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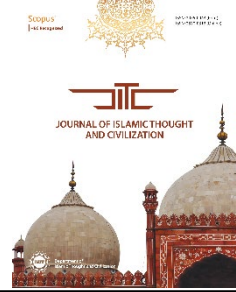|	
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Analyzing John H. Hick's *Religious Pluralism* and Its Implications from Islamic Ethical Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper underscores *religious pluralism* postulated by John Hick (1922–2012) to (re)solve various perceived conflicts of religious diversity and inter-religious relationships in the modern times. To embark on the religious implications of Hick's postulation from an Islamic standpoint with an emphasis on the ethical perspectives, this study discusses all the relevant conflicts arising due to the misrepresentation of certain issues in a religious context. Additionally, this research is eloquent as it highlights certain moral principles provided by Islam to address the real and potential conflicts of religious diversity and inter-religious issues without any apologetic view of Islamic core doctrines; this contrasts with Hick's approach that implies a fundamental revision in the foundational doctrines of Islamic belief system. Therefore, to focus on the doctrinal, theological, and epistemic implications; concerning any attempt by the Muslims to adopt Hick's view with special attention on Islamic ethics as the better alternative, this research analyzed various Qur'ānic verses. Furthermore, the study uses a qualitative method of interpretive and critical analysis approaches and the relevant Qur'ānic verses and previous studies to originate its sources of data from related research. Moreover, the paper concludes that an ethical approach to religious diversity and interreligious issues and conflicts is more pragmatic and effective based on Islamic perspectives other than Hick's *religious pluralism,* which necessarily implies religious relativism, agnosticism, and skepticism that are antithetical to the Islamic worldview.

Keywords: Islamic ethics, inter-religious relationship, religious pluralism, religious diversity, religious implications

Introduction

In the preceding years, a strong attention has been paid to the obvious religious diversity of the world due to certain unprecedented series of events and issues arising from colonialism, migration, diplomatic relations, international conflicts of interests, and globalization through trade and modern advanced technology that characterizes the contemporary existence. To address these issues, various scholars[1] have proposed ways and approaches to address religious differences and handle the attendant interreligious relationship based on various socio-religious frameworks, theological perspectives, and philosophical reformulations.[2]

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[1]Mikel Burley, "Religious Pluralisms: From Homogenization to Radicality," *Sophia* 59, no. 2 (2020): 311-331.

[2]Muhamad Ali. "Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam," In: *Freedom of Religion and Religious Pluralism*. (Brill 2023), 36–56 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004504967_004

One of the most widely discussed perspectives and approaches among these is religious pluralism. This has been variously formulated with different attendant implications for religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious co-existence. Hick's perspective on religious pluralism seems to be the most widely adopted and discussed view.[3] As a result, Hick's perspective has been variously critiqued[4] some of which also come from traditional Islamic perspectives.[5]

One of the most recent studies on religious pluralism, from an Islamic perspective, is *Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam*.[6] The study has many relevant and well-articulated views on the related issues; however, it has only oblique discussions on Hick's view. This is because its focus is on commentary and explanations of certain Qur'ānic terms to make valid and useful points on the conceptual implications for religious diversity and plurality with less focus on the ethical dimensions, which is also a major focus of this study Agbaria gave another Islamic perspective that focused on the educational aspect, though he also approached religious pluralism based on Qur'ānic discourse. His discussion was solely on "the complexity of religious pluralism" with highlights on the "tension between inclusive and exclusive interpretations"; though with a few tangential considerations of its moral aspects, the author presents various educational implications of religious pluralism in Islamic education. The paper specifically "advocates for a new type of education: education for religion."[7]

A closely related Islamic perspective based on Qur'ān is the work by Ayoub examined religious pluralism from a civilizational standpoint. He further discussed religious pluralism from the Qur'ānic worldview with a focus on how the Qur'ān emphasized the preordainment of the diversity of human racial and cultural identities. Without necessarily considering the ethical implications of religious pluralism, the author argued that the plurality and diversity of religions are a reflection of the plurality and diversity of cultures and civilizations. Therefore, he was more interested in contextualizing religious pluralism within the history of civilizations, particularly, in the Middle East, to show that "religious diversity is as old as human history.[8]

Additionally, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an intellectual figure in the Islamic world contributed to this religious dimension.[9] The author was essentially interested in the epistemological construct of Hick's view, as a result, he provided an in-depth overview and critical analysis of (with some objections to) the pluralism according to Hick's religious perspective. Though he was less concerned with the ethical dimension, which is the major focus of the current study, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's

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[3]Samuel Ruhmkorff, "The Incompatibility Problem and Religious Pluralism beyond Hick," *Philosophy Compass* 8, no. 5 (2013): 510–522.

[4]Peter Byrne, "Religious Tolerance, Diversity, and Pluralism," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 68, (2011): 287–309. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246111000014; Sumner B. Twiss, "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics," *The Journal of Religion* 70, no. 4 (1990); 533. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1204340. Access 13-08-2023.

