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THE RELIGIOUS OTHERS IN THE QUR'ĀN AND CONVERSION: FARID ESACK ON PLURALISM AND REZA SHAH-KAZEMI ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Reiko Okawa*

Abstract: This study examines how two contemporary Muslim thinkers, Farid Esack (1955–) and Reza Shah-Kazemi (1960–), developed their thoughts on non-Muslims through the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Traditionally non-Muslims have been called *Ahl al-Kitāb*, i.e. People of the Book, or *kuffār* (sg. *kāfir*), i.e. infidels, and believed to be inferior to Muslims. In this globalising world, however, it is an urgent issue to pursue peaceful co-existence among different religions. Esack, a South African scholar and activist, emphasised religious pluralism, while Shah-Kazemi, a London-based scholar with an esoteric tendency, emphasised universalism and interfaith dialogue. Both of them, however, have tried to understand non-Muslims by regarding them as “religious Others,” not to think that *da'wah*, calling for conversion, is an imperative, and to aim to establish the ultimate religion of one God for all humankind. It could be said that their thoughts on peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims is an effort, based on the Qur'ānic pluralism, to surpass the traditional exclusiveness to provide a space for monotheistic believers who put a premium on tolerance of religious Others. But both elaborate their ideas without discussing polytheists, which will be required as the next step in establishing the ultimate religion.

Keywords: *Qur'ān, pluralism, interfaith dialogue, others, conversion*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān has many references to religious Others, or non-Muslims, which has provided a significant impact on Muslims' lives until now. The Others include monotheists and polytheists: *Ahl al-Kitāb*, i.e. People of the Book—mainly implying the monotheistic Jews and Christians; and *kuffār* (sg. *kāfir*), i.e. infidels—meaning polytheistic idol worshippers in Mecca. As for the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, Muslims have seen them in two opposite ways: friends with a false understanding of faith or enemies who deny Islam. *Kuffār*, on the other hand, have been seen as clearly inferior to monotheists and need to be conquered and/or converted. While Muslim history proves that many confrontations have occurred between Muslims and non-Muslims, the Qur'ān seems to call for religious co-existence, especially on the basis of

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Abrahamic faith, as contemporary Muslim scholars have discussed.¹ Abdulaziz Sachedina describes this situation like this:

I firmly believe that if Muslims were made aware of the centrality of Koranic teachings about religious and cultural pluralism as a divinely ordained principle of peaceful coexistence among human societies, then they would spurn violence in challenging their repressive and grossly inefficient governments.²

In this increasingly globalising world, many scholars have, to create peaceful co-existence of people of different religious backgrounds, struggled to overcome the dichotomous view of the Self, as the superior and unnecessary to be changed, and the Other, who is necessary to convert. This struggle has been enhancing the academic field of religious pluralism since it was started by John Hick.³ As Muslim theories in this field, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*⁴ and Abdulaziz Sachedina's *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* are well known.

As Mun'im Sirry points out, traditional Muslims hesitate to use the word pluralism because it "seems to undermine the central Islamic principle of *tawhīd*."⁵ Sachedina also describes the hesitation on this point as:

There is a deep-seated fear of secularly inspired relativism about religious truth that, according to these scholars [i.e., resisting the implications of pluralistic discourse on religion], belief in pluralism might destabilize the authority of revelation as well as the tradition that has determined the authenticity of its foundational sources and the praxis for the faith community.⁶

In addition to theoretical works on religious pluralism, research focusing on realistic activities in the field of interfaith or inter-religious dialogue have been conducted eagerly by scholars such as John L. Esposito, Ihsan Yilmaz⁷ and Mohammed Abu-Nimer.⁸ It should be

¹ For example, see: Ali S. Asani, "Pluralism and Intolerance, and the Qur'an," *The American Scholar* 71, no. 1 (2002); Roger Boase, ed., *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005).

² Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

³ See for example: John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985).

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2004). For Nasr, see for example, Md. Abu Sayem, "Religions and Environmental Sustainability: Focusing on Some Practical Approaches by John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no.1 (2021).

⁵ Mun'im Sirry, "'Compete with One Another in Good Works': Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 423.

⁶ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 4 (2010): 221.

⁷ John L. Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz, "Transnational Muslim Faith-Based Peacebuilding: Initiatives of the Gülen Movement," *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 3 (2010).

⁸ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury and Emily Welty, *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007); Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc66w0>. See also, Osman Bakar, "Theological Foundation of Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence: The Qur'an's Universal Perspectives," in *Peace-Building By, Between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburg (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 135-155.

noted here that interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism are not completely identical. For example, Abu-Nimer, Amal Houry and Emily Welty insist that religious pluralism is not enough to solve the real conflicts that have been occurring in the Middle East, but transformative dialogue possibly works more effectively.⁹ However, it could be said that both approaches share the same objective of peaceful coexistence among different religious Others.

This paper focuses on two contemporary Muslim thinkers, Farid Esack and Reza Shah-Kazemi, who insisted on the peaceful co-existence of religion; the former calls it religious pluralism and the latter interfaith dialogue. Two main issues will be discussed: what these scholars think about Otherness and what they think about conversion. Both, despite their completely different backgrounds, put heavy weight on interpreting the Qur'ānic words to prove that Islam basically admits religious co-existence. They describe non-Muslims as Others rather than as *Ahl al-Kitāb* or *kuffār*, denying Islam's superiority over other religions, and do not see *da'wah*, verbally inviting all non-Muslims to embrace Islam, as obligatory. These shared points could be a new contribution to foster peaceful co-existence among various faiths. This paper clarifies the features of Esack and Shah-Kazemi's theories by discussing who the Other is and the true meaning of *da'wah*, as seen in their interpretations of the words of the Qur'ān.

