Analysis of Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī's Exegesis on the Deviation of Pluralist Interpretations

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DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000426

Received: 20 October 2025; Accepted: 28 October 2025; Published: 14 November 2025

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of pluralist interpretation has become increasingly prominent in contemporary Islamic thought, particularly through the influence of modern ideologies that advocate religious inclusivism, truth relativism, and universal salvation. These ideologies reinterpret Qur'anic teachings to promote the notion that all religions are equally valid paths to God. This study aims to examine the interpretative deviations arising from pluralist readings of the Qur'an, specifically in relation to the ideology of religious inclusivism as reflected in Surah Āl 'Imrān (3:19): *"Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam."* It also seeks to analyze the exegetical approach of Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* as a classical and authoritative framework that reaffirms the exclusivity of Islam and the principle of *tawḥīd*. This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing textual and content analysis to critically examine the writings of modern Islamic pluralist thinkers who interpret this verse through the lens of inclusivism. Their views are systematically compared with Imam al-Rāzī's exegetical approach to highlight the epistemological and theological differences between modern ideological interpretations and traditional Islamic hermeneutics. The findings reveal that pluralist interpretations often detach the verse from its theological and linguistic context, redefining *al-Islām* as a universal attitude of submission to God that encompasses all faiths. This approach undermines the Qur'anic affirmation of Islam as the final and exclusive divine religion. In contrast, Imam al-Rāzī interprets *al-Islām* in this verse as the specific revelation brought by Prophet Muhammad, representing the culmination of divine guidance and the abrogation of previous religious laws. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the necessity of returning to classical exegetical principles, as exemplified by Imam al-Rāzī, to preserve the integrity of Qur'anic interpretation and protect it from modern ideological distortions. By reaffirming the exclusivity of Islam as the true religion in the sight of Allah, this research underscores the enduring relevance of traditional exegesis in addressing contemporary pluralist and inclusivist readings of the Qur'an.

Keywords: Tafsir, Imam al-Rāzī, Deviation, Pluralism, Inclusivism.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the discourse on religious pluralism has emerged as one of the most influential and contentious paradigms within contemporary Islamic thought. This intellectual movement, deeply shaped by modern Western philosophies and globalized ideas of religious inclusivism, promotes the belief that all religions contain partial truths and ultimately lead to the same divine reality. Based on this assumption, no single religion—including Islam—can claim absolute truth or superiority over others. Such a worldview, while appearing to promote tolerance and coexistence, has introduced serious epistemological challenges to the traditional Islamic understanding of revelation, faith, and salvation.

This ideology of inclusivism has found expression in contemporary Qur'anic interpretation, where classical exegetical methods are often rejected or reinterpreted to conform to pluralistic ideals. Verses that affirm the exclusivity of Islam—such as *"Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam"* (Āl 'Imrān, 3:19)—are reimagined as endorsing a universal form of submission to God, applicable to all religious traditions. Pluralist scholars argue that such verses reflect a broader spirit of divine inclusivity rather than exclusivity, suggesting that Islam represents not a distinct faith community but a universal attitude of obedience to God. Within this framework, diversity among religions is celebrated as an expression of divine will, rather than as a test of faith and truth as traditionally understood.

This pluralist reading, however, often detaches Qur'anic verses from their linguistic, theological, and historical contexts. By subordinating revelation to modern ideological constructs such as relativism and inclusivism, these interpretations risk distorting the essence of *tawḥīd*—the oneness of God and the unity of His message. The result is an interpretative confusion that undermines the foundational Islamic principle that Islam, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, is the final and complete manifestation of divine truth.

