

ESENSIA

Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin

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and Movement**

Syaifan Nur and Dudung Abdurahman

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Suryadi and M. Mansur

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Exclusive Islam From The Perspective of Ibn Taymiyah

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Abstract

To build the idea of Islamic inclusiveness, Nurcholish Madjid made Ibn Taymiyah a reference. The definition of "Islam" as al-inqiyad, al-istislam, and al-ikhlas by Ibn Taymiyah became the foundation for Madjid to propagate the ideology of religious unity of the prophets, in the form of monotheism or submission only to Allah. But on the other hand there are many scholars who viewed the contrary, that Ibn Taymiyah was not an inclusive thinker. Instead he was the source of inspiration for the contemporary Islamic radicalism. This paper attempts to probe the religious ideas of Ibn Taymiyah. The focus of this paper is on the thought of Ibn Taymiyah on Islam and other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity. Research on some of his works showed that it is not quite right to conclude that Ibn Taymiyah was an inclusive thinker. There are, in fact, some of his ideas that seem to be inclusive as Madjid referred to. However, in-depth study on his thought showed that he had exclusive views on Islam. In addition to interpreting Islam linguistically, Ibn Taymiyah also considered that Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad is the true way of salvation. Meanwhile Judaism and Christianity have experienced deviations and therefore cannot guarantee the salvation of their adherents.

Keywords: *Ibn Taymiyah, exclusive, inclusive, Islam, Judaism, Christianity.*

Abstrak

Dalam upaya mengkonstruksi pemikiran Islam inklusifnya, Nurcholish Madjid merujuk pemikiran Ibnu Taymiyah sebagai landasan definisi sikap keislaman. Bagi Ibnu Taymiyah, definisi Islam ialah sikap tunduk/patuh (al inqiyad), memberikan keselamatan (al Istislam), dan keluhuran budi (al ikhlas). Corak pendefinisian ini juga dijadikan Nurcholis Madjid untuk mempropaganda kesatuan ideology kenabian dalam bentuk kesatuan ketuhanan dan kepatuhan hanya pada Allah. Pada sisi yang lain, pandangan Nurcholish Madji ini jauh berbeda dengan para cendekiawan muslim yang lain. Posisi Ibnu Taymiyah terkait sikap keislaman dikategorikan sebagai pemikir eksklusifisme dan fundamentalisme. Bahkan, tidak jarang dari mereka, mengatakan jika ajaran Ibnu Taymiyah menjadi sumber pemikiran radikal di era sekarang. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini akan mencoba untuk mengeksplorasi ide Ibnu Taymiyah secara holistik, khususnya sikap inklusif-eksklusif terhadap agama lain. Pada kesimpulannya, berdasarkan karya pribadinya, membuat konklusi Ibnu Taymiyah sebagai pemikir Islam-Inklusif tidaklah, sepenuhnya benar. Ada banyak fakta sikap Ibnu Taymiyah yang berbeda dari pemikiran inklusif. Sebab, kalau diteliti secara mendalam, pemaknaan linguistik terhadap kata Islam sendiri bagi Ibnu Taymiyah adalah kepasrahan dan penyelamatan yang datang dari Nabi Muhammad SAW. Dia masih menganggap bahwa agama lain merupakan wujud deviasi dari ajaran Islam. Serta, ketundukan mereka tidak akan membawanya pada keselamatan nantinya.

Keywords: *Ibn Taymiyah, eksklusif, inklusif, Islam, Yahudi, Kristen*

Introduction

In the discourse of religious studies, there are three religious attitudes: exclusivism, inclusivism, and religious pluralism. Exclusivism is understood as a religious attitude that claims truth and salvation only in the religion and beliefs one embraces. Other religions are considered wrong and deviant so their followers will not receive salvation. Meanwhile, inclusivism tends to have a more open stance with claims of the existence of truth and salvation in other religions, even though it is still believed that the truth of other religions is not as perfect as one's own.

And above all is the attitude that believes in truth and salvation in every religion and belief so that each believer has the same right to worship God and receive salvation. The truth of every religion is believed to be relatively absolute and more inward looking. The existing religions are regarded as different paths to one and the same God.

