

Islamic Concept of Religion

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Abstract

Religion remains a hot topic for discussion since the period of Enlightenment. Scholars from diverse fields and backgrounds like sociology, psychology, ethnology, psychology, etc. studied religion from their own unique perspectives. As a result, a huge corpus of theories and perspectives on religion accumulated defining and explaining it variously. Often such approaches reduced the manifestation of religion to the cause of something other than supernatural or divine. This position contradicted the belief of religious believers whose religion as divine or supernatural or spiritual. Theologians from major world religions including Islam strongly adhere to the divine origin of religion. Islam claims itself as a universal religion (Dīn) of guidance favored upon mankind in all times and climes, culminating in its final and full expression in the prophethood of Muḥammad (SAAS). Religion (Dīn) in Islam has meanings and implications for every activity of human beings. Its ultimate goal is to remind mankind of the covenant made to Allah in the realm of higher existence, and the life-hereafter without compromising the practical affairs of this world. This paper discusses the concept and meaning of religion in Islam with references drawn majorly from the Qur'an, the final Word of Allah revealed to Prophet Muḥammad (SAAS).

Key Words: Allah, Qur'an, Islam, Dīn, Dīn al-Fitrah, Dīn al-Haq, Dīn al-Qayyim, Dīn al-Khalis, Muhaymin, Muḥammad (SAAS)

Introduction

Mircea Eliade once exclaimed that the religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if that is grappled at its own level implying that it should be studied as something religious. Attempting to gauge the essence of religion through the means and agencies of physiology, psychology, sociology, economy, linguistics, art or any other study would lead us astray. Such a

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reductionist approach would surely miss the one unique and irreducible element in religion i.e. the element of sacred.¹ Religion in the eyes of theologians/religionists is autonomous and independent and shouldn't be confused and confounded with the essence of other disciplines. It has abeginning of its own without borrowing anything from science, politics, art, or sociology. It is what Talal Asad counts "a trans-historical and trans-cultural phenomenon."²

The word "religion" comes in three different but overlapping meanings from Latin: first *relegere* referring to the fact that the virtue of religion makes man ponder over, or read again (*re-legere*) the things related to God's worship. The second *reeligere* means to choose again. In this sense, religion intuitively leads man to choose God again after having lost Him through his evil actions. Finally, the third definition and meaning of religion is linked to the word *religare* meaning "to bind together". This ultimate meaning is upheld to express the mode, religion binds us to the servitude of God. Religion directs man to offer his worship to God because God is perfect, excellent, in brief infinitely surpassing all other beings.³

When Paul Tillich defined religion as the state of being overwhelmed by an ultimate concern that qualifies all other concerns as preliminary, he refers to God as the ultimate focus of our existence. He further claimed that such a concern provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence.⁴ In his *Kitab al Iman*, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes the popular *Hadith* of the Prophet (also called as *Hadith Jibra'el*) pertaining to *Islam*, *Iman*, and *Ihsan*. Ibn Taymiyyah calls all the three concepts of *Islam*, *Iman*, and *Ihsan* forming the essence of Religion.⁵ Religion when seen from a religious/theological point of view would always be a Divinely-ordained phenomenon and not a human construct.

Concept of Religion in Islam

Allah in the Qur'an is referred to as *Rab al-'Alamin*, Qur'an as *Muhyamin*, and the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) as *Rahmatun li al-'Alamin*. Such titles by themselves are indicative of the universality of Islam (*Din*). Islam is by all means a culmination of the religious thought of mankind at least in its

fundamentals. The attempt in the succeeding pages would be to comprehend the Islamic thought on religion. We may come across certain implications of religion from the standpoint of Islam that may overlap with the secular or quasi-secular theories of religion. However the Islamic approach is purely Divine. Without the concept of *Tawhīd*, religion could hardly be imagined. Islam constructs its whole array of beliefs on *Tawhīd*. It is the fountainhead from which all other beliefs and laws gush out.

Islam as the final approved version of religion is enshrined in the text of the Qur'an and the authentic *Sunnah* of the Prophet. The message of the Quran comprehends the fact of the universality of revelation. The Divine Scripture of Islam clearly states that there is hardly any human nation where the prophet or a messenger has not been sent. *For We assuredly sent Amongst every People an apostle, (With the Command), "Serve God, and eschew Evil": Of the people were some whom God guided, and some On whom Error became Inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth),* says Qur'an.⁶ It is in this connection that the Quran calls Abraham and Jesus as *Muslims* in the sense of a 'submitter.' They announced their submission to God with all heart and mind. The universalist outlook of Islam had the greatest bearing upon the relation between Muslims and the adherents of other religions on both practical and intellectual levels, throughout the course of Islamic history.

