

THE CONCEPT OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK (*AHL AL-KITĀB*) IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS TRADITION

By:

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Abstrak

Persoalan mengenai Ahli Kitab merupakan salah satu daripada isu utama yang masih dibicarakan pada hari ini. Golongan ini bukan sahaja mendapat perhatian khusus daripada al-Quran dan al-Hadis, malah turut menjadi bahan perdebatan di antara para sarjana Islam dan Barat. Perbincangan mengenai golongan ini menjadi lebih serius apabila seorang sarjana Islam, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (m.548/1153), mengetengah satu golongan Ahli Kitab lagi yang dikenali dengan nama “*Man Lahu Shubhat Kitāb*” atau “*Ahl Shubhat Kitāb*” (golongan penerima *ṣuḥuf* yang diragui kesahihannya). Walau bagaimanapun, penulisan ini akan menyentuh perbincangan mengenai siapakah Ahli Kitab daripada perspektif para sarjana Islam dan apakah kedudukan agama mereka, iaitu Agama Yahudi dan Kristian di sisi Islam. Diharapkan

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semoga perbincangan ini dapat melontarkan fahaman yang kemas mengenai golongan Ahli Kitab ini seterusnya membantu kita memahami kedudukan mereka dalam Islam secara lebih jelas.

The issue of the People of the Book has long been of central significance to Islam and later to the study of comparative religion. Many Muslim and European scholars have hence taken close heed of the People of the Book and their role as the holders of sacred books. The question of the People of the Book becomes more crucial when Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d.548/1153) develops another category identified as “*Man Lahu Shubhat Kitāb*,” (those who possess doubtful sacred scrolls) or “*Ahl Shubhat Kitāb*” (the People of a Dubious Book), the term that may be considered similar to that of al-Shahrastānī¹.

However, the focus of the present study will be the problem of “*Ahl al-Kitāb*” (the People of the Book) and their religions, i.e., Judaism and Christianity, as seen from the Qur’ān and Islamic Religious Tradition. Before proceeding with the analytical study of the People of the Book, it is vital to turn first to the study of some misconceptions concerning the so-called three “Abrahamic” Faiths. In a strict sense, it is only together with a proper understanding of such misconceptions that one can easily understand the nature of the People of the Book in the Qur’ān and Islamic Religious Tradition.

Misconceptions concerning the Three “Abrahamic” Faiths

It has long been mentioned that there are three “Abrahamic” faiths, and these are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Among the three, Islam is recognized as the

¹ See Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (1997), *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Amīr ‘Alī Mahnā and ‘Alī Ḥasan Faur, 2 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1: 247 and 273 ff., hereinafter cited as *al-Milal*.

youngest.² Needless to say, these religions are not only assumed as belonging to the "Abrahamic" faiths, but also regarded as the "three revealed religions" that have been bestowed upon mankind. Agreeing with as well as commenting on this issue, Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes:

As Adam was the first man and prophet and at the beginning of man's terrestrial history, so does Abraham represent the reassertion of this role for the Semitic people. He symbolizes the unity of that tradition from which Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the members of the Abrahamic community, issued forth.³

Being the father of monotheism and the father of the Semites, continues Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibrāhīm (Peace Be Upon Him) represents in Islam the primordial religion that Islam later came to reassert. Assuming Judaism as the first tradition of the "Abrahamic" faith, he stresses, it is to Judaism that the first universal message in the form of divine law (*sharī'ah*) is revealed. Christianity also receives the same universal message, yet in the form of esoteric aspect or spiritual way (*tariqah*) rather than a law. Islam integrates these two "Abrahamic" faiths, Seyyed Hossein Nasr reiterates, and as Islam is the third and the penultimate great manifestation of the "Abrahamic" tradition, it contains both a law (*sharī'ah*) and a way (*tariqah*) found in Judaism and Christianity respectively.⁴

² Ismā'il Rājī al-Fārūqī et al (1991), *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, Virginia: al-Sa'dāwī Publications, 3ff, hereinafter cited as *The Trialogue*; *idem* (1998), *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. by Atallah Siddiqui, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 40.

³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1966), *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, London: George Allen & Unwin; repr., London: Unwin Hyman, 1988, 32-34. (page reference is to the reprint edition). Cf. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (1991), *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1, hereinafter cited as *Qur'ānic Christians*.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1997), *Ideals and Realities*, 34-35. Cf. Atallah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 150-158.