Farid Esack and His Theory on Religious Pluralism

Esack was born in 1955 to a Muslim family who suffered from severe poverty and injustice under apartheid South Africa. He grew up in a multi-religious or religious pluralistic environment where Jews, Christians, Bahá'ís, and indigenous Africans lived as neighbours. After school, he studied at "a frightfully conservative institute" in Pakistan for theological training.¹⁰ He received his PhD from the University of Birmingham, England. He was eagerly committed to the protest movement against apartheid in collaboration with religious Others, as seen from the fact he was appointed by Nelson Mandela as the gender equity commissioner. Reflecting his experience of the anti-apartheid activity, he wrote *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* in 1997. This book earned a great reputation across the world.¹¹ Then, as a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, he wrote a highly esteemed introductory book on

⁹ Abu-Nimer, Houry and Welty, *Unity in Diversity*, 14-15.

¹⁰ Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 1-5. See also, "Prof Farid Esack," University of Johannesburg, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.uj.ac.za/contact/Pages/Farid-Esack.aspx>.

¹¹ See for example, Massimo Campanini, *The Qur'an: Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 107-114; Ziauddin Sardar, *Reading the Qur'an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21-22, 36; Reiko Okawa, "Contemporary Muslim Intellectual who Published *Tafsir* Works in English: The Authority of Interpreters of the Qur'ān," *Orient* 48 (2013), 67-70; Shadaab Rahemtulla, *Qur'an of the Oppressed: Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Kindle edition, Chapter 2.

the Qur'ān¹² and has been committing to support people living with HIV.¹³ Thus, Esack's pluralism is not only scholastic but also practical and political, based on his own experiences in the movement against apartheid.

Esack sees pluralism as embracing the Other and describes it as “the acknowledgement and acceptance, rather than tolerance, of Otherness and diversity, both within the Self and within the Other.”¹⁴ When pluralism is limited, he says, in “the context of religion it means the acceptance of diverse ways of responding to the impulse, which may be both innate and socialized, within each human being towards the Transcendent.”¹⁵ Esack also clearly denies the superiority of Islam to other religions by redefining the meaning of the term *islām*.¹⁶ After examining the Muslim interpretations, or *tafsīr*, of the Qur'ānic verses related to the term by many Muslim and Western scholars, including Wilfred C. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, Esack argues that the term *islām* in the Qur'ān means not only the faith of “the adherents of reified Islam: in other words, those known today as Muslims” but also that of “individuals and communities who share common space, geography or time.”¹⁷ This understanding of *islām* is also what is insisted on by many contemporary Muslim scholars such as Nasr.¹⁸ Reaching this expanded understanding of the term *islām* made it possible for Esack to accept non-Muslims if they already submitted to one God in their worship. Therefore, he could reject the superiority of reified Islam, or real Muslim society, to religious Others by stating “the pre-eminence of the righteous does not mean a position of permanent socio-religious superiority for the Muslim community. The Muslims, as a social entity were not superior to the Other.”¹⁹

Moreover, Esack understands the concept of *tawhīd* as being the oneness that engenders the solidarity of different kinds of people. This is contrary to those who deny pluralism, believing it would damage the oneness, or *tawhīd*, as Sirry and Sachedina point out (as mentioned above). According to Esack, *tawhīd* has two meanings: one is “the rejection of the dualistic conception of human existence whereby a distinction is made between the secular and the spiritual...to alleviate political injustice.” At the same time, it is the opposition “to a society which sets up race as an alternative object of veneration and divides people along the lines of ethnicity.”²⁰ This definition could be thought of as reflecting the South African context, where people of various backgrounds needed to struggle against the apartheid regime with strong solidarity.

¹² Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002).

¹³ Farid Esack and Sarah Chiddy, eds., *Islam and AIDS: Between Scorn, Pity and Justice*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

¹⁴ Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, xii.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 133.

¹⁷ Ibid., 132-133.

¹⁸ Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 8; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, new revised ed. (Chicago: Kazi, 2000), 14-17. See also, Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “The Qur'an and Religious Pluralism,” in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), 278-279.

¹⁹ Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 175.

²⁰ Ibid., 92.

Reza Shah-Kazemi and His Theory on Interfaith Dialogue

Reza Shah-Kazemi, born in 1960, obtained a PhD of Comparative Religion from the University of Kent in 1994, and he now is a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. His interest, in contrast to Esack's realistic interest, is directed to esoteric or spiritual dimensions of Islamic thought as he "writes on a range of topics from metaphysics and doctrine to contemplation and prayer."²¹ In 2006, he published *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue*,²² which was about his thoughts on co-existence with Others. In addition to this monograph, he has published many books discussing Sufism and Shi'i Islam,²³ and he has been working on a translation of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, the collection of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), the first Shi'i Imam.²⁴

Shah-Kazemi uses the term interfaith "dialogue" and religious "diversity," rather than "pluralism." He regards the Qur'ān as "unique among the revealed scriptures of the world not only in the way it promotes dialogue between adherents of different faith-communities, but also in the way it explicitly refers to the divine ordainment of religious diversity."²⁵ When he discusses academic theories of interfaith dialogue, he evaluates Nasr's theory more highly than Hick's theory of pluralism. Shah-Kazemi regards Nasr's theory as "one of the most important contemporary expressions of this vision of the inner unity of religions from an Islamic perspective."²⁶ This evaluation can be thought as a result of Shah-Kazemi's deep tendency towards Sufism. He explains the difference in Hick's and Nasr's theories by saying that Hick recognises the reason of religious diversity has been caused by the differences in human cognitive responses on the Ineffable Real, or God, while Nasr recognises it was caused by the difference of Ineffable Real's Self-revelation toward human beings.²⁷ It is obvious that Nasr's theory shows the significant influence of Sufism, understanding human involvement in a more passive way under the omnipotence of God.