The fall of human civilization is the direct outcome of the fall of man from True Religion of God i.e. Islam. The deviation and negligence of the fundamental truth of *Tawhīd* signals the disorder and finally to the downfall of human civilization. The downfall can be physical, moral, and even spiritual.

It was under the impression and inspiration of the Quran that Muslims much earlier than the modern times developed, what later gained popularity as the "*science of religion*" or *Religionswissenschaft*. They wrote about other religions including non-Abrahamic ones in a academic manner, as is reflected in the *Kitab al Hind* of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and *al-Milal Wa al- Nihal* of al-Shahristani, or *Christian Ethics* of al-Faruqi.

Now the term in Arabic that corresponds most closely to the word “religion” is *al- Dīn*. However *Dīn* indicates more than what the Western notion of a church or institutional/organised religion connotes. Whereas the term “religion” as we know has its origin from the Latin root *religare*, meaning “to bind”; by inference it means the thing that binds humans to God. The root of the Arabic word *Dīn* on the other hand is *d-y-n* that literally means “debt”, conveying the idea of obligation or indebtedness, the acknowledgment of indebtedness, and the requirement to repay one’s debts. Hence by insinuation *al- Dīn* signifies the repaying of our debt to God.

Muslims believe that all they have, in truth, belongs to God, even their own life. The Prophet is commanded to say in the Qur’an as, *Say: “Truly my prayer and my service of sacrifice my life and my death are (all) for God the Cherisher of the Worlds.”*⁷ All the possessions and gifts that a Muslim owns owe their debt to God. Religion, or *al- Dīn* which is inseparable from the sense of the reality of this “debt”, recounts Nasr, therefore, embraces the whole of life and is inseparable from life itself.

The derivatives of *Dīn* are rich and diverse in their implications and meaning but all uniting into a well-knit whole. See for example the verb *dāna* derived from *Dīn*; it conveys the meaning of “being indebted”, including various other meanings related with the term. Indebtedness also refers to the formal judgment (*daynunah*) or conviction (*idānah*). Such terms relate to one’s obligation to pay and/or fulfil a debt or a contract.⁸

In our experience of day to day life, we see commercial life based on the responsibility to fulfil one’s contracts and debts. Such commercial enterprise may be centered in a town or a city, the terms for both the town and city in Arabic is *madīnah*. The ruler, governor or judge of the city thus becomes *dayyan* in Arabic. Correspondingly, the concept of civilization has always been associated in Islam with towns and cities. There are the Arabic terms for civilization also derived from the root *dyn* as *tamaddana*— “to erect cities” or “to refine” while *tamaddun* means “civilization” or “refinement of society.” These meanings of the term can be collected from the works of noted Arabic lexicographers and grammarians like Ibn Manzur, Raghib al-Isfahani, etc apart from various other meanings they attribute to the term *Dīn*.

The conscientiousness to recognize and reimburse one's debt to God implies reciprocity. In a sense God owes the human being a fair return for his worship.⁹ Quran declares, *Who is he that will loan to God a beautiful loan which God will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is God that giveth (you) want or plenty and to Him shall be your return.*¹⁰ The Qur'an directs believers that they pay "loan" to God not only through worship but through charitable works and kind deeds. In this respect Qur'an says, *So he who gives (In charity) and fears (God) And (in all sincerity) Testifies to the Best We will indeed Make smooth for him The path to Bliss. But he who is A greedy miser And thinks himself Self-sufficient, And gives the lie To the Best, We will indeed Make smooth for him The Path to Misery ; Nor will his wealth Profit him when he Falls headlong (into the Pit).*¹¹

In the *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the word *Dīn* is termed as a religion in combination with its practices in general. As long as its meaning in abstract terms is concerned, it is "*diyanah*" and a specific religion is more often called "*Millah*" a way.¹² T.P. Hughes exclaims that *Dīn* is used especially for the religion of the prophets and their revealed books; however it is also used for idolatrous religions.¹³ He further observes that the expression of *Dīn*, however is of general application, while *Millah* and *Madhab* are restricted in their use.¹⁴ The Prophet is commanded to say in the Quran as, *Say: "Verily my Lord hath guided me to a way that is straight a religion of right the path (trod) by Abraham the true in faith and he (certainly) joined not gods with God."*¹⁵