In contrast, classical scholars such as Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606H) provide a robust intellectual and methodological framework for understanding the Qur'an. His monumental work, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (*Tafsīr al-Kabīr*), exemplifies an exegetical balance between rational inquiry and fidelity to divine revelation. Al-Rāzī's approach integrates linguistic precision, theological reasoning, and philosophical depth, ensuring that interpretation remains grounded in the *naṣ* (textual evidence) and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). Through his analysis of verses such as Āl 'Imrān 3:19, al-Rāzī affirms that Islam, in its specific and final form, is the only religion accepted by Allah, and that prior revelations have been superseded by the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze and evaluate the interpretative deviations committed by contemporary pluralist scholars—such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Farid Esack, Muhammad Asad, and Fazlur Rahman—who read this verse through the lens of religious inclusivism. By comparing their interpretations with the exegetical methodology of Imām al-Rāzī, this research aims to reveal the epistemological and theological inconsistencies of pluralist readings and to demonstrate the enduring relevance of classical tafsīr in preserving the integrity of Islamic doctrine. Ultimately, the study underscores that a sound understanding of Qur'anic interpretation must be anchored in the principles of *tawḥīd*, textual coherence, and the established sciences of *tafsīr*, rather than in modern ideological constructs that blur the boundaries of divine truth.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, textual, and analytical methodology designed to examine contemporary pluralist interpretations of the Qur'an —particularly Āl 'Imrān (3:19)—through a comparative lens grounded in the exegetical framework of Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. The approach integrates classical hermeneutics with modern critical analysis to reveal methodological and theological deviations within pluralist readings, while reaffirming the enduring relevance of traditional *tafsīr* in preserving Islamic doctrinal integrity.

The research is library-based, relying on critical reading, comparison, and interpretation of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist mainly of classical tafsīr texts, with *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Imām al-Rāzī serving as the central reference. This work was chosen for its methodological balance between *naql* (revealed authority) and *ʿaql* (rational reasoning), as well as its theological rigor in addressing issues of *tawḥīd* and revelation. Supporting classical sources such as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, and *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* are also consulted to provide comparative perspectives and verify interpretative consistency across the Sunni exegetical tradition.

The secondary sources comprise writings of modern pluralist scholars who reinterpret Islamic revelation through inclusivist and relativist paradigms, including Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Farid Esack, Muhammad Asad, and Fazlur Rahman. These figures were selected due to their intellectual influence and explicit engagement with Qur'anic verses related to religious diversity and salvation. Additional academic works on pluralism, theology, and Qur'anic hermeneutics are utilized to strengthen the analytical foundation of this study.

The analysis proceeds through two main stages. First, textual examination identifies each scholar's hermeneutical principles and interpretative assumptions. Second, comparative analysis contrasts these interpretations with al-Rāzī's exegetical framework, focusing on key theological concepts such as *al-Islām*, *dīn*, *īmān*, and *tawḥīd*. This stage determines the extent to which modern pluralist readings remain faithful to Qur'anic language, context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and theological consistency.

Data interpretation follows a descriptive, analytical, and evaluative framework—describing the positions of each scholar, analyzing their epistemological foundations, and evaluating their theological validity. The goal is to determine whether pluralist readings align with the essential principles of Islamic orthodoxy or diverge from them due to modern philosophical influences.

In summary, this methodology emphasizes a disciplined comparative analysis rooted in classical *tafsīr* methodology. By aligning modern debates with the interpretative rigor of Imām al-Rāzī, the study aims to demonstrate that a sound understanding of the Qur'an must remain anchored in the principles of *tawḥīd*, textual coherence, and the established sciences of *tafsīr*—rather than in modern ideological constructs that risk compromising the absoluteness of divine truth.

BIOGRAPHY OF IMAM FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ

His full name was Muḥammad bin ʿUmar bin al-Ḥusayn bin al-Ḥasan bin ʿAlī al-Qurashī al-Taymī al-Bakrī al-Ṭībriṣtānī al-Rāzī (al-Subkī, 1993: 81). The *nisbah* "al-Qurashī" indicates that he was of Arab Quraysh descent, while the *nisbahs* "al-Taymī" and "al-Bakrī" confirm his genealogical connection to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, the first Caliph of Islam (Ibn Khallikān, 1996: 140). Discussions surrounding the lineage and origins of Imam al-Rāzī reflect his eminence and stature in the scholarly world, to the extent that his background continued to attract the attention of scholars and historians throughout the ages.

Imam al-Rāzī was born at the end of the Abbasid Caliphate, on the 25th of Ramadan, 544 AH (corresponding to 1149 CE) in the city of Rayy, a region located in present-day Iran, which at that time was under the rule of the Khwarazmian and Ghurid dynasties. He was raised in an intellectually nurturing environment. According to Ibn Khallikān (1996: 252), Imam al-Rāzī received his early education under the guidance and tutelage of his father, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn ʿUmar, a highly respected scholar renowned for his contributions to society. In *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Imam al-Rāzī (1999: 96) refers to his father with the honorific titles *al-Shaykh*, *al-Imām*, and *al-Zāhid*, which signify his father's esteemed scholarly and spiritual status.