Another view, which is in parallel with and broader than the above-cited points, is by John Hick who claims that all faiths are equally and effectively the same and they all bring man to the final truth and ultimate salvation. In other words, Hick is suggesting that it is better to see that all religious traditions present the final truth instead of one claiming another as worthless or demonic. Thus, according to Hick, all great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological spaces within which man can find salvation, liberation and fulfillment.⁵ Hick believes that with interactions and mutual convergence of religious pluralism, boundaries of existing religions can be erased. Hence, all religions will come together and celebrate the peace between them by getting rid of doctrinal differences.⁶

Hick argues further that man can certainly decrease, perhaps even obliterate religious intolerance and conflicts by persuading religious people that the "gods" they worship are manifestations of the One, i.e., the Real. In other words, God figures like Allāh of the Muslims, Yahweh of the Jews, the Heavenly Father of the Christians, Shiva and Vishnu of the Hindus, are the ways through which the Real is worshipped and recognized. Hence, all religions have been brought about in response to the One and only Real. Hick believes that through this approach man can eliminate religious conflicts and intolerance and promote peace and religious tolerance in the world.⁷

In light of the above reasoning, Islam apparently is either categorized along with Judaism and Christianity as a one group of religion belonging to the "Abrahamic" faith, as if these three religions come from Allāh via His prophets, namely, Mūsā, ʿĪsā and Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Them), or classified along with other religions, as if there are no

⁵ John Hick (1987), "Religious Pluralism," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade, 16 vols. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 12:331.

⁶ Adnan Aslan (1998), *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 115.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 132. Cf. John Hick (1989), *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 233-292, hereinafter cited as *Human Responses*.

differences between Islam and other religions. With this present discussion, however, we shall try to throw light that it is only one religion that belongs to the "Abrahamic" faith. This religion incontrovertibly is Islam, which was formerly known as *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* (the generic name to the Ever-True Religion of Allāh). As it will be proved in due course, Islam is neither junior to Judaism and Christianity nor the youngest and similar to other world religions. In point of fact, it is the one and only truly revealed religion given to mankind for all times and climes.

Such a treatment of Islam as the revealed religion is inevitable in this study before pursuing any further remarks on the People of the Book. We need to clarify that Islam is fundamentally different from Judaism and Christianity. That it is only one revealed religion that is conveyed by all the earlier prophets, namely, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Them). With the dawn of the Final Prophet, Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), this revealed religion is finally endorsed by Allāh as His religion, i.e., "Islām." Suffice it to say, it is only after the comprehensive understanding of Islām as the genuinely revealed religion has been achieved that the nature of the People of the Book can be clearly comprehended.

Judaism and Christianity, on the other hand, are not a revealed religion. They, in point of fact, are a culture religion based on a revealed book. This is one of the crucial points that shall be dealt with in considerable detail when discussing the People of the Book.

Islām: the Genuinely Revealed Religion

The Qur'ān constantly reminds its audience that the religion (*dīn*)⁸ has been essentially one and the same throughout all

⁸ The concept couched in the term *dīn*, which is generally understood to mean "religion," is not the same as the concept "religion" as interpreted and understood throughout Western religious history. When we speak of Islam and refer to it in English as a "religion," we mean and understand by it the term *dīn*, in which all the basic connotations inherent in the term *dīn* are conceived as gathered into a single unity of coherent meaning as reflected in the Qur'ān and in the Arabic language

human history. Allāh has never meant neither a complete break nor a change or replacement of His religion with the advent of the new prophets. Rather, every prophet stresses on the unity of God and the essence of religion. In fact, the essence of the revelations of Allāh remains the same as the Qur'ān says in *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:25:

And before thy time We never sent any apostle without "having revealed" to him that there is no God save Me; therefore you shall worship and serve Me (alone).

The Qur'ān further asserts that with the essential unity of prophetic religions, mankind shares one true religion as *Dīn al-Fiṭrah*⁹ (the generic name of the ever-true religion of

to which it belongs. For a comprehensive elaboration on the term *dīn*, see for instance: Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1978, *Islam and Secularism* Kuala Lumpur: ABIM; repr., Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993, 49ff, hereinafter cited as *Islam and Secularism* (page reference is to the reprint edition); *idem* (2001), *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 41ff, hereinafter cited as *The Prolegomena*. For detailed accounts of the concept "religion" from the Western perspectives, see also for instance: Seyyed Hossein Nasr ed., *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, New York: Amity House, 1986, 67-85; Peter Byrne (1988), "Religion and Religions," in *The World's Religions*, ed. by Stewart Sutherland, London: Routledge, 5-27; and John Hick, *Human Responses*, 1-15.