What is Islam, then, to Shah-Kazemi? He defines Islam as a "quintessential and universal submission" to "the revealed will of the Absolute," which is based on Sufi theory that each revealed religion has its uniqueness, but, at the same time, all revelations express the same religious essence. Therefore, he believes Islam can be a particular religion and a universal religion.²⁸ He regards the universal religion beyond specification as the religion of Abraham, *al-ḥanīf*, referring to Qur'ānic verse 2:135, where God orders his people not to be Jews or

²¹ "Reza Shah-Kazemi's Life and Work," World Wisdom, accessed July 12, 2021, <http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Reza-Shah-Kazemi.aspx>.

²² Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006).

²³ For example, Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths of Transcendence: Shankara, Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart on Transcendent Spiritual Realization* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 2006); Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Spiritual Quest: Reflections on Qur'ānic Prayer According to the Teachings of Imam 'Alī* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

²⁴ World Wisdom, "Reza Shah-Kazemi's Life and Work."

²⁵ Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, xiv.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

Christians but to believe in the religion of Abraham, whose followers were not idol worshippers.²⁹ Here, Shah-Kazemi does not criticise being a monotheist, but being a polytheist.

By referring to an idea of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), Shah-Kazemi insists that one should engender a respectful attitude towards the beliefs of the Other. Ibn ‘Arabī, a prominent Sufi philosopher, having been well-known with his doctrine of the oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), insists that “God is the root of ever diversity in beliefs” and warns people “beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting other as unbelief.”³⁰ Shah-Kazemi, then, concludes that the most important virtues of believers of universal religion are “humility and generosity” because both are what “Islam” or universal submission demands.³¹

Shah-Kazemi also provides an esoteric understanding of *tawhīd* with significant influence by scholars of Shi‘i gnosis and Sufi metaphysics. He particularly refers to Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385), a Shi‘i mystical theologian who shifted the idea of *tawhīd* from “theological *tawhīd*” to “ontological *tawhīd*,” which makes it possible to understand God as the One revealed within the many, without ceasing to be One. Shah-Kazemi wrote, “Diversity is thus integral to unity, and unity is perpetually affirmed in diversity.”³² This shift means the Islamic concept of *tawhīd* no longer has the theological ground to deny the existence of multiple faiths but to admit the multiple understandings or diversity of religions of one God.

SELFNESS AND OTHERNESS

The meaning of the Self and the Other includes different levels. Nasr argues it is used in three main contexts: one is “my self or your self” in an individual and biological context; the second is the self and the other between which political, cultural and religious actions and reactions take place; and the third is human beings and nature. Nasr emphasises the necessity of re-evaluating the religious Other and insists that understanding the beauty in other religions could enrich the self.³³ This is one of the most important ways to enhance the peaceful relationship between religions. Sufism, furthermore, puts a premium on a relationship between one’s self and God; as a well-known saying of Muhammad puts it, “Whosoever knows his self, knows his Lord,” which means, according to Nasr, self-knowledge leads ultimately to the knowledge of God, who resides in human beings’ hearts.³⁴ In this paper, the Self and Other are discussed in a context where religious actions and reactions usually take place in our lives.

When Muslims call non-Muslims “Others,” rather than “*Ahl al-Kitāb*” or especially “*kāfir*,” the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims can become harmonious and symbiotic. The “Other,” generally speaking, means one who is not the “Self,” and the border between the

²⁹ Ibid., 179.

³⁰ Ibid., 207.

³¹ Ibid., 208.

³² Ibid., 98-99.

³³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Self and the Other: Re-Evaluating their Meaning in Our Lives,” *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies* 16, no. 2 (2011).

³⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 5.

Other and Self can be defined as the boundary of identity. Miroslav Volf explains the concept thus:

Who are the others? They are people of different races, religions, and cultures, who live in our proximity and with whom we are often in tension and sometimes in deadly conflict. But, who are we?...It is not possible to speak of ‘the other’ without speaking of ‘the self’ or of otherness without speaking of identity, for the others are always others to someone else.³⁵

Thus, the Self and Other are like two sides of a coin, impossible to completely be partitioned, always connected in various ways. It could be expressed that they are interchangeable with each other: the Self is the Other of another Self. This way of thinking opens a new possibility to create religious pluralism.