The three such attitudes are often understood as the stages of religious development, so no one can stand on both sides at the same time. This paradigm of religious evolutionism is understandable considering in the historical context, the three attitudes emerged gradually in the history of Christian theology; beginning with the belief in "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (outside the church there is no salvation), then to the attitude of inclusivism, and culminating in a pluralist attitude.¹

In this sort of mindset, Nurcholish Madjid put a prominent Muslim reformer, Ibn Taymiyah, in the inclusive category. This conclusion can be seen from Madjid's work in his *magnum opus* of "Islamic Doctrine and Civilizations", particularly the chapters entitled "Faith and Community Pluralism: Inter-religious followers (Universal View on the Unity of Universal Truth,

¹ Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 11 (New York: Mac Millan Publ. Comp., and London: Collier Mac Millan Publ., 1987), 331-333

and on the Constitution and Development of Religions)." In this book, Madjid wrote, the important consequence of pure monotheism is a complete submission only to Allah. This attitude is regarded as al-islam which is the essence of all true religions. To support this idea, Madjid cited the opinion of Ibn Taymiyah who interpreted the word al-islam as al-istislam (submission), al-inqiyad (obedience), and al-ikhlaash (sincerity).²

It is because this attitude is taught by all the prophets and affirmed in the scriptures of the apostles. Madjid quoted Ibn Taymiyah as saying that the basis of all religions is the same; the only difference is the teachings.³

However, is it true that Ibn Taymiyah had such an inclusive and pluralist religious attitude as Madjid had described? This paper attempts to reveal different things from the impression of Madjid's work, and to prove that Ibn Taymiyah's religious attitudes are closer to exclusivism than inclusivism, let alone pluralism. Based on that fact, this research is interesting to carry out.

A Brief Biography of Ibn Taymiyah

His full name was Taqiy al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyah, born in Harran on 10 Rabiul Awal 661/22 January 1263 AD and died in Damascus on 20 Dzulqa'dah 728/26 September 1328 AD.⁴ This Hanbali school theologian had well-known relatives of scientists, such as his uncle, Fakhr al-Din, and paternal grandfather, Madjid al-Din.

He had to leave his hometown and moved to Damascus with his father, Abd Halim, and his three siblings because of the Mongol invasion. There, his father became a director of Madrasah Sukkariyya and he also studied at the madrasah. Some of Ibn Taymiyah's teachers at the school were Shams al-Din Abd al-Rahman

² Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban (Doctrinal Islam and Civilization)* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1992), 181.

³ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 181-182.

⁴ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Vol III* (Leiden & London: EJ Brill & Luzac & Co, 1979), 951 .

al-Makdisi - a first Hanbali qadhi in Syria after the judicial reform by Baybars. Ibn Taymiyah later succeeded his father in the Sukkariyya office, and on 2 Muharram 683/21 March 1284 he was allowed to teach for the first time. On 10 Safar 684/17 April 1285 he began to teach the Qur'anic tafseer at the Umayyad Mosque.⁵

Ibn Taymiyah made his first pilgrimage in 691 AH / 1292 AD and returned to Damascus about four months later. From this spiritual journey, he produced the work of *Manasik al-Hajj* which contains his criticism of heretical practices in the hajj rituals. Ibn Taymiyah first dealt with politics when a case of harassment against the Prophet by 'Assaf al-Nasrani, a Christian from Suwayda. His decisiveness put him in jail for the first time. Under such circumstances, he produced to a great work entitled "al-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim al-Rasul". And on June 20, 1296, he taught at the oldest madrasah in Damascus, Hanbaliyyah, replacing of one of the teachers there who passed away.