Imam al-Rāzī was a man deeply devoted to knowledge and its pursuit. He dedicated much of his life to learning with great diligence. In the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), his chain of transmission (*isnād*) traces back to his father, and then through notable figures such as Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn bin Masʿūd al-Farrā' al-Baghawī, al-Qāḍī Ḥusayn al-Marwazī, and al-Muzanī, ultimately reaching Imam al-Shāfiʿī (Ibn Khallikān, 1996: 252). In the field of theology (*ʿilm al-uṣūl wa al-tawḥīd*), his chain of knowledge extends through scholars such as Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān bin Nāṣir al-Anṣārī, Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, and Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarā'īnī, eventually connecting to Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (Ibn al-Subkī, 1993: 242).

After the death of his father in 559 AH, Imam al-Rāzī continued his studies under several prominent scholars of his time in the city of Rayy and its surrounding regions. According to al-Dhahabī (1946: 206), among his main teachers was Kamāl al-Dīn al-Simnānī, a renowned scholar in the fields of *ʿilm al-kalām* (theology), *fiqh*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In addition, he studied with Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī, who had been a student of Imam al-Ghazālī (al-Dhahabī, 1946: 206). Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (1986: 65) also records that the first teacher Imam al-Rāzī studied with after his father's death was Muḥammad al-Baghawī, a distinguished scholar in religious sciences and Arabic language, before later studying with Kamāl al-Dīn al-Simnānī and Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī.

Imam al-Rāzī not only gained knowledge through direct study with eminent scholars but was also deeply committed to reading and memorizing the major works of earlier scholars. It is reported that he memorized *al-Shāmil* by al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *al-Mustaṣfā* by al-Ghazālī, and *al-Muʿtamad* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (Fatḥ Allāh Khalīf, 1976: 13). Imam al-Rāzī passed away on Monday, the 1st of Shawwāl, 606 AH (corresponding to

1209 CE) in the city of Herat. He was buried later that evening on a hill near the village of Mizdakhan, close to Herat (Ibn Khallikān, 1996: 252).

TAFSĪR AL-KABĪR

The field of Qur'anic exegesis represents one of Imām al-Rāzī's greatest contributions to the Islamic intellectual tradition. This is best exemplified in his most celebrated work, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, also known as *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, which is regarded as his magnum opus. The work consists of twelve large volumes, in which Imām al-Rāzī begins his exegesis with *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* in the first volume, followed by *Sūrah al-Baqarah* and subsequent chapters in the volumes that follow (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah 1699: 470).

This tafsīr is not limited to discussions of theology alone; rather, it encompasses profound analyses of Qur'anic verses that integrate elements of theology, philosophy, logic, science, linguistics, and other disciplines. Al-Dhahabī (1946: 209) notes that this commentary includes extensive discussions of the natural sciences and other branches of knowledge that had emerged within Islamic scholarship during his time, such as astronomy (*'ilm al-falak*). Imām al-Rāzī also frequently engages with the views of philosophers, offering critical refutations of their arguments within this work. Although his theological reasoning often relies on rational and logical argumentation, it remains firmly consistent with the creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (al-Dhahabī 1946: 209).

This tafsīr has attained great renown among scholars due to its distinctive character, setting it apart from other exegetical works through its breadth and depth of analysis across multiple branches of knowledge (al-Dhahabī 1946: 208). One of its notable features is the systematic examination of the interconnection between one verse and another, as well as between one chapter and the next. Moreover, the commentary does not limit itself to identifying a single form of correlation; rather, it often presents multiple layers of connection between verses and chapters (al-Dhahabī 1946: 209).