[5]Air Dastmalchian, "Hick's Theory of Religion and the Traditional Islamic Narrative," *Sophia* 53, no. 1 (2014): 131–144; Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[6]Muhamad Ali, "Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam."

[7]Ayman K. Agbaria "Education for Religious Pluralism in Islam: One Book or Series of Books, a Singular Message or Myriad Messages?" *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 283.

[8]Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub, "Religious Pluralism and The Qur'ān," In *Contemporary Approaches to the Qurān and Sunnah* , ed. (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 39–56.

[9]Seyed Hassan Hosseini, "Religious Pluralism and Pluralistic Religion: John Hicks Epistemological Foundation of Religious Pluralism and an Explanation of Islamic Epistemology toward Diversity of Unique Religion," *The Pluralist* 5, no. 1 (2010): 94–109. https://doi.org/10.1353/plu.0.0037.

work aimed to provide Islamic epistemological views of religious diversity, which remained one of the greatest analysis of Hick's religious pluralism. Equally important to mention is that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's submission is not free from certain epistemic and theological criticisms. This is also demonstrated by Muhammad Legenhausen who attempted a relative comparative approach [10] of Hick's views regarding religious pluralism with Nasr's perspective. With a focus on both the similarities and differences between these two scholars, Muhammad Legenhausen paid special attention to the logical aspects of some of the theological implications. The author provided an insightful discussion on the concept because he highlighted certain salient points concerning the views of the two scholars by indicating some doctrinal issues that did not logically fit well with Islamic theological perspectives. Overall, the paper is a resourceful one, however, it is not concerned with the ethical perspectives of the scholars on religious pluralism. A similar study that seems to be much broader on religious pluralism based on two intellectual's views, Hick and Nasr, was attempted by Aslan (1998).[11] Through the comparison of the philosophical views of the two intellectuals in his study; regarding the issues of religion, the concept of ultimate reality, and the notion of sacred knowledge, the author aimed to present the position of Christianity and Islam on religious pluralism. He seeks to show "the need for a pluralistic approach in religion," even though many of his views on the Islamic perspective seem to be later contested by recent studies. Nonetheless, the paper provides a substantial viewpoint of Hick's views on religious pluralism without much of its ethical implication from the Islamic perspective.

Without denying the importance of the reviewed studies and their relevance on the issues of religious diversity and pluralism, it appears that many of the studies have not focused on the implications of Hick's perspective and the conflation of theological perspectives and ethical issues, particularly from Islamic viewpoints. A few of the studies that seem to discuss similar issues are less on details as they focused broadly on the conceptual framework of religious pluralism.[12] Even Amir Dastmalchian[13] who focuses on Hick's theory of religion was only concerned with how it could be used to explain Islam! On his part, Ellethy, Yaser[14] focused on the epistemological aspect using a hermeneutical approach. Other similar resourceful studies on religious pluralism and its various theological views and implications from Islamic perspectives include Kamali's (2011) *Islams Religious Pluralism in Context*[15] and Sachedina's (2010) *Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam*.[16]

In contrast to many of the reviewed studies, the current study specifically focused on the ethical perspectives to doctrinal implications of Hick's revisionist approach to the diverse soteriological

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[10]Muhammad Legenhausen (n.d) *Misgivings about the Religious Pluralisms of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and John Hick.* https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol14-n4/misgivings-religious-pluralisms-seyyed-hossein-nasr-john-hick/misgivings. Accessed 09-05-2023.

[11]Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[12]Eva Sadia Saad, "Religious Pluralism: A Critical Review," *Philosophy and Progress* 50, no. 1-2 (2012): 89–108. https://doi.org/10.3329/pp.v50i1-2.11924; Fatah Aruzary Nasih, "Religious Pluralism In Islamic Thought," (Presentation: *Peacebuilding and Genocide Prevention Conference*, University of Human Development Iraq, June 4, 2021).

[13]Amir Dastmalchian, "Hick's Theory of Religion and the Traditional Islamic Narrative," *Sophia* 53, no. 1 (2014): 131–144.

[14]Yaser Ellethy, "Coping with a Qur'ānic Truth Claim: Muslim Hermeneutics of Knowledge and Pluralism," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 1, (2022): 66–84. https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.19378.

[15]Mohammad Hāshim Kamali, "Islams Religious Pluralism in Context," *ICR Journal* 2, no. 4 (2011): 714–176. https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v2i4.608.

[16]Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, "Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 4 (2010): 221–233.

claims[17] of the world's religions. In his opinion, this is necessary to achieve a harmonious society given the present realities of the potential religious crisis in modern times. The significance of this paper lies in its emphasis on the ethical guidelines provided by Islam to establish that there is no need to apologetically redefine Islamic doctrines to handle the contemporary issues of religious diversity and inter-religious encounters. This arises from efforts to encourage Muslims to embrace religious pluralism, specifically by promoting Hicks perspective on religious pluralism. [18] However, this is done without a thorough examination of how it fundamentally contradicts and implicates the tawḥīdi worldview of Islam and its ethical principles.