In his life span, Ibn Taymiyah faced an unstable political situation, divisions in Islamic countries and attacks from outside countries, particularly from the Mongols that had always haunted the Muslim community. Recorded in 1297-1299 in the era of al-Malik al-Mansur, Ibn Taymiyah was asked by the Sultan to call for jihad against the Little Armenian kingdom, in 1300 he was asked to call for Jihad against the Mongols, and in 1301 he went to Cairo to ask the ruler of Mamluk, Sultan Muhammad bin Kalawun to intervene in Syria, at the same time there was a new attack from the Mongols.⁶

Ibn Taymiyah was also actively involved in the upheaval of thought in the Islamic world at the time. He "attacked" Shaykh Ibrahim al-Khabbaz whom he regarded as anti-nomianism, while at the same time he went with a mason to destroy the sacred rock in al-Narandi mosque, "attacked" the Ittihadiyyah

group who supported Ibn 'Arabi, sent a letter to the Baybars advisor which contained a curse against Ibn 'Arabi's monism, was involved in an expedition against Rawafid of Kasrawan, and in Damascus he "attacked" Ahmadiyyah Rifaiyyah - a shaykh who was accused of being a Mongol sympathizer.⁷

Under the rule of Governor Damascus Tankiz (died in 740 AH / 1340 AD), Ibn Taymiyah was promoted as Professor and his followers appointed him as a Mujtahid. Ibn Taymiyah produce a great deal of works, such as *al-Radd ala al-Mantiqiyyin*, *al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyah*, *Fatawa Misriyyah*, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyya*, *Ziyarat al-Kubur*, the Book of *Ma'rifat al-Wusul*, the Book of *Al-Radd 'ala al-'ikhna'*, etc. In addition, there were also some of his works collected by his disciple Ibn Qoyyim al-Jawzie entitled *Asma 'Mu'allafat Ibn Taymiyah*. Not to be forgotten are some of his other works: *Majmu'at al-Rasa'il* (2 vol), *Majmu'at al-Rasa'il al-Kubra*, *Book of Majmu'at al-Fatawa*, *Majmu'at al-Rasa' Il wa al-Masa'il* (5 vol), and his greatest work the *Book of Majmu'at Fatawa Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah* (30 vol).⁸

Ibn Taymiyah's thought was generally inspired by the Hanbali school, as he spent most of his education within the school of thought. He sought to synthesize knowledge derived from reason, a tradition derived from naqli, and the doctrine of iradah or free-will in the Sufi. They were three important elements that he tried to integrate and harmonize in a solid doctrinal construct commonly called "conservative reformism." In the area of dogma, Ibn Taymiyah focused on following the Qur'an and Sunnah because with both we are capable of can "knowing God as God describes Himself in His book, and as the Prophet describes God in his sunnah."⁹

In later days, Ibn Taymiyah had a major

⁵ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 951.

⁶ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 951.

⁷ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 951-952.

⁸ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 952-953.

⁹ B Lewis, et.al (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 954.

influence on the Islamic world, especially among the Sunnis. He is considered to be equivalent to two other great figures: Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi. One of the figures inspired by Ibn Taymiyah was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who founded the Wahabism movement and the establishment of the state of Saudi Arabia under the Saud dynasty.¹⁰

Ibn Taymiyah's inclusivism?

Inclusivism is understood as religiosity that still gives space to beliefs and other religions in terms of truth even though the quality is not as perfect as the religion one believes in. An inclusive adherent still believes that other religions have and contain the truth, except that the truth in the other religions is not as perfect as it is in own's own religion. In Christianity, there is a concept of 'anonymous Christian', namely one who explicitly does not believe in Christianity, but consciously or unconsciously lives in the will of God. These people can be Muslims, Hindus, Jews, or any other religious followers.

The impression of inclusivism in Ibn Taymiyah's religious thought is quite pronounced in Nurcholish Madjid's works. The meaning of "Islam" put forward by Ibn Taymiyah became the starting point of Madjid's statement.¹¹ As the author mentioned at the beginning of this article, Ibn Taymiyah interpreted the word "islam" as "al-istislam", "al-inqiyad" and "al-ikhlash" all of which refer to the notion of "submission only to Allah." Here, Madjid also associated it with the duty of the Prophets of Allah to lead humans to the oneness of Allah (tawhid) and submission only to Him.¹²

Monotheism (tawhid) according to Madjid is the teaching of submission and obedience only to Allah Almighty, without the opportunity

for similar basic attitudes to anything other than to Him (taghut) (Quran al-Nahl [16]: 36, al-Anbiya [21]: 25). This teaching is at the heart of the mission that each messenger (prophet / apostle) in each different community, and of course found in the sacred books they brought.¹³ By quoting Surat al-Anbiya' verse 25, Madjid concluded that the unity of the concept of prophethood and apostolate automatically leads to the concept of the unity of the believers. In this case Madjid referred to Surah al-Anbiya verse 92: "Indeed this community of yours, is one community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me"¹⁴