INTERPRETATION OF PLURALISM TOWARDS THE QUR'ANIC VERSES

According to the *Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, the definition of *pluralism* refers to a plural condition, or a state of society that consists of various races, cultures, religious beliefs, and so forth. Terminologically, pluralism can be defined as a theory or doctrine that emphasizes that multiple belief systems, ideologies, or social groups can coexist harmoniously within a single society. Pluralism is not merely about tolerance, but involves recognition and acceptance of diversity as something legitimate and appropriate. In the context of religion, pluralism refers to the acknowledgment of religious and belief diversity as well as efforts to live together in harmony. It is not just tolerance, but acceptance of religious diversity as a social and theological reality. Religious pluralism places all religions on an equal and parallel footing, denying the existence of absolute truth in any one particular religion. (Nurhayati Abdullah 2023: 144–145).

Religious pluralism is one of the contemporary ideological movements that poses a significant challenge to the Islamic concept of *tawhid* (divine unity). It does not merely advocate for interreligious tolerance, but goes further by equating the truth of all religions, claiming that they are equally valid paths leading to God.

The Concept of Religious Inclusivism

Religious inclusivism represents an intellectual approach that has increasingly gained attention in modern theological discourse, particularly within the context of interreligious relations. This perspective views all religions as equally true, on the basis that each religion offers its own interpretation of an ultimate reality that cannot be fully comprehended in absolute terms. Such a view directly denies the concept of absolute truth and the exclusivity of Islam as the only religion accepted by Allah. Allah says in Surah Āl 'Imrān (Qur'an 3:19):

Indeed, the religion (that is true and acceptable) in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture (the Jews and the Christians) did not differ (regarding the religion of Islam and reject it) except after knowledge had come to them—out of envy and rivalry among themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the signs of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in taking account.

Pluralist thinkers interpret this verse as evidence that the religion accepted by God is a form of total submission (*self-surrender*) to Him. Their interpretation is based on the original meaning of the term *al-Islām*, which they define as an attitude of complete submission and surrender to the divine will—without restricting it exclusively to any particular formal religious institution or system (Muhammad Asad 1980: 69). This approach aligns with the method of *Biblical Hermeneutics*, which emphasizes understanding the original intent and meaning of a text as it was first revealed. Pluralist scholars adopt a similar hermeneutical framework when interpreting this verse, seeking to universalize the message of *al-Islām* beyond the confines of the Islamic faith as traditionally understood (Nurhayati Abdullah 2023: 92–93).

Etymologically, the term *Islam* in this verse derives from the root word *aslama*, which carries the meanings of *submission*, *surrender*, and *obedience in action*. Based on this linguistic interpretation, pluralist thinkers argue that the use of the word *Islam* in the verse does not exclusively refer to the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Rather, it refers to a broader and more universal meaning — the act of submitting oneself to God — which, according to them, may be manifested through various religious traditions (Muhammad Asad 1980: 69). Therefore, anyone who sincerely submits to God — whether they are Jews, Christians, or followers of other faiths — can be regarded as a *Muslim* in the broader, universal sense, as long as they are in a state of submission to the Divine will (Muhammad Asad 1980: 69).

Pluralist scholars also emphasize that the concept of *Islām* as a non-institutional phenomenon (a *non-reified Islām*) is indeed recognized in the Qur'an. This, they claim, can be seen in two forms of *Islām* that are not bound to institutional or formal structures: first, the *Islām* practiced by previous prophets and their communities; and second, individual acts of submission to God's will (Farid Esack 1997: 127). Although the term *Islām* originally denoted an exclusive relationship between individuals and a specific community, its usage has, over time, evolved significantly in meaning and scope (Farid Esack 1997: 127).

Such an interpretation leads to a form of religious inclusivism, an approach that implicitly dilutes the boundaries between the absolute truth of Islam and the forms of devotion found in other religious traditions. This includes reinterpreting the Qur'anic expression *dīn al-ḥaqq* not as "the true religion" in an exclusive sense, but rather as "devotion to the truth" in the sense of a spiritual relationship with God (Farid Esack 1997: 127). Interpretations of this nature open the door to various exegetical approaches that equate the truth claims of all religions, thereby generating ambiguity and confusion concerning the Islamic concept of *tawḥīd* (divine unity).

From the pluralist perspective, the main issue in contemporary Islamic discourse lies in the tendency to define *islām* solely in its institutional and formal sense (*reified Islām*). Therefore, according to them, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of two forms of submission: personal submission within the framework of a particular religion, and the possibility of sincere submission beyond the boundaries of that religion and its historical context (Farid Esack 1997: 127). This interpretation clearly reflects the ideology of religious pluralism, which holds that all religions are valid and acceptable as long as their adherents submit and surrender themselves to God, even if they differ in form, institution, and theological framework.