Alternatively, this paper discussed the implications of Muslims' adopting Hick's *religious pluralism* by indicating how theological, doctrinal, epistemological, and ethical issues concerning religious diversity and religious plurality were conflated by Hick. This study deployed a qualitative method of an interpretive approach to critical analyze the relevant library sources. The data were gathered from the Qur'ānic and selected sources of relevant studies. Apart from the introduction, the paper is divided into three parts: a general overview and conceptual analysis of religious pluralism with a focus on Hick's perspective; Islamic viewpoints on religious diversity and religious plurality vis-à-vis the implications of Hick's religious pluralism, and a discussion on Islamic ethics of interreligious relations; lastly, the research findings were concluded with future recommendations for further studies.

2. Religious Diversity, Religious Plurality, and Religious Pluralism: A General Background

2.1. Conceptual Clarification

Religious pluralism, religious plurality, and religious diversity are connected as they are three separate concepts, though some "confusingly" use religious pluralism and religious plurality interchangeably. However, there is a kind of consensus among scholars of religions on the use of "religious pluralism" to connote a "normative concept" that is variously constructed and proposed on how to perceive, react, and relate to issues of religious plurality (having many religions) and religious diversity (having a different perspective on religious issues).[19]

In other words, religious plurality indicates the observable multiplicity of religions in the world, while religious diversity means the observable intra-and-inter-religious differences. Religious pluralism; therefore, implies a prescriptive interpretation and disposition toward the observable fact about the multiplicity and diversity in/among religions.[20] Central to its connotation is the view or belief that all religions are equally valid.[21]

Before providing an overview of Hick's religious pluralism, it is also necessary to briefly mention important two keywords relating to "religious pluralism," since one of them has conceptual implications for Hick's thought. These two keywords are "religious inclusivism" and "religious exclusivism." Since this is outside the scope of the study, there is no need for any detailed analysis

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[17]Soteriology (Soteriology relates to theological questions on salvation such as "who is saved, by whom, from what, and by what means). See, E. Stetler, "Soteriology," In: Leeming, D.A. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (Springer, Boston, MA, 2014).

[18]John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Islam" (Tehrarn: Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, February, 2005). http://www.johnhick.org.uk/article11.html.

[19]Geir Skeie, "Plurality and Pluralism: A Challenge for Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 17, no. 2, (2006): 84–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/0141620950170203.

[20]Victoria S. Harrison, "Religious Pluralism," last modified July 29, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780195396577-0406.

[21]Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism," *Prajñā Vihāra: Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2010): 3.

for these two terms. A detailed critique of these three terms and their use as a standardized typology is attempted by Ellethy, Yaser.[22] For a conceptual clarification purpose, it suffices to say that "exclusivism connotes that only one true religion exists and that all others are false, whereas inclusivism has to do with the view that one religion is true "but some truth also exists in other religions." [23]

It must; however, be noted that religious pluralism together with these two terms is the resultant effect of the attempt made by the Western philosophers or scholars of religion to address the questions of the religious truth that claims how to evaluate a Christian theological view of other religions. These terms, which were initially devised by Alan Race[24] in the early 1980s have been generally adopted by many participants in the debate;[25] it is, however, less relevant to the Muslim perspective of religious diversity and religious plurality.[26]

Though it is the most popular among the three terms,[27] "religious pluralism" is only one of the ways Christian theologians[28] and Western philosophers/scholars of religions reacted and approached the realities of religious plurality and diversity. The other two ways were generally seen as the earlier perspectives. Religious pluralism is arguably an offshoot of religious exclusivism. As alluded to above, it was a major concept that Hick was reacting to by developing his perspective of religious pluralism. A few details were also provided below on this concerning thought, as the paper focuses on Hick's perspective of religious pluralism in the subsequent section.

2.2. John Hick's Religious Pluralism: An Overview

John Hick's major scholarly contributions was centered on religious epistemology, philosophical theology, and religious pluralism. He was arguably one of the most influential philosophers of religion. He underwent a series of religious experiences that did not only change the direction of his career in theology and philosophy but also potentially impacted his subsequent philosophical views.[29] For example, he posited many philosophical theories to explain various doctrinal issues and theological perspectives of the Christian religion; he postulated (and believed) that sincere adherents of other faiths experience the Transcendent as the Christians though with certain differences due to their various factors, which include cultural experience and historical background, and others. Hick's main thesis, according to Sumner B. Twiss, was that there is an

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[22]Yaser Ellethy, "Coping with a Qur'ānic Truth Claim: Muslim Hermeneutics of Knowledge and Pluralism," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 1, (2022): 66–84. https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.19378.

[23]Abdullah Saeed, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism among Muslims Today between Theological and Social Dimensions," *Interreligious Relations Occasional Papers of The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies* Programme (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University), Accessed May 13, 2023 https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IRR-Issue-21-November-December-2020.pdf.

[24]Alan Race, "Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions," (London: SCM Press, 1983)

[25]Burley, Mikel, *Religious Pluralisms*, 2020.

[26]Yaser Ellethy, Coping with a Qur'ānic Truth Claim," 2022.

