

# ALI 331:Religious Pluralism

Academy for Learning Islam

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# Outline of Discussion

## Week One

- Defining Pluralism
- Social Pluralism
- Exclusive, Inclusive or Pluralistic

## Week Two

- The Human Condition and Divine Guidance
- Salvation and Divine Justice
- Good Deeds of non-Believers

# Defining Pluralism

- Pluralism does not have a single accepted definition
- World religions are equally true or valid in their explanation of the truth and the path of salvation.
- Earliest proponent of pluralism was John Hicks.
- Consequences of pluralism:
  - Reality of the world is beyond human understanding
  - We only have a subjective understanding of the truth
  - Each subjective understanding is as valid as another
  - Differences in religion are superficial

# Social Pluralism

- Hicks argued that social pluralism requires religious pluralism
- Social pluralism requires tolerance and respect for human dignity

*Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah." (3:64)*

- Social pluralism is a part of the prophetic seerah. Ayatullah Subhani: "Prophet Muhammad (s) would personally attend the congregational events of the Ahl al-Kitab, and take loans from them, and visit their sick, participate in their burial ceremonies, console them..."

# Epistemology of Pluralism

- Human understanding can be subjective
- Human beings have the ability to have an objective understanding of the truth.
- Allah (s) has blessed human beings with faculties that can distinguish the truth from falsehood:
  - Aql (intellect)
  - Fitrah (human nature)
  - Nabi (emissary of God)
- Without asserting this ability, no meaningful discourse can take place.

# Islamic Theology and Pluralism

- One of the features of Islamic theology is guidance (hidayah).
- God is the guide (Hadi) who removes His servants out of darkness and brings them into light.

*God is the guardian of the believers. He removes them from darkness towards the light. (2:157)*

- God also guides His servants from falsehood to the truth.

*And Allah will efface the falsehood and confirm the truth with his words (10:24)*

- Subjective understanding of salvation is contrary to Islamic theology.

# Scripture and Pluralism

- Numerous verses of the Qur'an assert an exclusivist approach towards salvation:

*Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.  
(3:85)*

*Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam, and those who were given the Book did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. And whoever defies Allah's signs [should know that] Allah is swift at reckoning. (3:19)*

# Scripture and Pluralism

- Allamah Tabatabai's commentary in al-Mizan:
- There is only one way of life (din) with Allah (S).
- This way of life is Islam which is submission to the truth (taslim)
- The truth includes the truths of belief and practice
- The variations in the revelation between prophets are not in conflict with each other
- The common factor in the religion is the submission to the truth



# The case of Ahl al-Kitab

- Ahl al-Kitab defined as Christian, Jews and Sabeans.
- Community that believes in God.
- Community that believers in a divinely revealed scripture.

*Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (2:62)*

- What meaning do you take from this verse of the Qur'an?

# The Ahl al-Kitab

There are two interpretations of this verse:

- People of the book can enter paradise if they follow the true teachings of their religion.
- Shahid Murtada Mutahhari seems to lean towards this interpretation:
  - Condition for acceptance of deeds is belief in a creator and hereafter.
  - *However, the People of the Book are in a condition in which they can perform good deeds, even if in a deficient manner, and with certain conditions can attain the results of those actions.*
- *What about the verses that condemn them to hellfire?*

# The Ahl al-Kitab

- A second interpretation states that people of the book states that the verse is confined to the following individuals:
  - People of the book who lived before the coming of the Holy Prophet (s).
  - People of the book who lived after the coming of the Prophet (s) but are not aware of his message.
- Scholars like Ayatullah Nasir Makarem incline towards this interpretation.

# Discussion for Next Week

- What will be the case of atheists and polytheists?
- If Islam is the only right path, then are all atheists and polytheists condemned to hellfire?
- What if they did not know about Islam?
- What if they knew about Islam but could not accept it for genuine reasons?