Technically Quran uses the "term" or "concept", *Din* in four fundamental meanings They may be put as: a) Dominance, ascendancy or sway, on the part of someone in authority, b) Obedience, servitude, submission or worship on the part of the one submitting to the authority, c) Laws, rules or regulations or code imposed, and required to be observed, in the context of the above relationship, and d) Calling to account (for obedience or non-obedience to the Authority or for compliance or non-compliance with its dictates), passing judgement, and pronouncing reward or punishment.¹⁶ Naquib al-Attas attributes the following four meanings to the word *Din*: Indebtedness, Submissiveness, Judicious Power, Natural Inclination or Tendency. Wahid-ud-Din Khan in his *Din-o-Shariat* subscribes to the four

meanings of the word *Din*. He brings out relevant Quranic verses to validate his point. He observes that the first usage of *Din* is obedience as illustrated by Allah in verse 125 of Surat-ul-Nisa, as Judgement as demonstrated in al-Fatihah, verse 03, as Law in Surat-ul-Yusuf, verse 76, and as Madhab, elucidated in Al-Kafirun, verse 06.¹⁷ When one gives a serious thought to the above listed four meanings, one realizes that religion (*Dīn*) is natural to the human condition.

The Quran justifies and substantiates all the above meanings of *Din* in its various verses. We would first look upon the first two meanings i.e. in terms of authority and obedience. Quran says, *It is Allah who has made for you the earth as a resting place and the sky as a canopy, and has given you shape, and made your shapes beautiful, and has provided for you sustenance, of things pure and good. Such is Allah Your Lord. So glory to Allah, The Lord of the worlds.*¹⁸ Allah is declared as the provider of sustenance and the creator of the matter in the world and the heavens. The wonders and the magnificent nature that a man watches over everyday is the work of Allah, the “Best of the Creators”. At other place, Quran says, *He (Allah) is the Living One: There is no but He: Call upon Him, giving Him sincere devotion. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.*¹⁹ When one accepts Allah, the Lord of the worlds, he has no hesitation in paying homage to that Sovereign Lord. He equally requires obeying Him above all created beings. The Prophet is also ordered to declare, *Verily, I am commanded to serve Allah with sincere devotion.*²⁰ In this verse the word *al- Dīn al-Khalis* has been used. The term refers to the uncompromising and straightforward obedience to only One God Whose power and authority is partaken by none.

Similarly we have such verses from Quran as, *Those who eschew evil [translated by some mufassirun as Taghut] and fall not into its worship and turn to Allah (in repentance) for them is good news; so announce the good news to my servants.*²¹ This verse rejects the worship, veneration, adoration, obedience of beings other than Allah in all forms and shapes. The Quran claims unequivocally that none deserves obedience and servitude than Allah. It assures Prophet and his followers that Quran is the word of Truth revealed by Allah. So they are required to reserve their obedience to Him alone. The

Qur'an mentions in this respect as, *Verily it is We Who have revealed the Book to thee in Truth: so serve Allah, offering Him sincere devotion.*²² In chapter 39 Quran poses it as a question, *Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due? But those who take for protectors other than Allah (say); we only serve them in order that they may bring us neared to Allah: truly Allah will judge between them in that wherein they differ. But Allah guides not such as are false and ungrateful.*²³ Here the word employed for the word Din is once more used as *Dīn al-Khalis*. Quran strengthens the will and intentions of his followers with the pronouncements that none should inflict terror or fear in their hearts, be that any human or natural fear. Qur'an says in this connection as *To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on earth and to Him is duty due always: Then will ye fear other than Allah.*²⁴ The polytheists of *Makkah* had an idea of the One Supreme God, but they were scared of the evil forces as well. Qur'an reduced to all those fears to a naught. Qur'an strengthened the masses with the trust of Allah. The righteous entertained only the fear of Allah while all other fears vanished from their hearts forever.