Subservience and submission to Allah Almighty according to Madjid is manifested in formal religiosity with the act of worship only to Allah. Such acts, he concluded, is the essence and core of all religions. To reinforce this, Madjid quoted Ibn Taymiyah as follows:

"Since the base of religions, namely 'al-islam', is one, despite different teachings, the Prophet (s.a.w) said in a sahih hadith, "we are the prophets, our religion is one, and all the prophets are brothers, we come from one father and different mothers, and the one who is most entitled to Jesus son of Mary is me."¹⁵

Madjid's thought regarding the unity of the prophets was derived from Ibn Taymiyah. According to him all prophets from the first to the last bring the same message of Islam. This opinion is based on several verses of the Qur'an such as Surah Yunus verses 71-72 and 84, al-Baqarah verses 130-132, al-Maidah verses 44 and 111, al-Naml verse 44, and Surah Yusuf verse 101.¹⁶

Further, Madjid asserted that total submission to the One is what is called al-islam. Islam here is not an exclusive meaning

¹⁰ B Lewis, *et.al* (ed), *The Encyclopaedia*, 954-955.

¹¹ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 181.

¹² Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 181.

¹³ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 180-181.

¹⁴ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 181-182.

¹⁵ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 182.

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih li Man Baddala Din al-Masih Juz I* (Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Ashimah, 1999), 81-81

as the name of the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad, but refers to its generic meaning as an attitude of subservience and submission only to Him. From this argument Madjid distinguished between “Islam” and a small letter “i” and Islam with a capital “I”. The word “islam” (with small letter “i”) is used to refer to the attitude of submission to God Almighty or “islam” in its generic meaning. While the word “Islam” with a capital “I” is used to refer to Islam as a name of belief embraced by the ummah of Prophet Muhammad.¹⁷

Further, the concept is drawn into and associated with the concept of esoterism and exoterism in religion. Using the concept of Frithjof Schoun, Budhy Munawar Rahman explained that the religions that exist in the world are, in fact, built from two elements: esoteric and exoteric. The esoteric element is what Rahman referred to as the meeting point of religions transcendentally, because this element is the heart of religions. In this esoteric aspect, there is no difference between one religion and another. But when in the exoteric aspect, he explained, the unity of truth is fragmented through various dimensions, languages, and worldviews used by everyone in grasping and understanding it. And here lies the differences of religions.

Rahman used a rainbow analogy to explain both sides. Basically the rainbow has a white base color but the color is refracted so it looks more colorful. However, any color that appears from the white color maintains the white color. Essentially, all religions have the same basic colors Rahman affirmed, which is not visible from the diverse outer colors. In this context Rahman associates Islam as a green, Christianity a blue color, and so on. Though different,

¹⁷ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam*, 180-181. See also Mun'im Sirry (Ed), *Fiqh Lintas Agama (Inter-faith Fiqh)* (Jakarta: Paramadina & TAF, 2004), 18-20, and Komarudin Hidayat and Muhammad Wahyuni Nafis, *Agama Masa Depan: Perspektif Filsafat Perennial* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2003), 58-59.

basically all the colors of those religions come from the element of the ‘white color’, which he called the primordial religion. Rahman also associates himself with water that has the same substance even in different containers. He also gave an analogy of a wheel that has a unity at its center and difference / rift at its periphery.¹⁸

Mun'im A. Sirry explained that the color refraction occurs due to human limitations in perceiving God as the Absolute. Sirry regarded human beings as relatively incapable of understanding God as Absolute in absolute terms, except for the limits of his relativity. Therefore, he concluded, humans who are ontologically relative are incapable of perceiving God's absoluteness. Sirry assumed there is a very far ‘distance’ between humans and God, so it need symbols as a bridge between the two. So, according to him, it is understandable that in the human eye, there appears a variety of forms of plural God.¹⁹

