates from the Messenger of God who has said: Whoever likes to lead a life like mine, have a death like mine and find his destination in the paradise they should follow Imam Ali (AS), be a company of Imam Ali's followers and follow the Imams after me who descend from my household. (*Helyat al-Awliya*, vol. I, p. 86)

It has been mentioned in some traditions that Imam Mahdi (AS) is a descendent of the household of Muhammad (SA); he is the twelfth Imam of the

Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt, the first being Imam Ali (AS) and the last Imam Mahdi (AS).

From what we read in the traditions the Shiite could conclude that Imam Mahdi (AS) replaces the Prophet after the eleventh Shiite Imam. This started since the eleventh Imam was martyred and continues until now. When he appears he will take the place of the Prophet. He will act in a way as if the Prophet were present and rules the society. In other words, the basis of his rule and government and his political, social and religious decisions will be the Holy Quran and the practice of the Prophet. In fact, he will revive the way and manner of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt with a government attributed to them. As it is mentioned in the traditions the government of the Ahl al-Bayt will be the last government to implement justice and righteousness in the world (*Amali As-Sodouq*, vol. III, p. 396).

2. According to the Shiite belief, there are authentic and widely transmitted narrations which imply that Imam Mahdi (AS) is a descendent of the Prophet. Here are some instances:

The Prophet has said: Mahdi (AS) is a member of our household; the same behind whom Jesus Christ, son of Mary, stands for prayer. (Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol.51, p. 91) Also about the verse "Truly, My righteous servants will inherit the earth (Prophets: 105)" he has said: in this verse we are the "righteous." (*Al-Dor Al-Manthour*, vol. VI, p. 687). Imam Ali asserts: He (Mahdi) is the son of Hussein (AS) who is the third Imam of the Shiites. Then he described him and his signs. (Qandouzi, *Yanabi' Al-Mawaddah*, chapter 96, p. 597).

According to some authentic traditions, the Shiites believe that the by-name of Imam Mahdi (AS) is Abol-Qasim, the same by-name of the Prophet. According to a tradition, the Prophet has asserted: Mahdi is a descendent of my household and a son of Fatima; he will struggle on the basis of my way and method as my struggle was based on revelation (*Bayan-e Shafei*, p. 63).

In another tradition we read: He will rise with the religion of Islam at the end of the world, as I moved with Islam at the beginning of Islam (*Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol. 51, p. 78).

He also said: There will be no rule except that of Islam and the earth will be like a silver surface. In other words, according to this tradition, the earth will be empty of the filth of infidelity and hypocrisy like pure silver. (Ali Kourani, *Asr-e Zohour*, translated by Abbas Jalali, p. 359)

It is clear then, according to these traditions, Imam Mahdi (AS) is a descendant of the prophet of Islam, that there will be a government of Islam at the end of the world and that there will be no other religion whatsoever.

As mentioned explicitly in the Quran the Islamic ummah is the best ummah in the world; it has been described as the middle ummah. (The House of Imran: 110; The Cow: 143) Thus Imam Mahdi (AS) will attempt to form a united Islamic ummah of the world which is based on Quranic principles and according to stable justice and peace and permanent coexistence among all nations and groups of any race, color and culture. That will be similar to the powerful ummah established by the Prophet in a small and limited place named the city of Medina when he first arrived in the city. Later it was expanded. Thus Islam is set as the foundation of the bond between these dispersed communities; gradually they added to its greatness and elevation. In this regard, Imam Sadiq

states: God will elevate Islam after its trivialization through Imam Mahdi (AS) and He will revive it after a period of isolation. (*Bisharat Al-Islam*, p. 297)

So in the Shiite prayers emphasized by the infallible Imams for their followers to recite we find the meaning that God is asked to hasten the appearance of Imam Mahdi (AS) and thus the fulfillment of the divine promise so that in the light of such a government Islam and Muslims find again their greatness and elevation while the infidels and the hypocrites meet humiliation and trivialization. For instance, we find in the prayer of “Iftitah”: Oh God! We ask you earnestly to establish a dear government (the government of Imam Mahdi) by which you honor Islam and Muslims and humiliate hypocrisy and the hypocrites; in that government make us of those who call for your obedience and guide into your path; blessed with such a government grant us gifts of grace in this world and in the hereafter.