[27]It has even been used more increasingly in recent time due to the increase in rate of diversity of religions in the world and the associated religious conflict in today's world (see, Saad, Eva Sadia. 2012).

[28]This is not to deny certain recent attempts by other religions to use some of these terms, particularly "religious pluralism." In fact, this present paper is a reaction to similar situation based on Islamic perspective from an ethical standpoint.

[29]John Hick, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 160.

underlying unity to the obvious religious diversity that is to be understood and explained as "a set of differential responses to a transcendent reality conceived and perceived in alternative ways by different cultural and religious traditions."[30] This thesis is at the core of Hick's emerging philosophy of religious pluralism.

Relying heavily on Kant's philosophy, he developed a pluralistic hypothesis stating that all religions were different ways of experiencing the same ultimate reality, which he called the "Real." Hick argued that the 'Real' is beyond human comprehension and cannot be fully described in any one religion. Therefore, he believed that all religions are equally valid and that none has a monopoly on truth. In his view, adherents of other religions experience "the ineffable Real through their varying culturally shaped lenses."[31] Hick's pluralistic considerations then led him to adjust his theological positions and he subsequently developed various metaphorical and mythological interpretations of Christian doctrines (the trinity, atonement, and others.) as against their generally accepted metaphysical understanding. A few of his influential works include: *Philosophy of Religion, Faith and Knowledge, An Interpretation of Religion, The Myth of God Incarnate (ed.), The New Frontier of Religion and Science Arguments for the Existence of God, God Has Many Names, The Metaphor of God Incarnate,* and *A Christian Theology of Religions.*[32]

Hick was initially concerned with Christian exclusivism - the doctrine that there is no salvation for those who hold religious doctrines that are different from Christians' belief - which he found unacceptable because he couldn't believe that the good people of non-Christian traditions of faith will not be saved. He found this highly problematic; firstly, from the soteriological ground (for instance, beliefs and doctrines concerning salvation in any specific religion) and followed by a moral basis. This also has major implications for Hick's theology and religious epistemology.

His pluralistic views were developed over time through his various writings and academic presentations. *Faith and Knowledge* and *An Interpretation of Religion* seemed to jointly capture his full ideas concerning religious pluralism. He later implored Muslims[33] and Jews to join him in the "reformational movement" as he encouraged them to make similar reforms in their creeds to eliminate religious perspectives that are "exclusivistic."

According to Hick, exclusivism implies absolutism of faith – theologically claiming one's religion is the only true faith. Absolute view, for him, can justify anything; that is, he strongly holds an opinion that "to insist on the unique superiority of one's faith is to be part of the global inter-religious problem."[34] As a result, he does not see how peaceful co-existence can take place between "rival absolutes." He; therefore, believes it is the ultimate solution, which is "only stable and enduring" for peace that will only occur when different religious adherents mutually acknowledge various world religions to be equally valid for salvation and ways to the truth about God or "ultimate reality."[35]

In essence, Hicks religious pluralism posits that there exists a singular ultimate reality, referred to as the Real. This Real, according to Hick, transcends human comprehension and cannot be entirely

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[30]Sumner B. Twiss "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics," *The Journal of Religion* 70, no. 4 (1990): 533. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1204340.

[31]David C. Cramer, *John Hick (1922—2012)*, https://iep.utm.edu/hick/#SH4c, accessed on 08-05-2023

[32]Ibid.

[33]John Hick, *Religious Pluralism and Islam*.

[34]Muhammad Legenhausen, *Misgivings about the Religious Pluralisms,* (n.d).

[35]John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 300, 307, 337.

encapsulated by any single religious belief. He contends that diverse religions represent culturally influenced responses to this transcendent reality, and each offers a distinctive perspective on the Real.

By and large, he holds the strong view that all religions are equally valid paths to the Real. At the forefront of these considerations, which is the central focus of this paper, is Hicks conviction that adopting a pluralistic religious perspective encompassing all the aforementioned points fosters and guarantees peaceful coexistence. As alluded to earlier, Hicks view has been influential in the field of religious understanding and interpretation; this is because it has been a vibrant topic of debate by both religious believers and non-believers. It has been equally praised and criticized; it is praised for its "inclusivity" and more importantly because of its presumed ability to bridge the gap between different religions. This is because, according to the protagonists,[36] it argues that all religions are equally valid paths to the Real, and that no one religion has a monopoly on truth. Furthermore, it provides a contrastive exclusivist view, which holds that only one religion is true and that all other religions are false. On the other hand, Hicks religious pluralism has been criticized by some critics for being relativistic.[37] This is because, according to this group, Hick argued that there is no single, correct way to understand the Real, and by implications, religious truth. The current research aims to explore a similar viewpoint of criticism regarding Hicks view that is not necessarily relativistic since he believed that the Real is ultimately real and cannot, therefore, be fully captured by any one religion. As elaborated later in the discussion, Hick's claims for the need to incorporate different religious perspectives (even when they are contradictory) to understand the Real is nothing but religious relativism.