Qur’ānic References to Religious Others

The Qur’ān defines itself as a message of a religion to follow and as a complement to the preceding scriptural religions of Judaism and Christianity, which means the Qur’ān’s worldview starts from admitting religious Others. Fred M. Donner also proves in his detailed historical study that in Muhammad’s time Islam was an ecumenical, monotheistic faith including Judaism and Christianity, and the word *muslim* in the Qur’ān only implied monotheistic believer. However, during the Umayyad period, the concept of Islam was redefined to limit it to the faith of a follower of the Qur’ān. Riddell’s analysis on the Chapter of the Cave (*Kahf*) in the Qur’ān also supports this view.³⁶

The most important theoretical point is that the Qur’ān states the existence of a “primordial religion” or “primordial faith of mankind”: it says “Mankind was a single community.”³⁷ As Nasr observes, Islam has two aspects of “primordial religion” and the last religion in the present life of humanity, and it is a “reassertion of this primordial truth” following the Abrahamic tradition, exemplified by Judaism and Christianity.³⁸ This is exactly what the Qur’ān insists, implying that a primordial religion has been repeatedly revealed to many prophets. For example, it states:

In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: ‘Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it.’³⁹

The Qur’ān provides a huge range of references to religious Others, mainly focusing on two categories: monotheism and polytheism. It shows sympathy and hostility to the former, while clearly denying and criticising the latter. The monotheists, called *Ahl al-Kitāb* or *al-ḥanīf*, are

³⁵ Miroslav Volf, “Living with the ‘Other’,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39, no. 1/2 (2002).

³⁶ See Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Harvard and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 203-204; Peter G. Riddell, “Concepts of Believer and Unbeliever in Sūra Al-Kahf,” *The Straight Path* October (2020): 38.

³⁷ Qur’ān 2:213, 10:19. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

³⁸ Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 20-21.

³⁹ Qur’ān 42:13.

Jews, Christians, and Sabians, who could be allowed salvation together with Muslims, as mentioned for example in Qur'ān 2:62, 5:69 and 22:17. The Qur'ān also shows ambivalent attitudes toward *Ahl al-Kitāb*, saying for example,

Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.'⁴⁰

As Sachedina argues, this verse emphasises the common ground with *Ahl al-Kitāb*, specifically that they believe in only one God.⁴¹ However, at the same time, as Ismail Albayrak has explored in detail, this verse suggests that calling *Ahl al-Kitāb* to unite on common monotheistic ground was not successful.⁴² Thus, these verses suggest, although the Qur'ān taught the unity or commonality of monotheists based on the concept of a primordial faith, it was not easily accepted by *Ahl al-Kitāb*.

Polytheists are often called *kuffār* (pl.) (or *kāfir* in the singular), which is often translated as infidels or unbelievers. The Qur'ān, however, uses the terms to mean who conceals the truth (e.g. Qur'ān 39: 32) or one who is ungrateful (e.g. Qur'ān 26: 19), and Toshihiko Izutsu has also argued it has a fundamental semantic meaning of one who is not thankful.⁴³ These terms in the Qur'ān basically apply to Meccan idol worshippers who obeyed their tribal conventional belief and oppressed Muhammad and Muslims, who had started to insist on the oneness of God. It is well known, although misunderstood, that the Qur'ān orders believers to kill *kāfir* or "unbelievers (*alladhīna kāfarū*)" in the verse cited below, until they accept or convert to Islam, based on the following passage: "[Prophet], tell unbelievers that if they desist their past will be forgiven...[Believers], fight them until there is no persecution, and [your] worship is devoted to God alone."⁴⁴ However, these verses had a specific context: after the *hijra* (the migration from Mecca to Medina), the Qur'ān ordered followers to fight the polytheists, implying the Meccan pagans, because they persecuted Muslims and obstructed them from the free practice of Islam. The history of *tafsīr* shows that *mufasssirs* (interpreters) in the medieval era, such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), interpreted the term *fitna* in Qur'ān 8:39 as polytheism not persecution, which could support hostility towards polytheists. However, some interpreters in the 8th century before al-Ṭabarī and the modern *mufasssirs*, such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, understood *fitna* as persecution, which clearly provided a path to the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and polytheists.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Qur'ān 3:64.

⁴¹ Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, 68-69.

⁴² Ismail Albayrak, "The People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb) in the Qur'an," in *War and Peace in Islam: The Uses and Abuses of Jihad*, ed. HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Ibrahim Kalin and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2013), 295-296.

⁴³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 26.

⁴⁴ Qur'ān 8:38-39.

⁴⁵ Asma Afsaruddin, "Jihad and the Qur'an: Classical and Modern Interpretations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 517-518.

Thus, it can be said that the Qur'ānic view of religious Others basically accepts peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims and does not insist on the superiority of Islam over other religions. However, there have also been traditionalist views that regard Islam as superior to other religions. Two reasons for this exclusive view can be considered. The first, as Ali S. Asani and Sachedina have pointed out,⁴⁶ is the idea that Islam is the latest monotheistic revelation leads to the understanding that it supersedes all preceding revelations such as Judaism and Christianity. Another is, as Asani has observed,⁴⁷ that political hegemony in the 8th and 9th centuries led to aggression against non-Muslims, even prompting the concept of “*dar al-harb* (territories under non-Muslim control),” which does not exist in the Qur'ān, and the reinterpretation of the notion of “*jihad*,” which is used to mean “struggle” or “endeavour” in the Qur'ān, to justify military goals. Since the modern era began, however, a new understanding of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims has been required, and new theories have emerged, as will be shown here.