In addition, besides Surah Āli ʿImrān (3:19), another verse often cited by pluralists to support their notion of religious inclusivism is Surah al-Baqarah (2:62). Allah says in Surah al-Baqarah (Qur'an 2:62):

Indeed, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous deeds—will have their reward with their Lord. They will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

This verse is understood by pluralists as evidence that the Qur'an acknowledges religious inclusivism. Fundamentally, this belief asserts that faith in God is not necessarily confined exclusively to the *sharīʿah* revealed through the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Rather, faith remains valid and accepted as long as an individual fulfills three essential conditions: belief in the One God, belief in the Hereafter, and the performance of righteous deeds—even if this occurs within a different religious tradition, such as Judaism, Christianity, or others (Muhammad Asad 1980: 14).

From the pluralist perspective, a distinction is drawn between the terms *Īmān* (faith) and *Islām* (submission) as mentioned in the Qur'an. The word *Islām* is interpreted literally as sincere submission to God, without confining it exclusively to the prophetic message of Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Muhammad Asad 1980: 14). Conversely, *Īmān* is understood to refer specifically to belief in the *sharīʿah* brought by the Prophet Muhammad (Muhammad Shahrur 1996: 33–36). Consequently, a conceptual separation arises between a *Muslim*—one who submits to God—and a *Mu'min*—one who specifically follows the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

This view has led some pluralist scholars to propose a redefinition of the pillars of *Islām* and *Īmān* so that they align more closely with a universal and inclusive framework that accommodates the reality of multiple religions and diverse paths to faith (Muhammad Shahrur 1996: 33–36). This signifies a movement toward an inclusive conception of *tawḥīd* in which God is acknowledged as the Absolute, yet the paths of devotion to Him are not limited to any single religious tradition.

In addition, pluralist thinkers adopt an approach known as the Double Movement theory, which combines the historical analysis of revelation with its application in contemporary reality (Fazlur Rahman 1984: 5–11). The first movement involves a historical analysis of revelation, that is, studying the background and original context of the verse's revelation (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*). The second movement concerns contemporary application, which seeks to apply the moral principles embedded in the verses to the realities of modern society.

Through this approach, pluralists argue that many earlier exegetes avoided addressing the true intent of certain verses—including this one—which, according to them, clearly states that whoever believes in God, the Hereafter, and performs righteous deeds, regardless of their religious background, will attain salvation and reward from God (Fazlur Rahman 2009: 114–115). This serves as the foundation for religious pluralism, in which the concept is used to argue that salvation in the Hereafter is not exclusive to Muslims alone, but also extends to followers of other religions, so long as they uphold the principle of monotheism, believe in divine judgment, and perform good deeds (Fazlur Rahman 2009: 114–115).

Within the framework of religious relativism and inclusivism, the doctrine of religious pluralism asserts that all major world religions share the same metaphysical truth and originate from a single divine source, albeit through different paths (Hossein Nasr 1989: 87). Therefore, pluralists interpret Qur'anic verses concerning salvation and the Day of Judgment—such as this verse—through the lens of religious pluralism, emphasizing that genuine faith in God, belief in the Hereafter, and righteous conduct are far more important than one's formal religious identity (Muhammad Asad 1980: 14).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his work The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary, presents the pluralist perspective on this verse (Hossein Nasr 2015: 147–150).

This verse emphasizes that salvation can be attained by anyone who believes in God and the Hereafter and performs righteous deeds, regardless of their particular religion, so long as they do so with sincerity.

This interpretation forms the foundation of a broader religious inclusivism, which recognizes and affirms the fundamental moral and spiritual values shared across different religions. From this perspective, the mercy and justice of God are understood inclusively—acknowledging that sincere faith and righteous deeds performed by followers of various religions are also encompassed within the realm of divine mercy, not restricted exclusively to Muslims (Hossein Nasr 2015: 147–150).

This verse is also frequently cited by pluralist groups within the Liberal Islam Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal*, JIL) in Indonesia. They interpret the verse inclusively, arguing that divine salvation and reward are not limited to Muslims alone but also extend to adherents of other faiths, provided that they believe in God, the Hereafter, and perform good deeds (Muhibudin Hasan 2004: 64–66).