The foregoing is only a concise overview of the whole argument that Hick propagates for decades. How is the thrust of Hick's view different from Islamic viewpoints and what are the implications to adopt his proposition by Muslims based on the Islamic worldview? Is the placement of every religion at equal epistemological and soteriological statuses necessary to avert potential inter-religious conflict? And lastly, what are the Islamic alternatives to address the potential inter-religious conflicts given the reality of multiple religions of the world? These questions and other related issues are considered in the next section of the paper.

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[36]Paul Knitter (1932-2022), American theologian and author of the book, *One World Theology: A Christian Response to the Plurality of Faiths* (1984); Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), Canadian-American scholar of religion and author of the book, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962); Gavin DCosta (born 1959), British theologian and author of the book, *Theology in the Public Square: Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Truth* (2000); Mark Heim (born 1959), American theologian and author of the book, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (2001); Catherine Cornille (born 1957), Belgian theologian and author of the book, *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (2002).

[37]Alvin Plantinga (1932-2020): Plantinga was a Christian philosopher who argued that Hicks pluralism was a form of religious relativism. He published several works on the topic, including, *The Reformed Objection to Religious Pluralism* (1989) and *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Realism, Relativism, and Religion* (2000); William Alston (1929-2009): Alston was another Christian philosopher who criticized Hicks pluralism. He argued that Hicks view of religious truth was too weak and that it did not do justice to the claims of the worlds religions. He published several works on the topic, including, *Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge* (1991) and *A Realist Conception of God and Religion* (2005); Nicholas Wolterstorff (1932-2015): Wolterstorff was another Christian philosopher who argued against Hicks pluralism. He argued that Hicks view of religious truth was too exclusive and that it did not allow for the possibility of multiple paths to salvation. He published several works on the topic, including *"Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (1976) and *Divine Discourse* (1995).

3. The Realities of Religious Diversity and Religious Plurality: Islamic Viewpoints

This section is divided into three sub-sections, primarily a discussion of the realistic view of the Islamic perspective on the issues of religion concerning its plurality and diversity. After a solid discussion, the implications of adopting Hick's views by Muslims, in understanding and approaching religious diversity and plurality, will be analyzed, and lastly, this will be followed with moral principles provided by Islam to not only forestall religious conflict and crises but also engender harmonious and peaceful co-existence.

3.1. Religious Plurality and Religious Diversity: Islamic General Perspective

Islam has many defining features that set it apart from various other human approaches. One of these features, which is often neglected is "realism", and this is succinctly discussed by Seyyed Qutb[38] in his book *The Islamic Concept and its characteristics*. Without going into details as that is not the focus of this study, it suffices to say that the concept implies that Islam deals with the objective realities without any attempt to re-interpret available data through any manipulative ways under the guise of "divine" or metaphysical explanation.

This realism is also clearly demonstrated by Islam concerning the issues of religious plurality and religious diversity. This is because they are completely admitted by Islam as various facts of life and social realities of human existence that must be lived with. For this reason, as will be elaborated in the last part of this session, Islam stresses an ethical approach rather than a doctrinal perspective.

Before that, a few related verses of the Qur'ān concerning religious plurality and diversity were examined in this study. Allah says "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ. Except whom your Lord has given mercy, and for that He created them. But the word of your Lord is to be fulfilled that, "I will surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together."[39] Explaining these verses, particularly verse 118, Ibn Kathir holds that Allah has not made faith universally accepted. In his opinion, Allah, informs that He is able to make all of mankind one nation upon belief, or disbelief. And to this, he referenced another verse[40] where Allah said: "And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them together." This verse seems to be more specific and direct on issues of religious differences.

When Prophet Muḥammad (*SAW*) seemed disturbed as to the incorrigibility of the people of Makkah Allah revealed to him the following verse: "And if their evasion is difficult for you, then if you are able to seek a tunnel into the earth or a stairway into the sky to bring them a sign, [then do so]. But if Allah had willed, He would have united them upon guidance. So never be of the ignorant."[41] As an emphasis, particularly for a more practical side of the issues, Allah says "And if We had willed, We could have given every soul its guidance, but the word from Me will come into effect [that] "I will surely fill Hell with jinn and people all together.[42]

These verses are to be integrated as a whole to capture the truth of our lived experience regarding "human natural tendencies" and "the freedom of will and actions" that Allah divinely granted man. When these verses are analyzed together, as demonstrated below through other verses, one discovers that they jointly provide comprehensive explanations on the various dimensions concerning many

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[38]Syed   Qutb,   *The   Islamic   Concept   and   Its   Characteristics*   (n.d.)
https://www.kalamullah.com/Books/IslamicConcept.pdf. Accessed 09-05-2023
[39]Hud 11:118–119.
[40]Yunus 10:99.
[41]Al-An'am 6:35.
[42]Al-Sajdah 32:13.

issues relating to human behavioural differences, particularly religious preferences, affiliations, and practices.