Farid Esack on Otherness

Esack's “Qur'ānic re-interpretive ideas and redefinition of Self and Other emerged” from the community where he grew up, which required of him an “interfaith solidarity against apartheid.”⁴⁸ His basic concept of Self and Other is reflected in the words “Otherness is a condition of Selfhood...The Self cannot walk away from any meaningful encounter with the Other without carrying some of that Otherness along, and leaving some of the Self behind.”⁴⁹ Thus he holds that the Self cannot exist without religious Others, standing against exclusivist Muslims' view that Islam is superior to others and suggesting the importance of pluralism or diversity. Clearly, he criticises “the present basis for exclusion and inclusion in Islamic theological categories of Self and Other” as Islamic theology has become more rigid with applying the label of Otherness not to individuals but to groups.⁵⁰

He, therefore, engages himself to refine the terms *mu'min* (believer), *muslim* and *kāfir* to provide new interpretations of Qur'ānic words related to Self and Other. He starts by defining God as described in the Qur'ān as being “concerned with something that persons do, and with the persons who do it, rather than with an abstract entity [called belief]” by following W. C. Smith's definition.⁵¹ This definition made it possible for Esack to interpret the Qur'ānic verses regarding Others not collectively or as a group of any religion but individually. Then he examines the three terms: *īmān*, or faith, from which the term *mu'min* is derived; *islām*, from which the term *muslim* is derived; and *kufr*, from which the term *kāfir* is derived.

⁴⁶ Asani, “Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an,” 56-57; Sachedina, “Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam,” 226.

⁴⁷ Asani, “Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an,” 57.

⁴⁸ Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15, 114-115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

Esack examines a great number of Qur'ānic verses mentioning words of the root *a-m-n*, mainly Qur'ān 8:2-4:

Indeed, the *mu'minun* are those whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned; and whose *iman* is strengthened whenever His *ayat* [signs] are conveyed unto them; and who place their trust in their Sustainer. Those who are constant in prayer and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. It is they who are truly the *mu'minun*.⁵²

With detailed references to important Muslim interpreters (*mufasssirs*) of the Qur'ān, including al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and al-Ṭabāṭbā'ī (d. 1981), and non-Muslim scholars such as W. C. Smith and Toshihiko Izutsu, he reveals that *īmān* is dynamic and mutable, interrelated to righteous deeds, and is “a personal recognition of, and active response to, the presence of God in the universe and in history.”⁵³ He criticises traditional Muslim scholars who tend to interpret in a limited sense that the righteous deeds related to *īmān* are the rituals of Muslims.⁵⁴ He, however, insists that if *īmān* is a personal response to God, it cannot be limited to a particular socio-religious community, or Muslim community, outside which there are many people of *īmān* or *mu'minūn*.⁵⁵ Esack's attitude is close to what Nasr discussed; Nasr said Qur'ān 2:62 implies there is no difference between the Muslim faithful and the faithful of other religions, and in the most universal sense all who have faith and accept the One God are believers or “*mu'min*.”⁵⁶

Esack also reinterprets the term *islām* using the Qur'ānic verses with detailed references to important Muslim interpreters and non-Muslim scholars, such as Jane I. Smith. He, then, tries to understand *islām* by dividing it into two forms: a reified one and a non-reified one. He criticises the fact that the dominant contemporary Muslim discourses only use the term as a reified one, which denies the existence of people who conduct submission to God, or *islām*, outside the reified, or what is known today as the Muslim community.⁵⁷ This redefinition of *islām* widens the range of the term, providing the space for Muslims to include the religious Others as *muslims* in a wider and non-reified form, which is similar to what Nasr and Chittick discuss, as argued above.

Esack tries to rethink the term *kufr*, which is usually translated as disbelief, using Qur'ān 3:21-22 that “Verily, as for those who reject/are ungrateful [*yakfur*] for the signs of God, and slay the Prophets against all right, and slay people who enjoin justice, announce unto them a grievous chastisement.”⁵⁸ He particularly focuses on the relationship between *kufr* and justice. After citing the words of Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), an Austro-Hungarian Muslim who converted from Judaism, that a *kāfir* is “one who denies (or refuses to acknowledge) the truth in the widest, spiritual sense,” Esack insists that *kufr* as described in the Qur'ān is “an actively and dynamic attitude of ingratitude leading to wilful rejection of known truth...a pattern of

⁵² Ibid., 117.

⁵³ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁶ Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 43.

⁵⁷ Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.

actively arrogant and oppressive behaviour.” The Qur’ān portrays the typical *kāfir* who oppresses the weak people (Qur’ān 4:168 and 14:13) or keeps silent in the face of oppression (Qur’ān 5:79).⁵⁹ This contrast of the oppressed and oppressor can be thought to reflect his own experience during apartheid: the *kāfirūn* are not the non-Muslims who fought together against apartheid but the oppressors, which means in his context the apartheid regime. He wrote, “The Qur’an portrays *kufir* as an important factor that both shaped a bloated image of the Self and manifested itself in it and in the accompanying contempt for the weak Other.”⁶⁰

Thus, Esack separates the Self and the Other not based on the difference of religion, particularly Muslim or non-Muslim, but on that of the attitude of individuals, whether they conduct righteous things, submit to God, and accept weak people without arrogance. He tries to cooperate with the religious Others to solve the problems under apartheid by focusing not on religion as a group but on individuals’ behaviour.