⁹ The term *Fiṭrah* signifies Natural Disposition or Human Nature. It occurs only once in the Qur'ān, which says: And so set thy face steadfastly towards the one ever true faith, turning away from all that is false in accordance with "the natural disposition which Allāh has instilled into man" (*Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:30). The term *fiṭrah* here connotes man's inborn intuitive ability to sense Allāh's existence and oneness. According to commentators of the Qur'ān, men have been imbued with the *fiṭrah* of His being the only God and Creator since at the level of spiritual existence. Such a fact is illustrated clearly in (*Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:172) where Allāh has called upon men to bear witness that He is their One and Only God. In parallel to both the passages is the famous saying of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), quoted by Bukhārī and Muslim: "every child is born on *fiṭrah* (true faith of worship none but Allāh) but his parents convert him to Judaism, Christianity or Zoroastrianism." Hence, *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* refers to the ever-true religion of Allāh that summons mankind to place faith in none but Allāh. For further details, see for instance: Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī (2001), *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. by Maḥmūd Shākir, 30 vols. Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 9:132-141, and 21:47-48; hereinafter cited as

Allāh). Mankind, thus, is bound to one single community (*ummah wāḥidah*). In this respect, the Qur'ān records:

“All mankind were once one single community”, (then they began to differ), “whereupon Allāh raised up the prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, and through them bestowed revelation from on high”, setting forth the truth, so that it might decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views. Yet none other than the self-same people who had been granted this (revelation) began, out of mutual jealousy, to disagree about its meaning after all evidence of the truth had come unto them. But Allāh guided the believers unto the truth about which, by His leave, they had disagreed. For Allāh guides onto a straight way him that wills (to be guided). (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:213).

However, despite man's having been blessed with the *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* and then with the revelation of the Divine Will through the series of prophets, mankind still became divided in its understanding and realization of *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* and in its response to the chain of revelations. It is in this context that Allāh keeps sending His prophets to remind man of the true nature of the *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* and provides them with the true model of its interpretation and

Jāmi' al-Bayān; al-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1991), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 16 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-'Arabī, 7:341-350, and 12:479-480, hereinafter cited as *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*; Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawāwī (2001), *al-Minhāj*; *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Mustim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, ed. by al-Shaykh Khalīl Ma'mūn Shīhā, 19 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 16:423-426; Muḥammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzūr (1999), *Lisān al-'Arab*, 18 vols. ed. by Amīn Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahāb and Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq al-'Ubaidī, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 10:286-289; and Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr (1994), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 4 vols. Beirut: Mū'assasah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2:251-253, and 3:416-417, hereinafter cited as *Tafsīr al-'Azīm*. See also: Muḥammad Fū'ad 'Abd al-Bāqī (1994), *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras lil Alfaz al-Qur'ān: biḥāshiah al-Mashaf al-Sharif*, n.p: Dār al-Fikr, 664; *idem* (1995), *al-Lu'lu' wa al-Marjān*, trans. by Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān, 2 vols. Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2:366; and Muḥammad Asad (1980), *The Message of the Qur'ān*, Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 230, n. 139, and 621, n. 27.

realization. Such a fact is portrayed in the Qur'ān, *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:36:

“And indeed within every community have We raised up an apostle (entrusted with this message) Worship Allāh and shun the powers of evil”. And among those (past generations) were people whom Allāh graced with His guidance just as there was among them who inevitably fell prey to grievous error. Go then about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth.

Thus to every community there had been sent a prophet one after another. The task of these prophets is always the same: to remind their people of their obligation to Allāh and to deter them from deviation. Therefore, the prophets and the true believers also make one single religious community (*ummah wāḥidah*) and are called Muslims.¹⁰ Thus, the Qur'ān says:

“Verily (O you who believe in me) this community of yours is one single community since I am a Sustainer of you all, worship then Me (alone)”. But men have torn their unity wide asunder, (forgetting that) unto Us they all are bound to return. (*Sūrah al-Anbiyā*, 21: 92-93).

Pertaining to the earlier prophets as well as to the earlier true believers, it is pertinent to note that although the Qur'ān refers to them as Muslims, yet it does not call their religion Islam. Rather, their religion is generally identified with various terms such as *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* (the Ever-True Religion), *al-Dīn al-Ḥanīf* (the Righteous Religion), or *al-Dīn al-Qayyim* (the Ever-True Faith).¹¹ These terms are also

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 17:100-101; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 11:201-202; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-'Azīm*, 3:189. See also: Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 30 and 64. Cf. *idem*, *The Prolegomena*, 10 and 54; and 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmīyyīn*, 10-11.

¹¹ See for instance: (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:135), (*Sūrah Āli-'Imrān*, 3:67), (*Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:125), (*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:40), (*Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:30), and (*Sūrah al-Bayyinah*, 98:5).

a designated name of "Islam," the name which is exclusively reserved to the religion conveyed by Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

Although identified by different names, it does not mean that both the religions *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* and Islam are a different religion. In point of fact, they are essentially and eternally the same revealed religion. It is part of Allāh's Divine Plan and Wisdom to call the religion brought by the earlier prophets as *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* because this religion is yet to become universal. Furthermore, the earlier prophets are sent only to their communities and not to all mankind.