According to their view, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are seen as three religions that share a collective responsibility to uphold the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), since all three acknowledge Prophet Abraham as the foundational father of monotheism. Therefore, these religions are believed to carry the same divine message and originate from a common root of monotheistic faith (Muhibudin Hasan 2004: 64–66). This interpretation leads

to a form of inclusivism that effectively denies the uniqueness and exclusivity of Islam as the only true religion accepted by God.

ANALYSIS OF AL-RAZI'S EXEGESIS ON THE DEVIATED INTERPRETATIONS OF PLURALISM

In facing the increasingly challenging currents of contemporary thought, various groups have interpreted the Qur'anic verses using approaches that significantly deviate from the scholarly and methodological principles of tafsir recognized by authoritative scholars. These interpretations are often influenced by modern ideologies such as pluralism carrying its own agenda in understanding the Divine revelation. Such deviations not only distort the authenticity of the Qur'an's meanings but also undermine the faith (*ʿaqīdah*) and understanding of Muslims regarding the true teachings of Islam. As a response to this confusion, it is essential to re-evaluate these interpretations through the lens of authoritative exegetes, particularly Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

The Concept of Religious Inclusivism

Surah Āli-'Imrān verse 19 is among the Qur'anic verses frequently discussed in interreligious theological debates, particularly concerning the concept of salvation and the status of other religions in the sight of Allah SWT. Allah says (Qur'an 3:19):

Meaning: "Indeed, the religion (that is true and accepted) in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ (concerning the religion of Islam and refused to accept it) except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in account.".

Firstly, the pluralist scholars interpret this verse broadly and inclusively by emphasizing the etymological meaning of the term *al-Islām* as submission or total surrender to the will of God, without restricting it exclusively to the religious system brought by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. According to this interpretation, anyone who demonstrates an attitude of submission to God — whether through Judaism, Christianity, or any other religious tradition — is conceptually considered a *Muslim*.

They even reject the understanding of *Islam* as a reified religious institution, proposing instead that the definitions of the *Pillars of Islam* and *Pillars of Faith* be restructured. Meanwhile, the term *mu'min* (believer) is defined more specifically as an individual who accepts and believes in the message of Prophet Muhammad and follows the formal teachings of Islam.

However, according to Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 171–173), from the perspective of *Sharīʿah* terminology, *Islam* actually encompasses the meaning of *Iman* (faith). In other words, a person who is called a *Muslim* is also a *Mu'min* (believer), and the religion of Islam itself inherently contains faith as its essence. Imam al-Rāzī supports this view by referring to the statement of Allah SWT in Surah Āli-'Imrān (Qur'an 3:85):

Meaning: "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers."

If *Iman* (faith) were not regarded as part of *Islam*, then logically, *Iman* would also not be accepted by Allah as a valid religion. However, such an understanding is rejected as it contradicts the fundamental principles of religion. Therefore, according to Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 171–173), *Iman* and *Islam* in the context of the Sharīʿah are two terms that refer to the same reality — that is, the true religion accepted by Allah SWT.

According to al-Ṭabarī (2001: 280–281), the meaning of the term *al-dīn* (religion) in this verse refers to obedience that is founded upon humility and complete submission to Allah. Similarly, the meaning of *al-Islām* in this context denotes absolute surrender to the will of Allah with full devotion, humility, and submissiveness. The verb *aslama* conveys the sense of entering into a state of peace (*al-silm*), meaning a condition in which one completely submits without objection to Allah's commands. Hence, the word *aslamū* means "they have chosen to submit, surrender, and humble themselves" without any form of resistance or arrogance.

Therefore, Allah's statement — *"Indeed, the true religion in the sight of Allah is Islam"* — signifies that the form of obedience accepted by Allah is that which arises from both verbal and heartfelt acknowledgment that one is truly His servant, wholly submissive to His commands and prohibitions, without pride or defiance toward Him (al-Ṭabarī 2001: 280–281).

The essence of this obedience must also be free from any element of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah), that is, not attributing divinity or servitude to any being besides Him. Furthermore, the *Islam* referred to in this verse entails the testimony that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and the sincere affirmation of the truth of the message brought by Prophet Muhammad from Allah (al-Ṭabarī 2001: 280–281).