These range from the dignified status Allah accorded human beings from the standpoint of "freedom and privilege with attached responsibility" and of course, "the respective good and bad consequences that come with the beneficial use and the abuse of the freedom." In other words, apart from the often-discussed human rationality, freedom, responsibility, accountability and reward (good or bad) are distinctive attributes and realities that differentiate man from other creatures, such as animals. This is why anyone who fails to diligently make the best use of the privileges by discharging the attached responsibilities may end up in deep irreversible regret on the Last Day (Day of Judgement). Allah says "Indeed, We have warned you of a near punishment on the Day when a man will observe what his hands have put forth and the disbeliever will say, "Oh, I wish that I were dust!"[43]

This strongly suggests that, to Allah, it is more befitting to allow man to act out of his volition with necessary guides and a supportive environment than making him into an automaton. This is well captured in the following various verses of the Qur'ān where Allah says: "Has there [not] come upon man a period of time when he was not a thing [even] mentioned? Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful. Indeed, We have prepared for the disbelievers' chains and shackles and a blaze. Indeed, the righteous will drink from a cup [of wine] whose mixture is of Kafūr."[44]

In another verse, which is more apt, Allah says, "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing."[45] Allah does not divinely compel human beings (and Jinn) – against their willingness – to worship Him as He did for other creatures.[46] Allah would; therefore, not expect anyone to do that. This does not imply that Allah is pleased with our disbelief as categorically stated in the Qur'ān; it is, however, more pleasing to Allah that humans (and *Jinn*) believe in Him out of their free will that is consciously and conscientiously maintained. This will also make man to be genuinely accountable and responsible.

Based on the foregoing one could validly say that religious diversity and plurality, according to Islam, are manifestations of many issues that could be attributed to some of the following as captured in various Qur'ānic verses.

1. Man's free will: "Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful."[47]
2. Ignorance and insincerity: "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."[48]
3. Arrogance: "And indeed, every time I invited them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant with [great] arrogance"[49]

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[43]Al-Naba 78:40.
[44]Al-Insan 76:1-5.
[45]Al-Baqarah 2:256.
[46]Al-Isra 17:44.
[47]Al-Insan76:3.
[48]Al-Ahzab 33:72.
[49]Nuh 71:7.

4. Resultant divine will and punishment: "And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Moses said to his people, "O my people, why do you harm me while you certainly know that I am the messenger of Allah to you?" And when they deviated, Allah caused their hearts to deviate. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people."[50] "Whoever does righteousness – it is for his [own] soul; and whoever does evil [does so] against it. And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants"[51]

5. Human laxity and excessive indulgence in pleasure: "But there came after them successors who neglected prayer and pursued desires; so, they are going to meet evil"[52]

Having highlighted an Islamic general viewpoint on the reality of religious diversity and religious plurality, attention will now be on some of the implications of Hick's religious pluralism, based on an Islamic perspective.

3.2. The Implications of Adopting Hick's Religious Pluralism in Islam

Hick's formulation of religious pluralism has influenced (directly or indirectly) contemporary approaches to religious diversity, religious dialogue, religious co-existence, and rethinking of religious doctrines, and practices. However, in his philosophical formulation implies certain agnosticism, skepticism, and relativism. This is because it necessarily entails the need to revisit one's religious truth claim to accommodate other religious positions in the guise of accepting the acclaimed truth of other religions, even when they appear to be contradictory from an Islamic standpoint. As aforementioned, He posited that all religions are different "true" paths to the same Ultimate Reality, or what he calls "the Real." Hick, at various levels of his postulations, holds that the Real and Ultimate cannot be known, whereas, Islam asserts that truth has been sent to us through the revelations and we should; therefore, not entertain doubts and ambiguity concerning our belief and revealed the truth about Allah. For example, Allah says, "This is the Book (Qur'ān) about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah;[53] in another verse, Allah says, "He has sent down upon you, [O Muḥammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel.[54] On this basis, Hick's perspectives are wrong not only theologically but also epistemologically because they were predicated on a truth paradigm that negated the revelatory truth basis of Islam and the Qur'ān. It is an open invitation to relativism, agnosticism, and skepticism concerning a clearly defined basis of truth. Allah says: "Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction."[55] In another verse, Allah says, "Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion upon His Servant that he may be to the worlds a warner."[56]

In addition, these epistemological implications, such as (agnosticism, skepticism, and relativism), Hick's view was inherently antithetical not only to the Islamic belief system and its monotheistic belief but also to its theological basis and worldview. For instance, Hick implored and proposes to everyone to accord equally valid and true status to the doctrines of all world religions since all the theological claims of these religions, in his view, are only different but equally valid aspects of understanding and approaching God. Without a doubt, he was partly proposing this with the expectation that religious tension or conflict would be reduced if not eliminated in a society where there are different religious beliefs and practices. As a result, Hicks wants Muslims, for instance, to

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[50]Al-Saff 61:5.
[51]Fusilat 41:46.
[52]Maryam 19:59.
[53]Al-Baqarah 2:2.
[54]Al-i -'Imran 3:3.
[55]Al-Nisa 4:82.
[56]Al-Furqan 25:1.

hold the view that "Jesus is God" and accept that the "Trinity" is valid, even if it is from the Christian perspective.