3. According to the Shiites, the tradition of “The Thaqaalain” (the two weights) is issued by the prophet of Islam. It is the clearest and best evidence for the fact that the infallible Imams especially Imam Mahdi (AS) will never get separated from the Holy Quran and his main aim and plan is to implement the Holy Quran in the society. Thus he will put an end to the isolation and separation of the Holy Quran.

This tradition is widely transmitted, mentioned in different ways in the famous Sunni and Shiite resources.

There is no doubt that the tradition is issued by the prophet in different places and on different occasions not in one instance. Therefore, this tradition or hadith has been repeatedly narrated and attributed to the prophets by various transmitters of traditions. (*Sahih-e Moslem*, vol. IV, p. 1873; *Sahih-e Tarmazi*, vol. V, p. 662, the chapter of Manaqib Bayt Al-Nabi, tradition no. 3786) It is so established that Nir Hamed Hussein Hindi has mentioned it as among the 126 books and examined it. (*Abaqat Al-Anwar*, vol. II, pp. 105-242) In addition, twenty three Companions of the Prophet have narrated it directly from the Prophet. Therefore, there cannot be any doubt about the authenticity of the tradition. Here is briefly what the Shiites conclude from the tradition:

The Holy Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt are both permanent and eternal. The household of the Prophet, like the Quran, will live until the Day of Resurrection. Thus the earth will never be empty of Imams and the divine evidence. People will always be benefited from a right leader. Since the above-mentioned tradition insists on the inseparability of the two no one has the right to separate himself or herself from the Ahl al-Bayt with the excuse of sticking to the Holy Quran or giving up the Holy Quran with the excuse of sticking to the Ahl al-Bayt. On the contrary, using both as the destination and guidance (until the Day of Resurrection) is the path of human salvation. It is because the Ahl al-Bayt are the true interpreters of the Holy Quran and, on the other hand, the Holy Quran itself is the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt. They make the quiet Quran talk and reproduce its hidden truths for the general people. In the traditions, the Ahl al-Bayt are described as the talking Quran.

4. The companionship and bond between the infallible Imams, on the one hand, and the Holy Quran, on the other hand, are so strong that they only regard the Holy Quran as the criterion for distinguishing between the truth and the void as well as between the authentic and inauthentic traditions issued by them. They have insisted: Study every statement you receive from us (the Imams); accept it

in case it corresponds to the Holy Quran; but throw it away if it contradicts the content of the Holy Quran since that would not belong to us. (*Osoul Kafi*, vol. I, p. 69)

Therefore, according to the Shiite, the infallible Imams are the true interpreters and translators of revelation; they say nothing which contradicts the Holy Quran.

Imam Ali asserts: He (Imam Mahdi) takes the opinion from the Quran when others impose their own ideas on it; he shows them the way of justice and revives the Book and the Tradition which have been isolated and abandoned. (Ibn Abi Hadid, *Sharh Nahj Al-Balagha*, vol. IV, p. 36)

Thus according to the Shiite belief since Imam Mahdi (AS), like his forefathers, is a true interpreter of the Holy Quran and familiar with the secrets and symbols of the revelation and has access to the secret and the truth of the Quran, he will identify the inauthentic interpretations narrated after the demise of the Holy Prophet up until the age of appearance. He will clarify the true meaning of the Quranic verses to the people. He will also struggle to implement the Holy Quran on earth accompanied by Jesus Christ, son of Mary. Ultimately, the Book and the Tradition of the Prophet that guarantee peace and justice will rule the world.

On the other hand, Imam Mahdi (AS) will take measures since the Holy Quran has been abandoned during the period and people have been merely contented with the memorization and beautiful recitation or keeping the Holy Quran in the mosques and religious centers or the shelves at home; they have been inattentive to the content of the verses and what remains of Islam have been merely a name and the formal rituals. The Holy Quran will be no more abandoned and will be comprehensively and inclusively present within the context of human communities at all arenas of human life. Thus there will be a renaissance and a revival of the bright commands of Islam.