Reza Shah-Kazemi on Otherness

Shah-Kazemi’s concept of Other is rooted in the Sufi understanding of Qur’ānic *tawhīd* that “There is but one true or real God.” According to him, Sufism, which is speculative and spiritual, does not limit this message to the range of theology but expands to the perspective of ontology. Then, referring to al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), a representative of Ibn ‘Arabī school, he states this simple message could be understood as not only affirming the oneness of God to the exclusion of other gods, but also affirming “a unique reality, which is exclusive of all otherness.” Regarding the latter aspect as being more fundamental, he leads the theory of denying all kinds of Otherness and admitting only Self in substantial meaning.⁶¹ Thus, he shows the idea that overcomes the dichotomy of Self and Other by using the concept of *tawhīd* according to Sufi understanding.

He discusses the importance of dialogue, which usually occurs between the Self and Other, in the context that there is no Otherness. This seems contradictory, but he introduces the concept of “unity and multiplicity” or “oneness in diversity and diversity within oneness.” This is based on the Sufi understanding of God as divinely Self-manifesting, as described in Qur’ān 49:13: “O mankind, truly We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.” He interprets this verse to mean that one God created diversity of creatures in order to make them know Himself, which means the diversity among the creatures is the tool to recognise the one God.⁶² Therefore, people of different faiths need to have dialogue to know more about God, as he describes:

...on the one hand the human self will be seen to be integral to the divine Self-disclosure, being the most faithful reflection, within relative existence, of the unconditional being and manifold qualities of the divine nature; and on the other hand, the self-effacement required

⁵⁹ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁶¹ Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, 74-75.

⁶² Ibid.

for the Sufi assimilation of *tawhīd* will be seen to have potentially far-reaching consequences for effective dialogue with the other.⁶³

To explain the meaning of dialogue between Others on the human level, he cites many Qur'ānic verses, including Qur'ān 30:22, which reads: “And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know.” He says the verses not only intend to confirm diversity and foster mutual acceptance and tolerance among people, but also they provide a more esoteric message for the sensitive reader that, following the deepest spirit of *tawhīd*, make it possible to reach “transformative contemplation.”⁶⁴ Because the divine one God also exists in the Others, one can obtain an opportunity to contemplate God through the Others,

a dialogue rooted in the sincere desire for greater knowledge and understanding both of the other and of oneself...can be seen as a reflection of, and participation in, the very process by which God knows Himself in distinctive, differentiated mode.⁶⁵

Thus, Shah-Kazemi's theory of Otherness is deeply rooted in Sufi tradition, which tends to cross the boundaries of difference by intensely focusing on *tawhīd*, the oneness of God. Such a Sufi tendency allows him to open the gate to promote the dialogue between different faiths or religious Others. Obviously contrasting Esack's concept of Otherness, which is more practical and socio-political, Shah-Kazemi's theory is completely metaphysical, spiritual and speculative.

CONVERSION AND *DA'WAH*

If religious pluralism can obscure a boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims (which can be also described as a division between the Self and Other based on religion), another question may arise whether *da'wah*, calling non-Muslims to embrace Islam, is necessary because conversion is a transformation of the Self to Other. Chana Ullman defines conversion from a psychological perspective research, writing, “At least on the face of it, religious conversion is the occasion of a dramatic change in a person's life and in core elements of a person's self.” This means conversion is a process of discontinuing “major components of people's self-definition.”⁶⁶ This process can be described as a “spiritual transformation,”⁶⁷ going from the Self to Other; when the process is completed, the previous Self becomes the present Other, and the previous Other becomes the present Self. In such a case, *da'wah* can be described as an activity of inviting Others to convert to the Self, or to be Muslim, which has been regarded as one of the most important duties of Muslims. As seen above, however, Esack

⁶³ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 114-115.

⁶⁶ Chana Ullman, *The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1989), xv.

⁶⁷ See for example, Raymond F. Paloutzian, “Psychology of Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

and Shah-Kazemi deny the boundary of Self and Other in their own ways and insist that one must accept Others as they are, and this attitude seem incompatible with the traditional principle of encouraging *da'wah*.

The Qur'ān and Da'wah

The Qur'ān does not describe any specific order for conducting *da'wah*, because provided by *hadīths*, while many contemporary Muslims who insist on the importance of *da'wah* find grounds for an order. For example, Khurram Murad argues the importance of *da'wah* and the reason of it, insisting that *da'wah* is an essential activity of being a Muslim:

Islam means living in total surrender to Allah, in private and in public, inwardly and outwardly. This has two clear, important implications. One, as most of human life comprises of relationships with other people, living in surrender to Allah cannot be actualized fully unless other people join us in our endeavour, unless the whole society lives in surrender. Hence, at least inviting others to join in our venture, that is Da'wah, is an essential part of being Muslim. Two, Islam is not a once-in-a-lifetime decision; it is a process, it is a life-long pursuit. Hence we must continuously invite ourselves and everyone else to join in this pursuit.⁶⁸

Murad then cites Qur'ān 5:67, in which God orders Muhammad to deliver the revelation from his Lord, with the conclusion that *da'wah* is a continuous activity throughout a Muslim's life.⁶⁹

Although this kind of verbal *da'wah* has traditionally been regarded as a significant Muslim duty, it is contrary to the words of the Qur'ān, such as 28:56 and 2:256, which insist on the human impossibility of converting people and freedom of religion.⁷⁰ It should also be noted the concept of *da'wah* is not limited to verbal invitation to convert to Islam; it is also used to imply a spiritual calling for better education, moral improvement and the enhancement of pluralism.⁷¹

Muslim scholars who pursue religious tolerance have been regarding the following verses as the basis of tolerance to religious Others:⁷²

⁶⁸ Khuram Murad, *Da'wah among Non-Muslims in the West: Some Conceptual and Methodological Aspects* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation 1986), 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁰ Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 58.