Allah cautions mankind that all creatures, both animate and inanimate obey and subscribe to the laws of God. The mighty universe, the tallest of the mountains, the deepest of the seas function in accordance with the will of Allah. It is not behoving a man to shun the obedience of Allah. Quran says, *Do they seek for other than the Religion of Allah-While all creatures in the heavens and on earth have willingly or unwillingly, bowed to His will (accepted Islam), and to Him shall they all be brought back.*²⁵ The signs of Allah are clearly manifested in our own selves and the distant horizons. God's love and benevolence are pervading every string of the world. All nature adores and worships Allah, [through actions, gestures and /or words] in unity. Islam asks for nothing akin to sectarianism. It stimulates in us that awareness that would makes us to follow our nature (*Fitrāh*) and thus make our will conformable to Allah's will. Such obedience is seen in nature, history and revelation. The message of Qur'an is thus universal.²⁶ The phrase *mukhlisan or mukhlisina lahu al-Din* in chapter 39 of the Quran offers multiple implications attached with it. Few of the connotations in the light of the exegesis of various *mufasssirun* can be derived as a) dominance and sovereignty of Allah, His authority to impose His resolution over His creatures b) Mankind's

obedience to the commands of Allah c) The code of practice and action shown by Allah and following of that code by humans. When a man grasps all the implications of *Din al-Khalis*, he makes his religion exclusively Allah's.

The demonstration of the third sense of the term *Dīn* can be collected from the following verses of the Qur'an. The third sense can be called as the rational and practical system formed after recognising the authority and sovereignty of God. *To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth; all devoutly obedient to Him.* ²⁷ The nature with all its manifestations not only obeys Allah but fervently obeys Him. Humans are the only creatures that waver in answering to the call of their unspoiled nature. Qur'an declares in chapter 30, *So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith (establish Allah's handiwork according to pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah. That is the Standard Religion but most among mankind understand not.* ²⁸ Quran uses the phrase *Dīn al-Qayyim*. Man is moulded in the best of the shapes by God Himself. He is thus pure, unstained, innocent, true, and unspoiled. His nature thus tends towards to right and virtue. He is bestowed with the true and right understanding of his own placement in the universe and about Allah's kindness, wisdom, acumen and power. This concludes his true nature. However man falls prey to the clutches of customs, superstitions, evil desires and impure teaching. Caught in between the interlocks of deviations, he turns out as argumentative, contaminated, bogus, and slavish. He deflects from the love of his fellow-men and the pure worship of one true God. The challenge before the prophets and their truthful followers indeed becomes to cure such a crookedness and deviation. Their job is to restore the inborn human nature to what it should be under the will of Allah.

In the usage of Law, *Dīn* is portrayed as such in certain significant verses of Qur'an. For example in the following verse when Allah says, *"The Woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes. Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the believers witness their punishment."* ²⁹ This verse reveals that Islam as *Dīn* is not merely the name of chanting certain hymns at certain periods of the day. But it

signifies many more practical aspects of human life. The law and the regulation in a society are as much important part of Allah's *Dīn* as is the pronouncement of Allah's Oneness and sovereignty.³⁰ Few more verses of the Qur'an also allude to this fact. See for example the verse, *So he began (the search) with their baggage, before (he came to) the baggage of his brother; at length he brought it out of his brother's baggage. Thus did We plan for Joseph. He could not take his brother by the law of the king except that Allah willed it (so). We raise to degrees (of wisdom) whom We please, but over all endued with knowledge is one, the All knowing.*³¹ This verse substantiates that laws as codes of life are as much part of *Dīn* as a human conceives of when he thinks of some sophisticated ideologies. As the religion prescribed by Allah should guide in all affairs of life, how could one imagine the life going off the track without the tools of social and individual discipline.³²

The usages of the word *Dīn* in the sense of Law can be witnessed in multiple verses of the Qur'an. In such verses one could easily decipher that the word *al-Dīn* communicates the meaning of rules, statutes, and regulations. It could mean *Shari'ah*, or the code of conduct.³³