This is the religion approved by Allah — the very faith He has prescribed for Himself, conveyed through His messengers, and manifested in His saints. Thus, only *Islam* is accepted by Allah as the true way of life, and no reward or salvation is promised except to those who steadfastly adhere to it.

Secondly, the pluralist group also interprets verse 62 of *Surah al-Baqarah* as the Qur'an's recognition of salvation in the Hereafter for adherents of other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Sabianism, as long as they believe in God, the Last Day, and perform righteous deeds. This approach elevates the concepts of faith and devotion as inclusive and trans-religious, thereby implicitly validating the doctrine of religious pluralism. Moreover, they link this interpretation with the Double Movement Theory, which emphasizes the historical analysis of revelation and its application in the modern context, thus positioning the moral values of the verse as the ultimate criterion of salvation beyond the boundaries of formal religion.

However, this interpretation directly contradicts the exegesis of Imam al-Rāzī, who explains that the verse refers to the people who lived before the advent of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. According to Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 536), Ibn 'Abbās stated that the verse refers to those who believed before the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ — that is, those who believed in Prophet Jesus and dissociated themselves from the falsehoods of the Jews and Christians, such as Quss ibn Sa'īdah, Buhairā al-Rāhib, Habīb al-Najjār, Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, and the delegation from Najāshī. Hence, it is as though Allah SWT is saying: *"Indeed, those who believed before the coming of Muhammad, and those who were upon the false religion of the Jews, and those who were upon the false religion of the Christians — whoever among them believes, after the advent of Muhammad, in Allah, the Last Day, and in Muhammad, for them shall be their reward with their Lord."*

According to Ibn 'Āshūr (1984H: 531), this verse was revealed as an insertion (*i'tirāḍ*) placed amidst a series of verses describing the Children of Israel — particularly regarding the various blessings that Allah had bestowed upon them, and how they responded to these blessings with disbelief, defiance, and ingratitude. Thus, this verse appears as a parenthetical interjection within that sequence.

The wisdom behind this insertion is subtle: it serves to demonstrate that all the wrongful attitudes displayed by the Children of Israel toward Allah's blessings had led to their humiliation, poverty, and the perpetual wrath of Allah upon them. However, at the same time, because the heavy rebukes and warnings of punishment mentioned in the preceding verses could have instilled fear in their hearts and prompted them to seek deliverance from Allah's wrath, the All-Merciful Lord did not leave them without hope. Therefore, this verse was revealed to clarify that the path of repentance and return to Allah remains ever open (Ibn 'Āshūr 1984H: 531). It is not a difficult path to tread; rather, it is a simple one — by sincerely returning to faith in Allah and performing righteous deeds. Through this, they would attain forgiveness and a good reward from their Lord.

Furthermore, at the beginning of this surah, Allah Almighty describes the hypocrites, followed by a detailed discussion of the condition of the Jews. Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 536) cites the view of Sufyān al-Thawrī, who interprets the divine words, *"Indeed, those who believe"*, as referring to those who profess faith outwardly with their tongues but do not truly believe in their hearts — namely, the hypocrites. Thus, after mentioning the hypocrites, Allah then follows by mentioning the Jews, Christians, and Ṣābi'īn. It is as if the intended meaning of Allah's statement in this sequence is: *"All of these misguided groups — if there are among them those who come with true faith, then they will be accepted as genuine believers in the sight of Allah."*

Meanwhile, according to the theologians (*mutakallimīn*), the phrase *"Indeed, those who believe"* specifically refers to those who have sincerely believed in the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), indicating their state in the past (al-Rāzī 1420H: 536). The subsequent phrase, *"and whoever believes in Allah"*, refers to the future — namely, those who will continue to have faith and remain steadfast upon true belief (al-Rāzī 1420H: 536). Hence, the overall meaning of this verse is that those who truly believed in the past and persist in their faith until the end of their lives are the ones promised reward by Allah — without fear and without grief (al-Rāzī 1420H: 536).