⁷¹ See for example: Moh. Ali Aziz and Sokhi Huda, "The Spirit of Morality within Sufistic Da'wah of the Hizmet Movement of Fethullah Gülen," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 7 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i7/4326>; Restu Adi Nugraha, Cecep Darmawan and Dede Iswandi, "Islamic Da'wah Through Social Media as a Means of Political Education," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 418 (2020).

⁷² Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497568>, 87-88, 94. See also, Sachedina, "Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam," 225; Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, 90.

There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believers in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.⁷³

You have your religion and I have mine.⁷⁴

Farid Esack on Conversion and Da‘wah

Esack discusses the issue of *da‘wah*, connecting it with “the prophetic” or “Muhammad’s responsibility.”⁷⁵ He sees the Qur’ān insists on two fundamental prophetic responsibilities: the first is to challenge the People of the Book that they have lost their appropriate commitment to and understanding of their traditions and warns them about their deviation from them in order to make them return to the original religion, or the submission to one God; the second is to call all of humankind to accept the Qur’ān as their own guide.⁷⁶ The first one could allow the People of the Book to keep their own religion based on the belief that they worship the same one God and follow the revealed scripture, while the second one is what is ordinarily called the invitation of non-Muslims to convert to Islam, or *da‘wah*.

Regarding the second responsibility, Esack raises a question: if the faith of the Other is authentic, what is the purpose of inviting?⁷⁷ He tries to solve this problem by expanding the meaning of inviting, insisting that “Muhammad’s basic responsibility in inviting was to call to God.” Esack divides this inviting into two manners: some religious Others are better to become Muslims, while other religious Others are called to conduct *islām* in the sense of submission, not being required to become Muslims. For the grounds of this understanding of *da‘wah*, he refers to Qur’ān 3:64 in which God calls the People of the Book to “come to a word equal between us and you that we worship none but God, nor will we take from our ranks anyone as deities,” and Qur’ān 22:67, which admits to religious pluralism by saying:

Unto every community have we appointed [different] ways of worship which they ought to observe. Hence, do not let those [who follow ways other than yours] draw you into disputes on this score, but summon [them all] unto your Sustainer.⁷⁸

Thus, based on the Qur’ān, he expands the meaning of *da‘wah* from inviting non-Muslims to convert to Islam and become Muslims, to calling religious Others to submit to one God, regardless of what religion you belong to. He seems to imply that the People of the Book who have already believed in one God with revealed scriptures do not need to convert to Muslim and can remain with their faith in one God, if it is not against Islam, while the polytheists would need to convert and become Muslims to believe in one God.

⁷³ Qur’ān 2:256.

⁷⁴ Qur’ān 109:6.

⁷⁵ Esack, *Qur’an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 172.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

Esack then, presupposing that religious pluralism is permitted by the Qur'ān, insists on the importance of “calling” from the viewpoint of fighting against apartheid through solidarity with religious Others:

The task of the present-day Muslim is to discern what this means in every age and every society. Who is to be invited? Who is to be taken as allies in this calling? How does one define the path of God? These are particularly pertinent questions in a society where definitions of Self and Other are determined by justice and injustice, oppression and liberation and where the test of one's integrity as a human being dignified by God is determined by the extent of one's commitment to defend that dignity.⁷⁹

Thus, it could be found that, for him, the most important criterion of the judgment between the Self and Other is not what religion one belongs to, but whether one behaves with justice.

Reza Shah-Kazemi on Conversion and Da'wah

Shah-Kazemi discusses the importance of *da'wah* in the context of interfaith dialogue; although, according to him, “exoterically-minded Muslims (*ahl al-zāhir*)” tend to see *da'wah* as being much more important than interfaith dialogue.⁸⁰ Here, it should be noted the term “*ahl al-zāhir*” is the opposite of “*ahl al-bāṭin*,” or esoterically-minded Muslims, which specifically means Sufis. It is not only a Sufism-oriented thinker like Shah-Kazemi, but also modernist Muslims like Asghar A. Engineer, who lived in India and sought peaceful coexistence with Hindus. Engineer clearly states that *da'wah* is less important than dialogue:

Today dialogue is needed rather than *da'wah* or missionary activities... The first requirement of the spirit of dialogue is to know the ‘other’ in faith... It is important to note that a liberal Hindu or Christian or Muslim may have more in common than an orthodox and a liberal co-religionist. Liberals of two different religions may share much more in common than an orthodox and a liberal from the same religion.⁸¹

Thus, it seems that for exoterically-minded Muslims and modernist Muslims, *da'wah* and interfaith dialogue are incompatible and one of the two should be chosen. However, these two are typical but opposite ways in the situation when the Self engages with the Other by using verbal communication.

Shah-Kazemi tries to find a third way that *da'wah* can consort with interfaith dialogue. Similarly to Esack, Shah-Kazemi expands the meaning of *da'wah* from the exoteric definition of “the call or invitation to embrace Islam”⁸² to “an ‘invitation’ to study the universality.”⁸³ According to Shah-Kazemi, the universality is “undoubtedly present in the Qur'ān, together with the profound Sufi perspectives on key Qur'ānic verses, as a most—possibly the most—effective and appropriate manner in which to ‘call’ people to Islam.”⁸⁴ This implies that Shah-Kazemi believes in the ultimate mode of faith and calls it “the universality” with the idea that

⁷⁹ Ibid., 175.