From Madjid's explanation which was then drawn very far by some circles above, it seems that as if Ibn Taymiyah was an inclusive, even pluralist, Muslim thinker. Or at least, as if he was the founder of an inclusive and pluralist religious attitude. This impression is actually different and contrary to the views of some other circles. Azyumardi Azra, in fact, sees Ibn Taymiyah as a figure who has inspired the birth of contemporary religious radicalist movements, especially the Wahhabi movement in Arabia pioneered by Ibn Abdul Wahhab.²⁰

¹⁸ Budhy Munawar Rahman, *Islam Pluralis: Wacana Kesetaraan Kaum Beriman (Pluralist Islam: Discourse of Equality of the Believers)* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001), 50-52. See also Hidayat and Nafis, *Agama (Religion)*, 52-53, and Sukidi, *Teologi Inklusif Cak Nur Cak Nur's Inclusive Theology* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2001), xxxviii-ix.

¹⁹ Mun'im A Sirry, “Pluralisme Agama,” *Majalah Ummat*, (Religious Pluralism, Ummat Magazine) 33 (1 March 1999/13 Dzulkaidah 1419), 90; See also Komaruddin Hidayat, “Building Dialogical and Inclusive Theology,” in Komaruddin Hidayat and Ahmad Gaus AF (ed), *Passing Over: Melintasi Batas Agama* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2001), 45; Hidayat and Nafis, *Agama*, 69.

²⁰ Azyumardi Azra, *Transformasi Politik Islam:*

According to Azra, the notion of reform inspired by Ibn Taymiyah was later drawn to a more radical direction by Ibn Abdul Wahhab by purifying religion using jihad and violence. The action was carried out along with the head of the local Arab tribe in Nejd, Ibn Saud, that later gave birth to Saudi Arabia. It is this movement that inspires radical movements throughout the Islamic world.²¹

The differences in perspective in viewing the figure of Ibn Taymiyah are interesting to study by referring to his religious views directly; in this case, his perspective on Islam and other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity.

Ibn Taymiyah's Islamic Exclusivism²²

The assumption that Ibn Taymiyah is an inclusivist and even pluralist as Madjid referred to and drawn very far by some circles --with reference to the meaning of the word "islam" merely linguistically-- is actually a hasty statement. Linguistically, the word islam means al-inqiyad, al-istislam and al-

Radikalisme, Khilafatisme, dan Demokrasi (The Transformation of Islamic Politics: Radicalism, Chaliphatism, and Democracy) (Jakarta: Prenamedia Group, 2016), 122. See also Zulkarnain Haron And Nordin Hussin, a study of salafi Jihadist Doctrine and The Interpretation of Jihad by Al Jama'ah al Islamiyah, in *Kemanusiaan Journal*, Vol 20, No 2, (2013), 18

²¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Transformasi*, 122-123.

²² In addition to show basics scholar's assumption of Ibnu Taymiyah exclusivism, actually, we could read more easier than attempt to describe like Nurchalis Madjid did. Notably, some references which are explaining that Ibnu Taymiyah as exclusive, pioneer of radicalist movement, and fundamentalist teaching like another moslem leaders treat to their countries; Ahmad Rubaidi, *Radikalisme Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama', dan Moderatisme Islam di Indonesia*, (Surabaya, Logung Pustaka, 2008), 12. Compare with; M. Zaki Mubarak, *Dari NII ke ISIS; Transformasi ideology dan Gerakan Islam dalam Islam Radikal Kontemporer di Indonesia Kontemporer*, in *Jurnal Episteme*, Vol 10, No 1, Juni 2015) 86; see also in the same topic; Badrus Sholeh, *dari JI ke ISIS; Pemikiran Strategis dan Taktis Gerakan Terorisme di Asia Tenggara*, in *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, Vol 5 No 2 Oktober 2016-Maret 2017, 215. Earlier research we can get on outsider persepective seem like; Oliver Roy, *Genealogi Islam Radikal* (Yogyakarta: Genta Press, 2005), 37, Greg Fealy & Anthony Bubalo, *Jejak Kafilah*, translated by Akh. Muzakki, (Bandung; Mizan, 2004), 23

ikhlah (all meaning submission only to God), but in addition, the word islam also has a terminological meaning of the name of the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w); In a general aspect of language, Islam is the religion of the prophets and apostles. All the prophets came simultaneously with the teachings of monotheism and total submission only to Allah Almighty. The continuity of the apostles with their mission then culminated in Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) as the seal of the prophets.