In the sense of repayment by the Supreme Authority for loyalty, obedience and/ or rebellion and transgression against it is also witnessed in the Quran at numerous places. That includes the fourth sense of the word *Dīn*. Allah says, *Seest thou One who denies the judgement (to come).*³⁴ The implications of *Dīn* used in this verse are vast. It may refer to the judgement to come, the duty, responsibility and obligation in the moral and the spiritual world, for all actions and activities carried out by man. It also refers to the principles of right and wrong in ethical and spiritual matters, as against the wishful and selfish desires. Man often shuns the responsibility and undermines faith leading to the maltreatment of the people. His absorption into the material possessions assumes such intensity that he becomes callous to the sufferings of others. It is what Quran says in its own words as, *Then such is the (man) who repulses the orphan (with harshness). And encourages not the feeding of the indigent.*³⁵ In the sense of Judgement Qur'an produces few more verses as, *And what will explain to thee what the Day of Judgement is?*³⁶ Here Qur'an warns mankind that a day is dawning in very near future when the actions of

all human being will be brought to account. The Quran continues, *Again, What will explain to thee what the Day of Judgement is.*³⁷ It would be the Day when no individual would dare to say or do anything for anyone. The entire might would be Allah's. All creation would be powerless and helpless before Him. In the light of such verses it is established that the word *Din* is used to mean accountability, judgement and repayment.

The great achievement of the Qur'an is that it comprehended all the meanings of the term *Dīn* as would have been understood by the Arabs, the greatest of Its achievements is that it removed all the ambiguities from the word itself. When Quran was revealed many things become crystal clear. *Din* assumed the position of the code in which a person acknowledged the supreme authority of a Being, offered Him submission and uncompromising obedience. The conduct and behaviour in line with the guidelines prescribed by that authority were stuck to. The position of the servant/obedient also improved to the extent that he achieved honour, reward for his loyalty. The ultimate purpose of establishing *Dīn al-Haq*, *Din-ul-Qayyim*, *Dīn al-Khalis* would be to obtain Allah's pleasure only.

The comprehensive and all embracing use of the word *Din* in the Qur'an is found in many places of the Quran such as *al-Tawbah*, 9: 29: *Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor the last day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of truth (even if they are) People of the Book, until they pay the jizya with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.* In fact all the meanings that we came across with the term *Dīn* above are encased in the afore-mentioned verse of the Qur'an. The concepts that can be sifted out of that verse can be listed as: belief in Allah as the Supreme Authority is the prerequisite of *Dīn*, similarly the belief and implementations of the laws of Allah (*Ahkam*) are necessary. The sense of the accountability in the Last Day, and the exemplary role of Prophet in the implementation of Allah's Laws and commands are equally important in following or understanding the concept of *Dīn* in Islam.

The comprehensives of *Dīn* can also be illustrated through the following verse of the Quran. Quran actually narrates the episode in the court of *Fira'un* (Pharoah) when Moses presented his message to the arrogant king. In

retaliation, *Fira'un* called upon all his courtiers and pronounced his plan to them. Quran narrates it as, *Said Pharoah: Leave me to slay Moses; and let him call on his Lord. What I fear is lest he should change your religion or lest he should cause mischief to appear in the land.*³⁸ In this verse, the meaning of the phrase *yubaddila Dinakum* needs to be expounded properly. The word *Din* in the context of the above verse implies the system of government. Imam Alusi interprets that actually what *Fira'un* tried to convey was that Moses intended to change their king.³⁹ In a broader sense, we may say that the *Din* of the land (Egypt) was the mixture of all— religious, political, cultural and economic systems based on the dictatorship of *Fira'un* and his dynasty. What *Fira'un* feared was that Moses may change all his established system. It is similar to the apprehensions of Quraysh with respect to Muḥammad (SAAS). They too feared that the substitution of One Supreme God of Muḥammad (SAAS) would knelt a death-blow to the social and economic system revolving around the multiple gods placed in the sacred sanctuary of *Kaba*.

As Qur'an reminds mankind of the constant presence of Allah in all the domains of life, it hosts a multitude of verses on a specific theme. There is then no surprise that one can come across numerous verses pertaining to *Din* in the context of law in the Divine Scripture of Islam. In all these places, the word *Din* refers to a complete way of life, which includes belief, ideology, moral principles and behaviour; in other word, all aspects of life.⁴⁰