⁸⁰ Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, 234.

⁸¹ Asghar A. Engineer, “Da'wah and Dialogue?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39, no. 1/2 (2002).

⁸² Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, 234.

⁸³ Ibid., 235.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Islam is a/the best way to reach it. He furthermore insists this universality does not have any specific Islamic tendency, regarding it as a pure or ultimate one without any tendency of a particular religion. Esack and Shah-Kazemi, thus, seem to pursue establishing an ultimate faith with a less specific tendency to any existing religion, while insisting Islam is the most appropriate way to access it, by using different expressions.

Shah-Kazemi, therefore, strongly denies conducting realistic *da'wah*, but at the same time accepts the people who wanted to conduct it. He recognises that exclusivists say that *da'wah* works only when the superiority of a religion to all other religions is accepted by the religious Others.⁸⁵ He, however, does not deny this kind of exclusivist attitude because he thinks it is necessary to accept such an exclusive attitude so the ultimate faith can be accepted more widely. If he denied it, he could not pursue the ultimate faith, which includes all kinds of faith. He, therefore, on the one hand, admits the exclusivist attitude as it is, and on the other hand, seeks to establish the ultimate interfaith dialogue, which is his essential objective. In this sense, he admits the religious Others representing specific faiths respectively, maybe for the time being; however, he ultimately seeks that all humankind, including Muslims, become believers of universalism without any specific faith tendency, which is what he calls *da'wah*.

CONCLUSION

What is underlying through the discussions above is the problem of recognition on religion or faith, which has been searched using such technical terms as “inclusiveness,” “exclusiveness,” “pluralism,” “interfaith dialogue,” “universalism,” and “particularism.” Yong Huang explicitly defined these terms as:

The exclusivists insist that only one religion is true and all other are false. The inclusivists maintain that only one religion represents the absolute truth and all others have only some measure of it. Obviously, interfaith dialogue in these two cases can only be a convenient name for the religious mission of converting all to the only true or the only absolutely true religion after the demise of colonialism. True and genuine interfaith dialogue is thus congenial only to a pluralistic view of different religions as on a par with each other.⁸⁶

Huan, furthermore, moved on to define two more terms as two models of religious pluralism with different implications for interfaith dialogue: universalism and particularism. Universalism is the idea that “different religions are seen as different parochial expressions of some universal essence,” which is linked to interfaith dialogue when it enables “all religions to better express this common essence.”⁸⁷ Particularism is defined as the idea that “different religions are regarded as different in their fundamentals” and interfaith dialogue is necessary for “different religions to clearly realize these fundamental differences so that they can tolerate each other.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 244-245.

⁸⁶ Yong Huang, “Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond Universalism and Particularism,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 37 (1995): 127.

⁸⁷ Huan, “Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue,” 127.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Now, following these definitions, Esack and Shah-Kazemi's ideas on the Other and conversion can be analysed as below. Obviously, neither is exclusivist nor inclusivist because they admit there is value in other religions without considering that Islam is superior to others. Therefore, both their ideas are compatible with pluralism or interfaith dialogue. Shah-Kazemi's thoughts on interfaith dialogue can be regarded as "true and genuine" as they do not require verbal conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. Thus, we may think that neither is for particularism because they insist that all human beings, ideally, must believe in one God, which clearly denies the existence of different religions with fundamental differences.

It could be said they are for universalism according to Huan's definition. While Esack does not use this term, rather using pluralism, Shah-Kazemi often uses the term universalism, together with the term interfaith dialogue. Both insist there exists one true religion/faith, which is mostly realised in Islam; therefore, it is worthwhile for people to convert to Islam, but all religious Others should be respected. However, the different usage of the terms reflects the difference between their focuses in terms of their way to pursue peaceful coexistence with religious Others. Esack focuses on how to unite different religious groups, such as to fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa through admitting religious Others based on the idea of religious pluralism, which could be called practical or realistic pluralism. On the other hand, Shah-Kazemi's interfaith dialogue is more theoretical: He seeks for interfaith dialogue based on the idea of religious universalism through the esoteric, metaphysical or Sufi worldview that one God created various faiths to have conversation between them.

Thus, Esack and Shah-Kazemi's views on religious Other overcome the hostile attitude taken by some Muslims who regard non-Muslims as enemies or inferiors to be forced to convert to Islam. On the contrary, Esack and Shah-Kazemi agree on the importance of coexistence with Others, with the condition that these others are People of the Book, or Jews and Christians, who share the belief there is only one God—in other words, the believers of Abrahamic faiths or monotheists. Their thoughts are new in a sense that, as we have seen in their arguments on *da'wah* and religious Others, they tried to develop Qur'anic and Muslim scholastic ideas on religious co-existence from each perspective, based on their own worldviews. Lastly it should also be noted that Esack and Shah-Kazemi hardly argue how to see polytheists, which implies the issue of co-existence with monotheists matters much more for them as they have been facing a lot of conflicts, compared with the issue with polytheists, who used to be severe enemies in Muhammad's time, but now they seem to be less problematical. However, if they were to try to construct a theory on peaceful co-existence with religious Others that brings all human beings into perspective, arguing polytheism will also be an important element.

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