It is also part of His Divine Plan and Wisdom that with the passage of time, partly due to the new needs of the changing and developing times and climes, and partly due to the nullification and falsification of the earlier revelations by their followers, the series of the prophets and revelations continue until it is sealed with the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the Qur'ān. In other words, with the advent of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), the series of the prophethood is completed and the phenomenon of the series of revelations come to end.

Therefore, the *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* which is brought by all the earlier prophets is officially declared Islam with the advent of Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Islam, thus, is attested to be the final, perfect, universal and everlasting form of religion for all mankind with the Qur'ān being its guardian over the original teachings of the earlier prophets, and a judge in deciding the differences between them.¹² The declaration of Islam as the Ultimate Religion begins with this revelation of the Qur'ān. In *Sūrah al-Māi'dah*, 5:3, the Qur'ān says:

"Today have I perfected your religion for you" and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings and "willed that Islam unto Me shall be your religion."

¹² See for instance: (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:89), (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:213), (*Sūrah Āli-'Imrān*, 3:3), (*Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:105), (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:48) and (*Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:64).

From the above discussion we have learned that according to Islamic Religious Tradition the religion (*dīn*) has forever been one and the same eternally, and that it is *Dīn al-Fiṭrah*. In a strict sense, *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* is the one and only revealed religion conveyed by all the earlier prophets. The essential message of this divine religion is always the same, to worship Allāh without associating Him with any partner, and to confirm the truth preached by the earlier prophets as well as to confirm the final truth brought by the last prophet as it was confirmed by all the prophets sent before him.

The above statement, in turn, signifies that Mūsā (Peace Be Upon Him) is sent to the Jews with the messages of Tawḥīd, the same message carried out by the earlier prophets before him. In other words, Mūsā (Peace Be Upon Him) is never instructed to establish a new religion called it Judaism. Rather, he conveys the Divine messages to his people and provides them with specific laws that are specifically designated to them. Apart from this, he also confirms to his people the prophethood of Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and instructs them to follow this prophet when he is sent.¹³ Therefore, Judaism is not the revealed religion established by Mūsā (Peace Be Upon Him). Instead, it is a culture religion based on a revealed book but has been mixed up with a lot of semi-historical and legendary matter.

Likewise, ʿĪsā (Peace Be Upon Him) is just one of the chain of prophets whom Allāh has sent down from time to time. He like any other prophets stressed on the unity of Allāh and the essence of religion which remains the same eternally.¹⁴ It is on this limited basis that Allāh has sent ʿĪsā

¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 9:79-80.

¹⁴ Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī Ibn Ḥazm (1999), *Kitāb al-Faṣl fi al-Milal wa al-Aḥwāʾ wa al-Niḥal*, ed. by Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn, 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1:239-241, hereinafter cited as *al-Faṣl*; Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (1997), *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. by Amīr ʿAlī Mahnā and ʿAlī Ḥasan Fāʿūr, 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1:249-250 and 254, hereinafter cited as *al-Milal*; and al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 27-28. See also: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾanic Christians*, 181-184.

(Peace Be Upon Him) to his people. In conveying the divinely teachings to his people, 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Him) is obligated to carry three tasks, that is, to affirm the truth brought by the earlier prophets, namely, Mūsā (Peace Be Upon Him); to correct the deviations created by his people; and to confirm the advent of the ultimate prophet whose name is Aḥmad or Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him).¹⁵ In a strict sense, these arguments imply that Allāh has never asked 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Him) to establish a new religion called it Christianity. In point of fact, 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Him) himself had never preached Christianity nor he indoctrinated his followers with the doctrine of the Redemption and Trinity. Let alone to believe in the Original Sin, to wear crucifix as himself is never being crucified, to institute the Sunday services, to celebrate Christmas, and above all to worship him as the son of Allāh.¹⁶

At this juncture, it is palpable that Judaism and Christianity are not a revealed religion. Both religions neither belong to the "Abrahamic faith" nor come from Mūsā and 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Them). In fact, these religions are just a culture religion, modified and later attributed to their respective prophets. However, considering the fact that their prophets have come with a revealed book, i.e., the Torah and the Evangel, the adherents of these religions, although succumb to a culture religion, are designated as "*Ahl al-Kitāb*" (the People of the Book).

The Concept of *Ahl al-Kitāb* (The People of the Book) in the Qur'ān.