For Muslims, this is an invitation to disbelief as Allah categorically said "They have certainly disbelieved who say, "Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary" while the Messiah has said, "O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Indeed, he who associates others with Allah – Allah has forbidden him Paradise, and his refuge is the Fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers. They have certainly disbelieved those who say, "Allah is the third of three." And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment."[57] Hick equally wanted Muslim to accept, contrary to the Qur'ānic textual reference, that everyone would enter paradise so long as they are sincere in their respective religious paths even if it is not Islam. Contrary to this, Allah clearly says: "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers."[58]

Beyond the foregoing theological and epistemological implications, there is also moral and ethical implication to Hick's religious pluralism. This is the main focus of this paper. As alluded to earlier, Hick believed that his proposal would solve socio-religious issues related to religious plurality and diversity. From the Islamic perspective, Hick's propositions were not pragmatic enough to approach the anticipated or real problem associated with religious diversity or plurality. This was, primarily, from an Islamic perspective, Hick was erroneously putting forth Islamic perspective, against an a poorly conceived doctrinal solution, for issues that could be addressed or resolved based on some moral propositions.

From Islamic viewpoints, religious diversity and plurality appear to become observable and significant through the social reality of human existence. On this basis, Islam rather lays emphasis on ethical perspectives as against the doctrinal and theological perspective proposed by Hick. Therefore, Islam provides moral principles and guides, which were deemed more pragmatically. There are even jurisprudential principles in Islam[59] (which are beyond the scope of this paper) that deal with many of the related socio-religious issues that could likely require enforceable laws beyond general ethics. In short, it will never be necessary and remain absurd, from the Islamic viewpoint, to negate the foundational doctrinal basis of the religion to achieve a peaceful co-existence amidst religious diversity and plurality. This is because social ethics, as alluded above, seems to be what is needed other than the doctrinal reformation. Some of these ethics are discussed next.

3.3. Ethics of Inter-Religious Relationships in Islam

Inter-religious relationship occurs and takes place under various conditions. These includes; however, are not limited to general social intercourse and economic transaction, socio-political reality that necessarily involves co-existence within the same community, unexpected religious encounters, or mutual religious dialogue, among others. Irrespective of the conditions, one sacrosanct thing is for the parties involved to uphold "fair and just dealings," "peaceful relationship," "Mutual respect," and "rendering needed assistance."[60]

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[57]Al-Maidah 5:72-73.

[58]Al-i-ʻImran 3:85.

[59]Anver M. Emon, *Religious Pluralism in Islamic Law: Dhimmis and Others in the Empire of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

[60]Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct* (London: Oxford University Press, 2022); Fatmir Mehdi Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and The Islamic Perspective of Inter Religious Dialogue* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press. 2008); Louay Safi, "Religious Freedom and

In light of these, the Qur'ān is replete with many related ethical principles and guides (these are besides practical demonstrations in the prophetic life story and the historical account of Islamic civilization). A few of these principles and guides are identified and discussed below with reference to respective relevant Qur'ānic verses.

a. No one should be unfairly treated based on their religious affiliation or faith: "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do."[61] As a realistic religion that takes into account human predisposition to favouritism, Islam commands equity and justice as an important basis of relationship above religious connection. Since just doing not entails any apologetic attitude, Allah categorically forbids Muslims from harbouring animosity toward people of other religion in the name of Islam, and therefore emphasizes that righteousness is better displayed through fair treatment to all and sundry. This is succinctly captured by Ibn Kathir in the interpretation of this verse; thus, "The Ayah commands: Do not be carried away by your hatred for some people to avoid observing justice with them. Rather, be just with everyone, whether a friend or an enemy." This is why Allah said, (Be just: that is nearer to *Taqwa*)"[62]

b. Maintaining a peaceful environment is a necessity. "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly."[63] In this verse, Allah clearly shows that a friendly co-existence with people of other religions who may be our neighbour is highly encouraged as long as they are not being hostile to us. According to Ibn Kathīr, "Allah does not forbid you from being kind to the disbelievers who do not fight you because of the religion to be gentle with them, to be fair with them." This does not in any way require us to sacrifice our religious worldview because upholding different belief systems should not constitute a barrier to peaceful co-existence as long as members of the society maintain a mutually accommodating environment.

c. Rendering assistance to those who do not harm the Muslims: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly."[64] In addition to maintaining peaceful co-existence with people of other religions who are not hostile to us (as discussed above), this verse also indicates the importance of being of helpful to all and sundry, including people of other religions. This is more praiseworthy before Allah than any attempt to make people feel good about us by being apologetic regarding our religious beliefs.

d. Religious dialogue must be mutually entered into and morally guided: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a best way. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."[65] In this verse, Ibn Kathīr opined that "Allah commands His Messenger Muḥammad to invite the people to Allah with Hikmah (wisdom)" Nothing stops us from inviting people of other religions to Islam but this must be done in the best of ways that demonstrate not only logic and coherence but also lofty admonitions and empathy. While on religious dialogue mentioned

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Interreligious Relations on Da'wah and Qur'ānic Ethics," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9, no. 2, (2011): 11-16.

[61]Al-Maidah 5:8.