An important note here is that the advent of an apostle to replace the previous apostle is a sign of invalidity of the previous apostles. So the coming of Jesus was to replace or revise the teachings brought by Moses, as well as Muhammad (s.a.w) came to replace and revise the teachings of Jesus.

In this context, it is only natural that any followers of Prophet Moses (Jews) or Jesus (Christians) must embrace and follow the teachings that Prophet Muhammad brought, if they were contemporaneous and met Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). This rule also applies to prophets before Muhammad, if they were alive and met Muhammad (s.a.w). Indeed Islam requires its adherents to believe in all the prophets and apostles and the books they brought with them, but it does not mean Islam also recognizes the validity and enforceability of all the teachings of the prophets before Muhammad (s.a.w). When Muhammad (s.a.w) came, then all human beings without exception were obliged to believe in Muhammad (s.a.w) and worship according to the shari'a. The meaning of Surah Ali Imran verses 19 and 85 does not refer to Islam generically, but Islam in a special sense as the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w).

This conclusion is derived from Ibn Taymiyah's interpretation of the following verses of the Qur'an:

Surah al-Baqarah [2] verses 62 and 112:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّٰلِحِينَ
وَالصَّٰبِغِينَ مَن ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ
صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا
هُم يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

"Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." (QS. 2:62)

بَلَىٰ مَن أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ
رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

"Yes, whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." (QS. 2:112).

Literally, both verses in Surat al-Baqarah above provide legitimacy for the salvation of other religious followers (in this case Jews, Christians, and Sabeans) as long as they believe in Allah and Judgment Day and do good deeds without following the teachings of Muhammad.

Nonetheless, such brief understanding was explicitly rejected by Ibn Taymiyah. In "al-Tafsir al-Kabir" Ibn Taymiyah strongly rejected the literal understanding. Referring to the Sabab al-nuzul of the verses, Ibn Taymiyah declared that the verses are related to Salman al-Farisi's question to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) about the conditions of his friends who observed their religious teachings before the coming of Prophet Muhammad, they also believed in the coming the last prophet. This question was then answered by the Prophet: "They are among the inhabitants of hell." After repeating

the same question several times, the answer of the Prophet was the same, Salman was sad. However, Allah then revealed verse 62 of Surah al-Baqarah [2].

So the message that the verse conveys, Ibn Taymiyah asserted, is that the Jews, Christians and Sabeans who observed their religious teachings, believed in the coming of the last Prophet, but they died before they met Prophet Muhammad. The faith and good deeds of such people, according to Ibn Taymiyah, will still be rewarded by Allah so that they will have salvation in the Hereafter.

In contrast, the Jews, Christians and Shabiin who lived in the period of and had time to meet with Prophet Muhammad, then they had to believe in the Prophet and follow the Shari'a that he brought. If this is not done, they are not regarded as those who have salvation as set forth in the two verses above.²³

Ibn Taymiyah's opinion is in harmony and agreed upon by many other commentators, such as Ibn Jarir al-Tabari in "Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an," Ismail ibn Kathir in "Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Adhim," and Imam al-Mawardi in "Tafsir al-Mawardi."²⁴ Different interpretations are expressed by Ibn Umar who considers the verse has been removed (naskh) by verse 85 of Surah Ali Imran [3].²⁵

Despite the existence of different interpretations from Ibn Umar on Surah al-Baqarah [2] verse 62 above, it does not really matter since the two interpretations still culminate in a similar conclusion: the followers of the prophets and apostles Before Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) still have to follow the

²³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, juz III* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, tt), 34-35

²⁴ See Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an, Juz I*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1992), 358-365; Ismail ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Adhim, juz I* (Riyad: Dar Alam al-Kutub, 1997), 131-132; Al-Mawardi, *Tafsir al-Mawardi, juz I* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, tt), 131-133.