Although the term *Ahl al-Kitāb* engaged in the Qur'ān explicitly refers to the Jews and Christians who respectively

¹⁵ See for instance: (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:46), and (*Sūrah al-Şaf*, 61:6) together with their interpretations in: Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6:315-317, and 28:99; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 1:239-241; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milāl*, 1:249-250, al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Kabīr*, 11:38-41, and 30:515-517; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-'Aẓīm*, 2:61-62, and 4:359-360. See also: al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 27-28.

¹⁶ A.D. Ajijola (1979), *Myth of the Cross*, Chicago: Kazi Publications, 125-129.

hold the revealed books of the Torah and the Evangel, Muslim scholars apparently have different yet interconnected point of interpretations. Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d.204/819) restricts the People of the Book only to the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), i.e., the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel. Conversely, those people aside from this tribe are not regarded as the People of the Book although they place faith in Judaism or Christianity. Al-Shāfi'ī explains that the People of the Book are limited only to the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel because their prophets, namely, Mūsā and 'Isā (Peace Be Upon Them) are sent only to them and not to the other tribes. As it is unto them the Torah and the Evangel are revealed, the Qur'ān justifies their position by addressing them as the People of the Book.¹⁷

The Shāfi'ītes and the Hanābilites, like Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Alī al-Shīrāzī al-Shāfi'ī (d.476/1083) and Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmāh al-Maqdisī al-Hanbalī (d.630/1232), are of the same view as al-Shāfi'ī. They, in point of fact, proffer this passage to corroborate their argument:

(It has been given to you) lest you say, "the Book was sent down" unto "two groups of people" before us and We were indeed unaware of their teachings. (*Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:156).

According to them, the term *al-ṭāi'fatayni* (two groups) as indicated in the above verse denotes the Jews and

¹⁷ Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (n.d.), *al-'Umm*, 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 4:173-174, hereinafter cited as *al-'Umm*. Cf. Abū Bakar Ahmad Ibn 'Alī al-Jassās (1994), *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. by 'Abd al-Sallām 'Alī Shāhīn, 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2:411-412, and 3:118, hereinafter cited as *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*; and Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī (n.d.), *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān l'il al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. by Qāsīm al-Shamā'ī al-Rafā'ī, 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Qalām, 2:54, hereinafter cited as *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān li al-Shāfi'ī*. See also: Badrān Abū al-'Aynayn (1984), *al-'Alāqāt al-Ijtīmā'iyyah bayna al-Muslimīn wa ghayr al-Muslimīn fi al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Yahūdiyyah wa al-Masīhiyyah wa al-Qānūn*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 40-42, hereinafter cited as *al-'Alāqāt*; and 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān (1988), *Aḥkām al-Dhimmīyyīn wa al-Musta'minīn fi Dār al-Islām*, Beirut: Mua'ssasah al-Risālah, 11ff, hereinafter cited as *Aḥkām al-Dhimmīyyīn*.

Christians of the Children of Israel. Hence, a proof that it is only them that are recognized as the People of the Book.¹⁸

Al-Shahrastānī, likewise, puts forward that the People of the Book are those of the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel, and to all those who have been given the Torah and the Evangel regardless of whether they act on these revealed books or not.¹⁹ Calling our attention to the term *al-ṭāi'fatayni* (two groups) as cited in (*Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:156), Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes, the term *al-ṭāi'fatayni* (two groups) although explicitly signifies two groups of the Jews and the Christians, implicitly it signifies one group, i.e., the Children of Israel. In other words, he asserts, the Jews and Christians actually derived from the same roots of the Children of Israel. Due to excessive arrogance and haughtiness, they denigrate each other and thus disintegrated into two groups, i.e., the Jews (those who believe in Mūsā) and the Christians (those who believe in 'Isā). In effect, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī says, these are the People of the Book as addressed in the Qur'ān and the Tradition.²⁰

Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān Ibn Thābit (d.150/767), in his treatment of the People of the Book, proffers a converse consideration. He writes that the People of the Book are not only the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel, but also those who have received either the sacred scrolls (*ṣuḥuf*) of the Prophet Ibrāhīm and Shīth or the Psalms of David (*Kitāb al-Zabūr*) of the Prophet Dāwūd (Peace Be Upon Them).²¹ Affirming Abū Ḥanīfah in this respect are Abū

¹⁸ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Alī al-Shīrāzī (1996), *al-Muḥadḥab: Fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. by Muḥammad al-Zuhailī, 6 vols. Beirut: al-Dār al-Shāmiyyah, 4:150-153. Cf. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī (1994), *al-Mughnī 'alā Mukhtasar al-Kharqī*, ed. by 'Abd al-Sallām Muḥammad 'Alī Shāhīn, 9 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 6:414-416. See also: 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyyīn*, 11-12; and Badrān Abū al-'Aynayn, *al-'Alāqāt*, 41.

¹⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1: 49, 247-250ff.

