

A Critical Analysis of the Pluralist Interpretation of Q. 109:6 (Sūrat al-Kāfirūn) in Light of Intratextual and Extratextual Approaches

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ABSTRACT

The issue of religious pluralism in theoretical belief and practical program represents one of the enduring questions in the history of interfaith encounters that has received renewed attention in recent periods due to various causes and purposes. Religious pluralism encompasses different meanings and dimensions, and proponents of pluralism have relied on various arguments, including religious content and Quranic verses, to establish their position. Many of these claims and their supporting evidence have frequently been subject to examination, critique, and refutation. One verse that has received less scholarly attention is the sixth verse of Sūrat al-Kāfirūn: "To you your religion, and to me my religion" (lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn). Pluralism advocates maintain that this verse confirms pluralism in truth and veracity, grants various religions and beliefs a share in truth, and accepts the multiplicity of religions. The principal research question is whether, based on conventional approaches to Quranic understanding, this interpretation of the verse is correct, and if problematic, what criticisms may be raised against it? In this article, employing a descriptive-analytical method, we explain two interpretive approaches—namely, the use of internal contextual indicators and reliance on supportive external principles—and examine the pluralistic interpretation of the verse against these two approaches. We attempt to prove the hypothesis that such an interpretation is unacceptable neither through reliance on context and internal indicators nor through dependence on general external principles.

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Introduction

Proponents of religious pluralism frequently appeal to religious texts, including select verses from the Qur'an, to substantiate their claims. A prominent example is the final verse of Sūrah al-Kāfirūn (109), which states: "Lakum dīnukum wa liya dīn" (To you your religion, and to me my religion). Adherents of pluralism contend that this verse endorses a "pluralism of truth" (ḥaqqāniyyah), thereby positing that various religious and belief systems possess a legitimate share of veracity. This leads to the conclusion that individuals are free to choose any religion and live accordingly. The central research question of this paper is: when analyzed through established methodologies of Quranic exegesis, can this verse genuinely be interpreted as affirming pluralism in the dimensions of truth (ḥaqqāniyyah), salvation (sa'ādah), and ultimate deliverance (najāt)? This study critically examines this interpretation by employing conventional standards of Quranic hermeneutics, including an analysis of the internal evidence (qarā'in) within the sūrah itself, corroborating evidence from analogous Quranic passages, and an evaluation of the exegetical traditions (riwāyāt) pertaining to its revelation. Furthermore, the paper invokes the principle of jarī wa taṭbīq (flow and application) to affirm that the verse establishes a practical method, endorsed by the prophets (anbiyā') and saints (awliyā'), of avoiding futile engagement with willful obstinacy ('inād).

Methodology

This study is theoretical in nature and employs a library-based research methodology. The research process commenced with the definition of the core problem, followed by the development of a detailed research plan. Primary and secondary sources, including classical and contemporary Quranic exegeses, hadith collections, and theological treatises, were systematically compiled and reviewed. Relevant data was excerpted and categorized thematically. The subsequent stages involved the drafting of the primary analysis, followed by a rigorous process of revision and refinement informed by further in-depth research to ensure academic rigor and conceptual clarity.

Findings

The analysis demonstrates that the pluralistic interpretation of Sūrah al-Kāfirūn is untenable. The context (siyāq) of the sūrah clearly establishes a definitive boundary between truth (ḥaqq) and falsehood (bāṭil), as embodied by the Prophet (ṣ) and the polytheists (mushrikūn). Far from validating the beliefs of the polytheists, the verse serves to affirm the absolute truth of the Prophet's religion while unequivocally negating theirs. The historical context reveals that the mushrikūn approached the Prophet with obstinacy, contention, and stubbornness (ta'aṣṣub, 'inād, and lajāj), attempting to legitimize their own path alongside the divine message of Islam. The Qur'an decisively refutes

this equation. The Prophet (ṣ) was commanded to declare his complete disavowal (barāʿat) of their religion, thereby refusing to recognize even a modicum of truth or legitimacy in their polytheistic creed.

This conclusion is strongly corroborated by other Quranic verses that articulate the Prophet's disassociation from the polytheists' beliefs and actions, such as, "And if they deny you, then say, 'For me are my deeds, and for you are your deeds. You are disassociated from what I do, and I am disassociated from what you do'" (Qur'an 10:41). Verses that appear to grant permission, such as "...So worship what you will besides Him" (Qur'an 39:15) and "Do what you will" (Qur'an 41:40), are understood by exegetes as forms of ultimatum and threat, not endorsement. The Qur'an contains hundreds of verses that condemn polytheism (shirk) in all its forms, identifying it as the most detestable act and an unforgivable sin. As the esteemed exegete 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes, the fundamental, truth-centric call (da'wah ḥaqqah) of the Qur'an inherently precludes any possibility of it endorsing the creed of the mushrikūn.

Furthermore, the exegetical traditions (riwāyāt) confirm this interpretation. The Prophet (ṣ) himself identified this sūrah as a "disavowal of shirk." This is echoed in a tradition from Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ('a), who, pairing Sūrah al-Kāfirūn with Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ (al-Tawḥīd) for recitation before sleep, affirmed that the former is a definitive declaration of "disavowal from shirk." Finally, according to the principle of jarī wa taṭbīq, the verse establishes a timeless and universally applicable rule for social and religious interactions. It instructs believers, when faced with willful and bigoted intransigence, to adopt the prophetic method: to cease futile efforts and to establish a peaceful but clear separation from the obstinate party.

Conclusion

Proponents of religious pluralism have appropriated verses such as Qur'an 109:6 to argue for a pluralism of truth and validity among different religions. This investigation has demonstrated that this interpretation is critically flawed and indefensible from multiple perspectives. Firstly, it is incongruous with the internal evidence provided by the verse's context, analogous Quranic passages, the historical circumstances of its revelation (sha'n al-nuzūl), and the authoritative prophetic traditions that explain its meaning. Secondly, it violates the general rules of conventional hermeneutics. Therefore, the pluralistic reading is unsupported by both internal textual evidence and external exegetical principles.

It appears that such interpretations of the Holy Qur'an are not derived from the text itself but are instead rooted in the pervasive spirit of relativism concerning reality and epistemology (ma'rifah) that has expanded as a foundational tenet of modern anthropocentric culture. This intellectual framework seeks to pave the way for permissiveness (ibāḥism) and to unbridle

modern humanity from intellectual and moral constraints. By advancing this line of thought, pluralists attempt to evade the acceptance of objective truth and the responsibilities that arise from it, thereby justifying their own subjective inclinations in the perennial struggle between the human conscience and innate disposition (fiṭrah) on the one hand, and carnal desires on the other.

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