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 34-35. See also the tafseer above

Shari'a brought by Muhammad (s.a.w) when they were alive and had time to meet with him.²⁶

The obligation of believing in Prophet Muhammad and following his shari'a not only includes the people of the previous prophets, but also applies to the previous prophets. This concept is reinforced by the following verse of Surah Ali Imran [3]:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِءَ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

"And [recall, O People of the Scripture], when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses"

This verse explicitly explains that Allah has taken a covenant with the prophets and apostles to believe and help the apostles who came after them and confirmed their books. According to al-Tabari, what is meant by the "covenant (mithaq)" in the verse is that prophets and apostles must acknowledge all the prophets sent by Allah Almighty, not only in part. Al-Tabari also affirmed that the covenant also applies to all ummah and their followers. And what is meant by "the prophet who comes after them and acknowledges their books and who should be believed and helped" in the verse according to al-Tabari is Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w).²⁷

Therefore, Ibn Taymiyah stated that Islam

brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is the same Islam as well as different from Islam brought by other prophets before. The point of similarity lies in the essence of the doctrine the apostles brought, i.e. monotheism-- to worship only Allah. All the prophets throughout the ages brought the same teaching, namely monotheism. Nevertheless there is a point that distinguishes between them, i.e. the teachings of the Shari'a brought Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) invalidate the teachings of the previous apostles. So, strictly speaking, anyone who lived during the time of Prophet Mose or Jesus, and he lived outside the Shari'a of both apostles, then he was not a Muslim. Similarly, anyone who lived/lives in the period of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) but did/does not embrace his religion or not follow the Shari'a of Muhammad (s.a.w), then he was/is not a Muslim.²⁸

This is the fact that the "Islam brought by Muhammad (s.a.w)" is superior to the previous prophets. Ibn Taymiyah confirmed it in his commentary. There are two reasons Ibn Taymiyah used to reinforce this conclusion: First the naqli proof is Surah al-Nisa' [4] verse 125:

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا ﴿١٢٥﴾

"And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend".²⁹

In that verse Allah uses the form of istifham (question). According to Ibn Taymiyah, the istifham in the above verse is an istifham inkari, meaning that it denies the existence of a better religion than Islam, and establishes Islam as the best (ahsan). Clearly, the verse affirms that Islam is the best religion, no religion is better than it.

²⁶ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 34-35

²⁷ Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, Juz III (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1992), 328-333.

²⁸ Ibn Taymiyah, *Iqtido' al-Shirat al-Mustaqim Mukhalafah Ashab al-Jahim*, (Tt.: Jamiyyah Ihya' al-Turath al-Islamiy, tt), 76-77

²⁹ Ibn Taymiyah, *al-Tafsir*, 457-461

Ibn Taymiyah explained that the verse was revealed in relation to a quarrel between some Muslims and Jews. On that occasion the Jews claimed his religion as better than the Islam that Prophet Muhammad brought because the religion, prophet, and holy book of the Jews came earlier than the religion, prophet and holy book of Muslims. "Our Prophet came before your Prophet, our book came before your book, and we are superior to you," said the Jews. The Jewish claim is reciprocated by the Muslims: "We are superior to you, our Prophet is the seal of the prophets, and our book decides the earlier books." Then Allah revealed Surah al-Nisa [4] verse 123:

لَيْسَ بِأَمَانِيَّتِكُمْ وَلَا أَمَانِيَّ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا
تُجْزَى بِهِ وَلَا تَجِدْ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٢٣﴾

"Paradise is not [obtained] by your wishful thinking nor by that of the People of the Scripture. Whoever does a wrong will be recompensed for it, and he will not find besides Allah a protector or a helper."

When this verse was revealed, the Jews seemed to have legitimacy and said: "We are the same." Hearing this, the Muslims were sad.

However, then Allah revealed [4] verses 124 and 125 above: "And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed." (Qs. 4:124) dan "And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend." (Qs. 4: 125). Both of these verses, according to Taymiyah, confirm the superiority of Islam brought by Muhammad (s.a.w).

The second reason Ibn Taymiyah used was a logical argument about the impossibility of two equal and similar things when there is a fundamental contradiction between them.