²⁰ Syed Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1983), *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. 21 vols. Beirut: Mua'ssah al-A'lami li al-Maṭbū'āt, 5:129.

²¹ Al-Jassās, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 2:413; 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyyīn*, 11; and Badrān Abū al-'Aynayn, *al-'Alāqāt*, 40-41.

Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm (d.456/1063), the Hanafites and some of the Hanābilites.²² Ibn Ḥazm, as a matter of fact, notes that the Zoroastrians (*al-Majūs*) and the Sabians (*al-Šabiū'n*) are also regarded as the People of the Book. Ibn Ḥazm then informs us that among the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and their successors who reported the Zoroastrians as belonging to the People of the Book are 'Alī Ibn Abī Tālib (d.41/661), Sa'īd Ibn al-Musayyab (d.93/711), Abū Qatādah Ibn Da'āmah (d.107/725), Abū Thūr Ibrāhīm Ibn Khālid al-Kalbī (d.240/854), and several scholars belonging to the Zāhiri school of Islamic Law.²³

Contemporary scholars like Muḥammad 'Abduh Khayruddīn (d.1323/1905) writes that the Sabians belong to the category of the People of the Book on the basis that they are mentioned along with the Jews and the Christians in the *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:62, and *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:17.²⁴ Expounding the above passages, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d.1354/1935), on the other hand, proffers that the People of the Book are not only the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians, but include also the Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. He argues further, the reason the Qur'ān does not mention these oriental religions is because the Muslims, during the revelation of these passages, did not yet come into close contact with peoples of India and the Far East. Since the Muslims, during that time, were not having very close interaction and encounter with the adherents of these oriental religions; there is no point for the Qur'ān to mention these people along with the Jews, the Christians, the Zoroastrians, and the Sabians.²⁵

²² Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 1:135-136. See also: Badrān Abū al-'Aynayn, *al-'Alāqāt*, 40-41.

²³ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 1:135-136. Cf. al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 2:147-148; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-'Azīm*, 1:99-100.

²⁴ Muḥammad 'Abduh Khayruddīn (n.d.), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Juz 'Ammā*, Cairo: Dār Maṭābi' al-Sha'b, 101.

²⁵ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (n.d.), *Tafsīr al-Ḥakīm: Tafsīr al-Manār*. 9 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 6:187-190.

Perusing and comparing the above interpretations, it is palpable that the aforementioned scholars have one thing in common, that is, they agree that the Jews and Christians of the Israelites are the People of the Book. The only thing that makes them differs is the case of non-Israelites. In this respect, some of them regard non-Israelites as the People of the Book should they place faith in Judaism and Christianity before its corruption, whilst others include all of them as belonging to the People of the Book as long as they profess a religion and accept a revealed book. The analysis concerning these non-Israelites is presented below.

It is plausible to regard those who have been given either the sacred scrolls of Prophet Ibrāhīm and Shīth, or the Psalms of David of Prophet Dāwūd (Peace Be Upon Them) as the People of the Book. Yet their condition is not as crucial as the Jews and Christians for their sacred scriptures carry only religious exhortations (*mawā'iz wa mazājir*) and exemplary lessons (*rumūz wa amthāl*) whereas the Torah and the Evangel comprise the laws (*sharī'ah*), which are to be implemented by the Jews and Christians respectively.²⁶

Concerning those who place faith in Judaism and Christianity before its alteration, although it is reasonable to regard them as the People of the Book on the basis that they are placing faith in the teachings of the Prophet Mūsā and 'Īsā (Peace Be Upon Them), yet their condition is not crucial for they probably are small in number despite having no mention either in the Qur'ān or Islamic Religious Tradition.

However, it is rather absurd to assume every people who profess a religion and claim to accept a revealed book like the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Sikhs, the Taoist, and the Confucius as belonging to the People of the Book. Although they profess a religion and claim to have a revealed book, yet it does not mean that they have "followed a revealed religion" and thus regarded as the People of the Book.

²⁶ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl*, 1:273-274. Cf. 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyyīn*, 12.

Taking Hinduism for example, even Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (d.443/1051), who runs an exhaustive research on Hinduism, never declares that the followers of this religion are the People of the Book.²⁷ Instead, he is of the view that they are deists. This position is shared by Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī. Ibn Ḥazm, in actual fact, considers the Hindus, particularly the Brahmans as deists and regards the religious traditions of India and the Far East in general as a corrupted form of the religion of the Sabians.²⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, likewise, is of the view that the Hindus and the Buddhists are deists that have neither a revealed book nor fixed laws.²⁹ Although recent research shows that the Hindus come from a monotheistic religion and that some of their holy texts like the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* affirm the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him),³⁰ the nature of this research is yet to be determined and needs further critical study.