[62]https://Qur'ān.com/5:8/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir.

[63]Al-Mumtahanah 60:8.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Al-Nahl 16:125.

in the verse, Ibn Kathīr maintains that religious debate and argument are not only permitted but also must be done "in the best manner, with kindness, gentleness and good speech." Buttressing this point, he pointed to another Qur'ānic verse: "And do not argue with the People of the Book, unless it be with that which is best, except for those who purposefully do wrong."[66] As a result, high moral rectitude with mutual respect for an individual's worldview should be cultivated to achieve effective religious dialogues. Entering into a religious dialogue requires the unapologetic view to be fruitful, this could be simply achieved through a good moral disposition of parties involved by upholding "ethics of disagreement"

e. No denigrating or hate speech: "And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus, We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do."[67] As a specific reference to speech and verbal engagement, which is a re-emphasis on the ethics of religious dialogue discussed above, this verse clearly states an ethical disposition that must be upheld by Muslims toward people of other religions. As an interpretation of this verse, Ibn Kathir says "that Allah prohibits His Messenger and the believers from insulting the false deities of the idolators"[68]. In his correct view "insulting their deities will lead to a bigger evil than its benefit, for the idolators might retaliate by insulting the God". In other words, beyond the instructive socio-religious moral guide in this verse, Allah points to the implication of acting otherwise, which is to predispose our belief system particularly Allah's Essence and attributes to blasphemy from non-Muslims. To restrain ourselves from unwarranted verbal insult concerning people of other religions is; therefore, a practical way to maintain a good relationship with people who differ from us in religious belief and also to protect the sanctity of our Islamic beliefs.

f.   The last inter-religious ethics to be discussed in this paper is, compelling unacceptable, and frowned upon by Islam. Allah says, "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing."[69] In his explanation of this verse, Ibn Kathir said that the meaning is that "Do not force anyone to become Muslim, for Islam is plain and clear, and its proofs and evidence are plain and clear. Therefore, there is no need to force anyone to embrace Islam."[70] Even though Islam is the only religion acceptable to Allah, He categorically forbids us from any attempt to compel it on anybody. This does not mean that other religions are on equal footing with Isam, on the contrary, Allah prefers willing acceptance, which is more effective and rewarding than acting under any duress, fear, or pretext. Beyond this, without encouraging any apologetic belief from the Muslims, Allah gives preference to maintaining mutual respect for individuals' religious convictions and a good ethically accommodating society. Apart from the fact this will foster some mutual understanding and respect among people of different religions, Allah does not see any importance in an insincere acceptance of Islam, and he strongly discourages inter-religious relationship that is laced with hostility as a result of compulsion.

With the above-discussed ethical principles and guides from selected verses of the Qur'ān, it becomes clear that Islam not only accepts religious plurality and diversity as facts of human existence but also provides an integrated moral paradigm that it deems appropriate to address potential conflict that could arise from them. We should; therefore, as Muslims, not conflate ethical issues (for which

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[66]Al-Ankabut 29:46.

[67]Al-An'am 6:108.

[68]https://Qur'ānx.com/tafsirs/6.108.

[69]Al-Baqarah 2:256.

[70]https://Qur'ān.com/2:256/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir

Islam has provided a practical and realistic approach) with doctrinal and epistemological issues by losing focus of the main problem (for instance, inter-religious relationships). As variously argued in this paper, a contrary perspective, particularly a doctrinal approach informed by Hick's religious pluralism, would rather destroy the foundational belief of Islam without even resolving the anticipated socio-religious problem.

4. Conclusion

Religious pluralism, in its philosophical formulations by Hick, appears as an ideal project aimed to stir a revisionist approach to various religious beliefs, practices, and views as seemingly necessitated by the continuous growth of global interreligious relationships and encounters. However, it leads to religious relativism, agnosticism, and skepticism, particularly from the Islamic perspective of the concept of religion. Besides this, it was discovered that an attempt to adopt Hick's religious-philosophical pluralism by Muslims indicates the obliviousness to the fact that Islam has clearly defined and pragmatically provided a series of ethical codes concerning inter-religious relations without having to revise its basic doctrines and values orientations.

5. Recommendations

In the course of writing this paper, certain issues that would attract more studies were discovered. Those issues were only pointed to without any substantial discussion as they are outside the scope of the paper. Some of these are, namely a robust approach to Islamic ethics of inter-religious relationships and diversity based on the new emerging challenges of modern times. Studies on the implication of other scholars' perspective of religious pluralism based on Islamic understanding for instance, for different reasons and basis, Dr. Nasr has a view similar to Hick's; certain other sufi order also seemed to have the same view, such as Rene Guenon (1886-1951). Comparative studies on Hick and Nasr could also be attempted, though there are some sketchy attempts at their views on pluralism already but with little details. An awareness of the various secular agendas on religious diversity with a focus on articulating Islamic approaches to contemporary and postmodern situations is essentially required. Additionally, jurisprudential ruling that would reflect contemporary realities of interreligious relationships is also significant as it appears that new issues are emerging, concerning the contemporary times.

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