Now the Qur'anic verse that, *The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will) Nor did the people of the Book dissent there from except through envy of each other after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account.*⁴¹ According to Allah, the right and proper way of life is the one which stands upon obedience and bondage to Allah. No authority can be compared to the authority of Allah. The greatest of the acknowledgement of Truth and obedience from man is to live by the standards set by Allah. True religion (*Din al-Haq*) and Standard religion (*Din al-Qayyim*) requires total obedience and submission to Allah. It also demands to carry out the Commandments of Allah in both letter and spirit at all times. The announcement of the Qur'an as traced in *Surah al-Tawbah* that Muḥammad has come with the religion to make it to prevail over all religions

is in fact not a sign of fanaticism but that the Religion (Islam) has completed all the characteristic features of what the religion actually should be in the sight of Allah. The greatest of the human weaknesses is that it sometimes reduces religion to its own wishful thinking or to justify ones actions. Iqbal, one of the leading Muslim poets and intellectuals of the East had lamented that even Muslims with the intact Qur'anic text resort to certain misinterpretations of its verses to exploit the meaning in their own interests. Thus if left to human control, religion can become as redundant as other human ideology!! The regulation and contours of religion can be set by Allah only. Only He could judge the rightful essence and sustenance of religion.

As far as the relationship between the concept of *Din* and the religious practice in Islam are concerned. That has been beautifully and subtly summarized in a famous *Hadīth* of Prophet Muḥammad (SAAS). That *Hadīth* is popularly called as *Hadīth-e Jibrael*.⁴² In that *Hadīth* Islam denotes the religious practice. *Imān* indicates religious knowledge, and *Ihsān* can be said to represent the union of knowledge and practice.

Tawhīd is but the source of every subsequent belief in Islam. All the aspects of *Din* are born out of that central concept. Indeed the key to Islam is the *Shahādah*, the 'act of bearing witness, which signifies that the faith and practice are complementary to each other in Islam. The statement i.e. *Shahādah* in Islam which can be expounded as "There is no god worthy of worship/ obedience but Allah", bears out the believer's acceptance of divine reality. However as a formal proclamation of Allah's Unity, it represents the essence of knowledge (*ilm*). The second part of the *Shahādah* i.e. "Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah" corroborates the believer's submission to God— meaning of the word "Islam" itself. With the utterance of such words, the believers respond to Allah by conceding that Prophet Muḥammad (SAAS) is the infallible transmitter of the Islamic Universal message and as an exemplary Muslim to be followed unquestionably. The Prophet personified religion both inwardly and outwardly. Such a dual personification is illustrated in the last part of the *Hadīth-e Jibrael*, where *Ihsān* i.e. the perfection of religion, is defined as "Praying to Allah as if one sees Him.

Conclusion

It is only through participation in a religion i.e. divinely revealed way of living, thinking and being that man really becomes man and is able to find meaning in life. It is only religion in this sense that gives meaning to human existence. Many thinkers of the enlightenment and the age of rationalism who theorized against religion didn't realize the deep need of man for religion or for meaning in an ultimate sense. They failed to foresee that once deprived of a divinely revealed religion, man rather than becoming content, would begin to craft pseudo-religions and the spiritually and morally perilous eclecticism. If Islam is thus the 'Primordial religion' it is also the 'last religion' and in fact it is through this particularity that it becomes not just religion as such, but a particular religion to be accepted and followed. By reaffirming what all the Prophets have asserted over the ages, Islam emphasized its universal character as the primordial religion by considering itself as the last religion, a claim by the way which in fact no other orthodox religion before Islam had ever made, Islam attained its particularity which distinguishes it and gives it specific form as a religion. No specific religion can in fact be the universal religion as such.

The Qur'an discusses the themes of continuity of the revelation of God, finality of prophethood and completion of religion. It firmly claims to safeguard the essence of the religion revealed to all the predecessor prophets. Qur'an reprimands the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians) for they failed to anchor on to the essence and core of the religion. They should have been strengthened in their faith through the revelation brought by the final Prophet (SAAS). Instead of seeking ease and spiritual bliss, they repelled Islam that otherwise had come to endorse the preceding revelations with all might. The substitution of fresh revelation through Qur'an was in the best interest of all those who believed. The substitution of one revelation for another aimed at strengthening the faith of believers. However to one's dismay, Jews and Christians who had earlier fought within themselves couldn't succeed in finding the panacea of their adamancy and poor vision in the new revelation of Qur'an. *Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages). Say,*

*the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy in Truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a guide and glad tidings to Muslims.*⁴³

Qur'an often exemplifies Ibrahim as the great ancestor of those among whom Islam was preached i.e. Jews, Christians and Arabs. It explicitly calls Ibrahim, a Muslim, upright (*Hanīf*). The Jews and Christians were held as the inheritors of the Divine Book, and the prophethood. They were favored over all nations for they were the guardians of the eternal message brought by the prophets. The clear signs of God were revealed to them in the affairs of religion. Both Jews and Christians were thus Muslims as far as Islam is maintained as a generic term. It was the religion preached from antiquity through such figures as Ibrāhīm, Nuh, Musā, Isā, Yaqub,, Dawūd, Ilyās, Yahyā, Sulaymān, Yusuf, Ishāq (Peace be them upon all) etc., in fact by all the prophets. Qur'an says that some Prophets have been mentioned in the Qur'an but some have not been mentioned to the Prophet (SAAS). However, as the time elapsed people meddled with the pure message and hijacked its meaning and purpose.