Sikhism, founded by Gurū Nānak (d.946/1539), on the other hand, is even more crucial for it is a religion of sophisticated form of culture, and a combination of Islamic and Hinduism theology.³¹ Similarly, religions of Taoism and Confucianism are the religions of an oddly assorted mixture of beliefs and practices.³² Since these oriental religions are

²⁷ Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Hind*, 7ff. See also: Edward C. Sachau (1992), *Alberūnī's India*. 2 vols. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1:17ff and 2: 1ff.

²⁸ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 1:86-93.

²⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:49, and 2:601ff. Cf. Muhammad Syed Kaylānī, "Dhayl al-Milal wa al-Nihal," in Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (n.d.), *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, ed. by Muḥammad Syed Kaylānī, 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2:9ff.

³⁰ See for instance: Ved Prakash Upadhyaya, et.al. (1998), *Muḥammad in the Vedas and the Puranas*, trans. by Muhammad Alamgir, Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 3ff.

³¹ See for instance: W.H. McLeod (1968), *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1ff. Cf. C. Shackle (1998), "Sikhism," in *The World's Religions: The Religions of Asia*, London: Routledge, 182-193.

³² Muḥammad Syed Kaylānī, *Dhayl al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, 19-28.

certified polytheism as confirmed by the Qur'ān³³ and affirmed by intellectual and sagacious scholars, it is rather perplexed to determine on what ground Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā regards the adherents of these religions as belonging to the People of the Book.

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that the term *Ahl al-Kitāb* is labeled only to the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel. The Qur'ān designates them by this name in order to show that they are the holders of revealed books whose teachings are meant only for them. In point of fact, they are neither assigned to establish a new religion nor authorized to preach its teachings to all mankind. In a strict sense, their covenants as well as their revealed books are valid only for a certain period of time and it will become self-terminated and invalid with the advent of Islam. It is in this context that the Qur'ān recurrently urges them to leave their religion and to place faith in Islam and become Muslims. Therefore, should the People of the Book place faith in the Qur'ān and they willingly submit themselves to Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), they do not change their religion as it is part of their religion to place faith in Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), and to submit to his law whence he is sent. They, in point of fact, become true Muslims³⁴ as Allāh has recurrently illustrated in the Qur'ān.³⁵ In conformity with the above passage, thus, they are not only

³³ See for instance: (Sūrah al-Nisā', 4:48), (Sūrah al-Māi'dah, 5:72), and (Sūrah al-Kahfi, 18:110).

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*; 3:67-71; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 4:403-405, and 641-642; Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyyah*, 3:403; and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-'Azīm*, 1:375, and 419-420. See also: al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 20-21; Hasan Hanafi (1977), *Dialogue and Revolution: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Cairo: Anglo Egyptian Bookshop, 33; Wahbah Zuhailī (1991), *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr: fi al-'Aqīdah wa al-Sharī'ah wa al-Manhaj*, 32 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āshir, 4:48-49, hereinafter cited as *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr*; and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 287-289.

³⁵ See for instance: (Sūrah Āli-'Imrān, 3:110, 199); and (Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:32).

true Muslims, but also considered among those who are ever-conscious of Allāh (*muttaqīn*) who follow the divine and prophetic guidance (*hudā*).³⁶

Turning toward the People of the Book that are still steadfast with their religion after the appointment of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), they fall into three divisions according to Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d.505/1111).

I. The First Division

Al-Ghazālī contends that this division are those People of the Book who do not even hear or have a slightest idea of the last prophet, i.e., Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Due to such ignorance of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), al-Ghazālī is of the view that these peoples are forgiven and excused (*ma'dhūrūn*) even though they are still exercising their religion.³⁷

II. The Second Division.

The second division represents the People of the Book who recognize the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him). However, due to confusion caused by their leaders who are not only suppressing the truth of the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), but also concealing the veracity of Islam, these People of the Book have mistakenly charged the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) as a deceiver. Al-Ghazālī is of the view that the People of the Book of this division are the same as the first division who are excused and forgiven

³⁶ Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1972), *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyyah*, ed. by 'Uthmān Yaḥyā, 13 vols. Cairo: al-Hai'ah al-Maṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 3:403. See also: Hasan Hanafi, *Dialogue*, 33; and Wahbah Zuhailī, *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr*, 4:48-49.

³⁷ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1986), *Fayṣal al-Tafrīqah bayna al-Islām wa Zandaqah*, ed. by Riyād Muṣṭafā 'Abd Allāh, Beirut: Manshūrāh Dār al-Ḥikmah, 105-106, hereinafter cited as *al-Fayṣal*.