According to Ibn 'Āshūr (1984H: 531), one of the subtleties and eloquent aspects of Qur'anic rhetoric manifested in this verse lies in the way Allah pairs the mention of the Jews with earlier righteous nations — whether from among themselves or other communities. This serves to reduce the psychological burden and sadness resulting from the harsh reproaches directed at them earlier. It also represents a form of justice toward the righteous among the Jews, an acknowledgment of their virtues, and a message of glad tidings for those who were truly obedient to their prophets before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Among such individuals were those who lived before the time of Prophet Jesus and followed their prophets faithfully, such as the *Ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples of Jesus), as well as those who lived during the time of the Qur'an's revelation, like 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām — a Jewish rabbi who embraced Islam — and Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī, a companion of Roman origin (Ibn 'Āshūr 1984H: 531). Thus, this verse grants due recognition to these groups through encouragement (*targhīb*) and glad tidings (*tabshīr*), while maintaining balance by mentioning warnings (*tarhīb*) in the preceding verses.

Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 537) concludes that all four groups mentioned in the verse — the believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Ṣābi'īn — if they truly believe in Allah, are entitled to divine reward and blessings in the Hereafter. This conclusion reflects a fundamental principle in religion: that all groups previously in error, if they abandon their falsehood and return to the truth through sincere faith in the true religion, will have their faith and obedience accepted by Allah Almighty without rejection. Indeed, Allah does not prevent anyone from drawing near to Him, so long as they are sincere in their faith and submissive to the truth.

In addition, Imam al-Rāzī (1420H: 537) further explains that belief in Allah is not limited merely to acknowledging His existence, but rather encompasses faith in all that He has made obligatory — including belief in the messengers whom He has sent. Likewise, belief in the Hereafter includes all matters related to the life after death, such as the reckoning of deeds, rewards, punishments, Paradise, and Hell. Hence, the two main expressions in this verse — *"belief in Allah"* and *"belief in the Last Day"* — in reality, encompass all aspects related to the religion of Islam, both in terms of worldly duties and responsibilities during the period of moral accountability (*taklīf*), as well as in relation to the recompense that awaits in the Hereafter (al-Rāzī 1420H: 536).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has critically examined the phenomenon of interpretative deviation in contemporary Qur'anic discourse, particularly the pluralist and inclusivist readings of Surah Āl 'Imrān (3:19), *"Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam."* The analysis demonstrates that the pluralist tendency to interpret this verse as an affirmation of the equal validity of all religions represents a significant departure from the established principles of classical tafsīr. Such interpretations, grounded in modern ideologies of inclusivism and relativism, attempt to universalize the meaning of *al-Islām* as a generic submission to God applicable to all faiths, thereby diluting the Qur'an's explicit assertion of Islam as the final and exclusive revelation accepted by Allah.

Through a comparative analysis with the exegetical framework of Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, this study reveals that the pluralist approach suffers from a fundamental epistemological flaw—its subordination of divine revelation to modern humanist constructs. By divorcing the Qur'an from its theological, linguistic, and historical contexts, pluralist interpretations prioritize human reason and sociocultural ideals over divine guidance. In contrast, Imam al-Rāzī's exposition in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* situates the verse firmly within the framework of *tawḥīd*, revelation, and the finality of prophethood. He interprets *al-Islām* not as a universal disposition but as the specific religious system revealed to Prophet Muhammad, which supersedes all prior revelations and embodies the culmination of divine truth.

The findings of this research affirm that the epistemological soundness of Qur'anic interpretation lies in maintaining a balance between rational reflection and submissive adherence to revelation. Imam al-Rāzī's methodology exemplifies this balance, integrating intellectual rigor with theological fidelity. His tafsīr thus serves as a powerful corrective to modern ideological distortions that seek to reinterpret divine truth through relativistic and inclusivist paradigms.

Ultimately, this study underscores that the preservation of Qur'anic integrity requires a conscious return to classical exegetical methodologies that uphold the supremacy of revelation over human speculation. Imam al-Rāzī's interpretative framework stands as both an intellectual and spiritual safeguard against the erosion of Islamic orthodoxy in the face of contemporary pluralist thought. Reviving and applying his principles of tafsīr is therefore not merely an academic pursuit but a religious obligation—ensuring that the Qur'an continues to be understood within the immutable framework of *tawḥīd*, *sharīʿah*, and ultimate divine truth.

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