It should be noted that the discussion on the interpretation and understanding of religion has a long history in the Islamic sciences. This is especially the case in the fields of usual, Qur`anic commentary, and theoretical mysticism. Hence, the different kinds of intellectual, textual, symbolic, and mystical commentaries of the Qur`an, the commentary of the Qur`an by the Qur`an, the commentary by one's own opinion, semantics, and the method of obtaining the apparent meaning of the words of a text, all serve to show the presence of this perspective in traditional Islamic scholarship. Since the religious texts played an important part in shaping the culture of Muslims and in the formation of the different Islamic sciences, it is possible to say that investigations into the method of interpreting religious texts play a pivotal role in theological discussions. It is largely due to this that the arguments surrounding the different interpretations of religion have provoked much debate in this area. Most of the views that have been put forward by Arab and non-Arab intellectuals in recent years have been for the most part borrowed from the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer. These intellectuals have tried to use the hermeneutic philosophy and methodology in the interpretation of the Noble Qur`an and the traditions, and in trying to understand religion in general. Some of their views in this regard can be summed up as follows:

1. Religion and the religious texts are quiet and do not speak to us.
2. The presuppositions of interpreters have an effect in their interpretations of

the texts.

3.No interpreter can grasp the essence of any religion.

4. There is no one pure perspective. Rather we all use interpretations that are mixtures of truth and falsehood.

In the view of many of the thinkers mentioned above, no importance should be given to principles by which we can judge the various interpretations of religion. No effort is exerted towards separating the incorrect readings from the correct ones. In other words, according to this stance, all the different understandings are equal. On the contrary and in line with the religious principles and viewpoints that are still prevalent in the traditional world, any interpreter must strive to separate the predispositions of his thought from that of the author of the text. He must strive to correct his line of thought and achieve a concordance with the intentions of the writer by using certain principles. If he does not do this, his views will lead not only to the relativity of the understanding of religion but also to the relativity of the methodology of understanding.

According to the views of Islamic scholars, the different understandings of religious statements are an unavoidable phenomena but this difference of understanding is a matter that is regulated by certain principles and laws, many of which have been clearly enunciated by the religious tradition itself. According to what we have just said, the thought of the followers of religious hermeneutic philosophy and the different interpretations of religion revolves around the interpreter and sees him to be central. While on the other hand, the view of Islamic scholars revolves around the author and they attempt to find his original intentions (in the case of religion, the author is either Allah or one whom He sends). In this approach, the interpreter looks through the text—the Qur`an or the traditions—to the intentions of the author, allowing it to be called a “text centred” approach. It aims at revealing the intentions of the author or speaker as correctly as possible and uses all the means that can possibly assist him in this regard.

All in all from the point of view of Islam, religious pluralism is incorrect because we have clear proofs that Islam is the true religion and that the other religions cannot be on par with it. Also, the fact that the Noble Qur`an has not been tampered with and that Islam is the final and conclusive religion effectively amounts to the abrogation of the religions predating Islam. Aside from all the objections that can be raised against religious pluralism, one must not forget that according to us Muslims there are various sound proofs for the validity and truthfulness of Islam. With these proofs one cannot claim that all religions are equal. Some of these proofs areas follows: the reasonable nature of the teachings of Islam, the fact that Islamic texts are backed up by references, the un-tampered nature of the Noble Book of Muslims, the miraculous nature of the Qur`an, the comprehensiveness of the laws and their positive and practical nature.

Aside from these proofs a point that must not be lost sight of is the fact that Islam conclusively follows all previous religions. This is tantamount to the abrogation of the preceding religions (Mahdi Hadavi Tehrani, Imam Reza Networking, Retrived 2015).

CONCLUSION

In short, one might conclude from the verses and traditions reviewed here

that, according to Muslim belief, reason dictates us that we choose the more complete religion and prefer the more comprehensive and better divine law. Islam is the manifestation and the summary of the evolutionary development of past divine laws revealed to the great divine prophets by God at different ages and according to the conditions and intellectual and cultural capabilities of human communities. There are affluent evidence in the Holy Quran and the traditions which imply that at the end the righteous Muslims will rule throughout the world. Promises such as the universal government of Islam and the spiritual influence of the government of Allah in the hearts of the people will be materialized. Any kind of polytheism (dualism and trinity) will be eliminated from the whole world. Such a universal event will be realized by a descendent of the prophet of Islam. Thus the doctrine of mahdaviat and the belief in one world government is outstanding evidence which alludes to the fact that pluralism is baseless. It is because all are called for one single religion. A single religion will govern the whole world. The presence of Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, will be a company for Imam Mahdi (AS). The former will follow the latter and invites his followers to accompany Imam Mahdi (AS) in this significant divine event. These are good enough reasons that religion is limited to “the religion of Islam” and thus the idea of religious pluralism is rejected. Therefore, Imam Mahdi (AS) leads humanity towards a just law, permanent peace and justice as well as ethical and spiritual virtues. Ultimately, through his universal revolution, he changes the world view in favor of Islamic truth and justice.