(*ma'dhūrūn*) because they are concealed from the truth of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him).³⁸

Ibn 'Arabī, however, writes that should these people adhere to such confusion and continue to reject clear proofs brought by the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), they will not be excused, instead considered as negligent of the truth and henceforth called the misbelievers.³⁹

III. The Third Division.

According to al-Ghazālī the third division represents the People of the Book who recognize the truth of Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him) like they know their own children. In fact, their accreditation of his truth is so palpable to the extent that it is unfeasible for them to rebut or reject it from their own souls. Secretly, they affirm the truth of the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him). However, instead of declaring it they conceal and suppress the truth of him, and perversely confuse the minds of their community by harboring lies against Allāh and Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him). In this respect, al-Ghazālī regards them as the truly deviating misbelievers (*al-kuffār al-mulḥidūn*).⁴⁰

In conformity with al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī argues further that these are the People of the Book that are isolated from the Absolute Monotheist Religion (*al-Millah al-Hanīfiyyah*) and Islamic Law (*al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*).⁴¹ It is they whom Allāh has severely criticized in many a Qur'ānic passage such as this:

And, behold, "there are indeed some among them who distort the Book with their tongues" so as to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106. Cf. Muhyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1988), *Ījāz al-Bayān fī al-Tarjamah 'an al-Qur'ān* in *Raḥmah min al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr wa Ishārāt al-Qur'ān min Kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī*, edited and presented by Maḥmūd Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, vol. 1, Damascus: n.p., 1:61-62, hereinafter cited as *Ījāz*.

³⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *Ījāz*, 1:61-62.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Fayṣal*, 106. See also: Hasan Hanafi, *Dialogue*, 32-33.

⁴¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:247.

make you think that (what they say) is from the Book, while it is not from the Book, "and who say This is from Allāh", while it is not from Allāh, and thus "do they tell a lie about Allāh, being well aware (that it is a lie)". (*Sūrah Āli-'Imrān*, 3:78).⁴²

Responding to the above verse, Ibn 'Arabī opines that it is these People of the Book that are considered as the Rejecters (*Jāhidūn*), or the Obstinate ones (*Mu'ānidūn*), or the Spreaders of Corruption (*Mufsidūn*).⁴³ In a strict sense, they are the ones that are entitled with suffering upon suffering (*zidnāhum 'adhāban fawqa al-'adhāb*)⁴⁴ in the hereafter in return for all the sin of *tahrīf* (tampering with content, context, and meaning),⁴⁵ *tabdīl* (adulteration in content, context, and meaning),⁴⁶ and *talbīs* (alteration of the truth with falsehood through interpolation and extrapolation)⁴⁷ which they knowingly suppressed and committed in this world.

Conclusion

We have discussed briefly yet comprehensively on the issue of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It becomes clear that religion has forever been the one and the same eternally. In other words, all the earlier prophets of Allāh have conveyed only one revealed religion which was known as *Dīn*

⁴² See also for instance: (*Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:20-21) and (*Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:13-14).

⁴³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2:592; and 3:243. Cf. *idem*, *Ijāz*, 1:61-62.

⁴⁴ See for instance: (*Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:88).

⁴⁵ *Tahrīf*: see for instance: (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:75), (*Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:46), and (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:13) together with its evaluative analysis in Aasi, *The Study*, 40-46.

⁴⁶ *Tabdīl*: see for instance: (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:59), and (*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:162).

⁴⁷ *Talbīs*: see for instance: (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:42), and (*Sūrah Āli-'Imrān*, 3:71).

al-Fiṭrah (the Ever True-Religion). With the advent of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), this religion is declared Islam. Judaism and Christianity, thus, neither belongs to the "Abrahamic faith" nor forms a part of the revealed religion. In fact, these religions are nevertheless a cultural religion based on a revealed book. In presenting the nature of the People of the Book, the discussion distinguishes the true believers among the Jews and Christians from the misbelievers of Jewish and Christian background. The true believers of Jewish and Christian are not the People of the Book; they are the Muslims who adhere to the true teachings of their respective prophets. When they learn the advent of Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him), they thus place faith in him. In so doing, they do not change their religion as it is part of their religion to place faith in Muḥammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and to submit to his law whence he is sent. It is the truly misbelievers among the Jews and Christians that are recognized as the People of the Book. However, despite having excoriated as the truly misbelievers, these People of the Book have not reached the stage of polytheism. It is on this basis that the People of the Book occupy special place in Islamic law and are subjected to its specific implementation such as poll-tax (*jizyah*), slaughtering of animals (*dhabīḥah*), marriage (*al-nikāḥ*), food (*ṭa'ām*), and salutations (*salām*). However, although the People of the Book occupy special place in Islamic law, yet they are misbelievers whose religious traditions are corrupted and are equally as invalid as those of the Polytheist.