The *Dīn* (religion) that God has sent unto humankind is one. It has been sent to every messenger in the same form. However Qur'an hints at some differences in some superficial matters as, *To each among you have We prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you all a single people, but (His Plan is) is to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of your all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.*⁴⁴ One however finds in the light of the verse aforementioned that God gave different messengers varying *Shari'ah* (Law/way) and different *Minhāj* (methodologies of religious practice). One should not however interpret the verse under study in an absolute sense. The *Shari'ah* (rules of Worship) given to the multiple prophets was not radically different from the predecessor fellow prophets. The essence of worship has always remained uniform; however the external forms of worship displayed some differences. The Qur'an for example says that the earlier communities of believers were directed to pray and fast, as the Muslims do, though the details and nature of former is different from the latter. As far as *Minhāj* (method/way) is concerned, God taught diverse

methods to His prophets to accommodate the different circumstances. The provision of that method only meant to ease the living in the prevailing circumstances. It won't be wise to think that the variations in the *Shari'ah* of different prophets owe to the process of evolution i.e. elementary *Shari'ah* of the earlier prophets kept on modifying till the finally-evolved *Shari'ah* was dawned on the final Last Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). One shouldn't be wonder-struck about the differences in the *Shari'ah* of the Prophets. The differences only imply the different time and space demands. In fact God commands through His prophets to escort a change in some external forms of worship only to restrict the stagnation in performing the religious obligations. Besides, one discovers with the study of revealed scriptures that the dissimilarity in the *Shari'ah* of the prophets at different annals of history is that God wanted this difference to become a means of testing people. All those who comprehend the true religion, who grapple its spirit and essence, are conscious of the true substance of the different legal prescriptions. They always recognize the Truth and accept it whatever its form be. They show least hesitation in accepting the new ordinances of Allah in place of the old ones.

On the other hand, the ultimate purpose of all the divine religious laws is the accomplishment of goodness and righteousness. This purpose can be achieved only when a man obeys whatever commandment comes from God at a particular time. The proper mode of conduct for people who keep their eyes fixed on this true purpose is to strive for Allah's good pleasure rather than quarrel about differences in the legal prescriptions of the various Prophets. This is demonstrated when the *Qibla* or direction of worship was changed. The differences in the *Shari'ah* are there to steer the social affairs of the people that may be affected by a particular social, cultural, historical and topographical milieu. That difference should not be thought as the authenticity for religious pluralism in the absolute sense. Allah declares in the Qur'an, *This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion, al-Islam.*⁴⁵ This verse was revealed at the time of Prophet's (SAAS) final pilgrimage to Makkah— when his

mission was coming to a close. This verse sealed all the claims and opportunities for any new religion to substitute the *Dīn* of Islam.

Notes and References

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¹⁹ Qur'an, 40:65

²⁰ Qur'an, 39:11

²¹ Qur'an, 39:17

²² Qur'an, 39:2

²³ Qur'an, 39:3

²⁴ Qur'an, 16:52

²⁵ Qur'an, 3:83

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²⁷ Qur'an, 2:116

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³⁰ Al-Hussaini, Muhammad, Taj-ul-Urus, Dar-ul-Hidaya, vol.35, pp.50-60

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³³ For further elucidation of Din as law, we may search for such verses as Al-Qur'an, X: 104-105; XII: 40; IX: 36; VI: 137, XLII: 21 and CIX: 06.

³⁴ Qur'an, 107:1

³⁵ Qur'an, 107: 2-3

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⁴⁰ For more comprehension and supplementation one could go for the exploration of such verses as, III: 19, VIII: 39 and CX:03

⁴¹ Qur'an, 3:19

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⁴⁴ Qur'an, 5:48

⁴⁵ Qur'an 5:3