In this case, Ibn Taymiyah saw the difference between the religions that are not merely a difference which means "diversity (tanawwu)", but rather "contradiction (tudhod)". Ibn Taymiyah's definition of "diversity" is the existence of two or more opinions or behaviors that are correct according to the Shari'a, or one that has two equally correct understandings. Meanwhile, contradiction according to him, is the existence of two opinions that mutually reject, either in the field of ushul (fundament) or furu' (branch).³⁰

In this light, it is obvious that Ibn Taymiyah's "al-Islam" does not only means al-inqiyad, al-istislam or al-ikhlash, but it also has the terminological meaning as religious teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). The religion brought by of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is, according to Ibn Taymiyah, a true religion, approved by Allah and provides assurance of salvation for its followers. Ibn Taymiyah also argued that Islam as the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is intended in verses 19 and 85 of Surah Ali Imran [3], and not Islam in its generic sense.

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ۗ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْثًا بَيْنَهُمْ
وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩﴾

"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them - out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account." (QS. Ali Imran: 19).

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي
الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

³⁰ Ibnu Taymiyah divided the *ikhtilaf* (difference) into two: *tanawwu* (diversity) and *tudhod* (contradiction). See Ibn Taymiyah, *Iqtido' al-Shirat*, 14-15.

“And whoever desires other than Islam as religion - never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.” (QS. Ali Imran: 85)

In addition to asserting the superiority of the Islamic version of Muhammad (s.a.w), Ibn Taymiyah also explained the condition of the Jews and Christians who will be the losers in the afterlife because of their deeds. Regarding the Jews, Ibn Taymiyah said that these were the people who had committed lies twice. Firstly, they believe the prophethood of Jesus, and secondly they reject the prophethood of Muhammad (s.a.w).³¹

Meanwhile, regarding the Christians, the cause of their misfortune is because they have appointed Jesus as God; that Jesus is believed by Christians to have an element of lahut (divinity) and nasut (humanity). In fact, Ibn Taymiyah asserted that Jesus is only a God’s servant who was sent as an apostle, has only human elements not those of divine, and his creation is not much different from Prophet Adam.³²

Although Jesus came after Moses, it turns out that they were considered by Ibn Taymiyah to have belied Moses because they did not acknowledge and did not practice many of the teachings that Moses brought, even though those teachings were not invalidated by Jesus.³³ In addition, Christians also denied the prophet after Jesus, namely Muhammad (s.a.w). In fact, their kufr (denial of the truth) of Muhammad (s.a.w) was considered by Ibn Taymiyah more severe than Jewish lies about Jesus.³⁴

Conclusion

Islam, according to Ibn Taymiyah, is a religion with two sides, inclusive and exclusive. The inclusive side is in the sense that Islam

brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is a religion that substantially has similarities to those brought by previous prophets and apostles. This type of Islam has the same teachings, i.e. monotheism, worshiping only Allah. It corresponds to the linguistic meaning of the word namely al-inqiyad, al-taslim and al-ikhlash or total submission only to God Almighty.

However, each teaching brought by prophets and apostles also has a difference in the aspects of the shari’a or teachings about the model of submission. Each apostle came with his own unique shari’a. The advent of a new apostle was regarded by Ibn Taymiyah as a sign of the invalidity of the teachings of previous prophets, unless the previous teachings were declared valid by the apostle. In this case, the coming of Isa (Jesus) invalidated the teachings of Moses, and the arrival of Muhammad (s.a.w) marked the end of the validity of the teachings of Jesus. Every ummah (people) must follow the way of Islam according to the apostle of their time.

At this point lies the aspect of Islamic exclusivism brought by Muhammad (s.a.w). As the last prophet and apostle, Islam brought by Muhammad is perfect and the seal of the teachings of submission to Allah Almighty. Thus, the Jews and Christians will not have promise of salvation from Allah because of their reluctance to follow the teachings of Islam brought by the last apostle. Allah is the most knowing.

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³¹ Ibn Taymiyah, *al-Tafsir Vol III*, 189-120. See also Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih*, 114.

³² Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih*, 202-204.

³³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih*, 115-116.

³⁴ Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih*, 115-116.

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