Is the Word Islām in al-Qur'an the Name of a Religion or an Attitude of Self-Surrender? A Response to Nurcholish Madjid's Religious Pluralism

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to investigate the word *Islām* in al-Qur'an, be it as the name of a particular religion or merely the attitude of self-surrender, which can be deemed an important yet neglected issue in the discourse of religious pluralism. The negligence appears clearer when the issue is put in the framework of inclusive theology coined by Nurcholish Madjid, one of the celebrated Indonesian public Muslim intellectuals, with the existing related studies having elaborated more on *Islām* as a common ground among true religions without adequately examining the integrity of the meaning of *Islām* itself. This study hence aims to examine selected Qur'anic verses dealing with the word *Islām* about its structure including its additional particles, like, *al* (the), or pronouns, like, *hum* (their), to understand which of the two above-mentioned meanings is closer to what is intended by al-Qur'an based on the context of its usage. In a broader context, this examination will concern two main points, namely the universality of Islam and the formation process of this religion with this all, in terms of presentation style, being presented after a brief introduction of Madjid's life and thoughts. At the analysis stage, this literature study employs comparative and content methods, which respectively serve to compare the Qur'anic verses consisting of the word *Islām* and then to deduce therefrom a conclusion based on the widely agreed upon framework the scholars have built in their works. Three findings are finally found that, *first, Islām* in the Qur'an carries from the very outset its generic meaning, i.e., self-surrender. Yet, the universality of teachings associated with the religion named Islam that this generality bears may be divided into two: partial and temporary, which applied to different groups in various ages before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), and comprehensive and perennial, which has used from the time of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) onwards. Based on this, *second,* pre-Prophetic Islam is considered as having manifested in the form of *millah*, as being multiple, and *third*, the post-Prophetic *Islām* is the one called *Dīn*, as being single. Therefore, *Islām* in the Qur'an is closer to being defined as the name of religion.

Keywords: *Islām,* Qur'an, Nurcholish Madjid, Self-surrender,

Introduction

Religious pluralism is a concept that has numerous definitions. As long as it is seen as an - ism - to manage the plurality of religions that human beings embrace well,[1] none seems to reject it. For, the diversity of religion – as well as of other aspects of human life – is an undeniable reality. However, when it is related to the concept of divine salvation, particularly in the context of the Muslim world, it is where a fierce debate that eventually leads to segregation of the community takes place.[2] By such a relation, i.e., between religious pluralism and divine salvation, it is claimed that most of the world's major religions, particularly Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese tradition, even though different from each other, are indeed respectively valid paths to attain salvation from the same God. John Hick, for instance, in a foreword to a book by Frithjof Schuon, stated "metaphysically, in God at the apex, religions (or rather the revealed religions, a distinction to which we shall return) converge, below they differ. The epistemological concomitant of this metaphysical fact is that religious discernment, too, unites at its apex while dividing below it."[3] Hence, the difference in them takes place merely in the exoteric realm; for, in the esoteric one, they are substantially the same.

In the Indonesian context, despite being responded to by the Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars (MUI) in 2005,[4] the issue has remained hotly debated and sometimes sparked communal segregation in the public space. Every group has acknowledged to already refer to the Qur'an such that they claimed that their opinion is the right one. Among Indonesian Muslim public intellectuals who advocated the idea of religious pluralism – with the meaning as elaborated above – was the late Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005). In general, he contended that the word *Islām* in the Qur'an does not only refer to a particular religion as the modern people understand it, namely the one that is institutionalized in what is referred to as, for example, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Yet, it substantially refers to a form of attitude that one may behave with, i.e., a self-surrender to the One and Only God. Considering it more in the form of a moral attitude, the religion of *Islām,* Madjid

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[1] Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Antara Pluralitas dan Pluralisme," *Sumanto Al Qurtuby* (blog), July 9, 2020, https://sumantoalqurtuby.com/antara-pluralitas-dan-pluralisme/.
[2] Muhamad Ali, "Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam," in *Freedom of Religion and Religious Pluralism* (Brill Nijhoff, 2023), 36–56, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004504967_004.
[3] John Hick in his *Preface* to the work of Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions,* xiii.
[4] Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, Dan Sekularisme Agama" (Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), 2005).

continued, may include several religions with their followers truly submitting themselves to God.[5]

At this juncture, among the points of debate that have not been proportionally addressed is a kind of systematic analysis of the word *Islām* itself by collecting all Qur'anic verses containing the word *Islām* and deducing therefrom a conclusion based on a paradigm that all collected verses are built and united as a system. This research gap becomes much rarer when it is put in the context of studies in response to Madjid's thoughts. To provide a broader picture of that research gap, the general summaries of the related previous studies as follows may be helpful.

Among those needed to be revealed here is that of Nasitotul Jannah with her article titled *Nurcholish Madjid dan Pemikirannya: Di Antara Kontribusi dan Kontroversi* (Nurcholish Madjid and His Thoughts: Between Contributions and Controversies).[6] There, Jannah presented Madjid's view by elaborating on some of his contributions that the Muslim community has acknowledged, as well as some aspects that history has witnessed as sparking controversy. In the context of the present research, the research touched upon Madjid's interpretation of the meaning of *Islām*, which is considered an attempt to promote the concept of anonymous Muslim that transforms later into the basis of the so-called inclusive theology. Consequently, as Madjid reportedly assumed, one called Muslim does not include merely those who embrace the organized religion named Islam, but also those affiliated to what is in the modern day referred to by Christianity, Judaism, and other religions. Despite *Islām* being the subject matter of the discussion, however, the article does not provide a sufficient comparison or examination of the meaning of *Islām* between the one employing the inclusive interpretation and the one taking the systems approach into consideration.

A book chapter titled *Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam* by Amin Abdullah, who is also a Muslim public intellectual as Madjid, is also worth mentioning.[7] Unfortunately, there was no comprehensive discussion about

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[5] Nurcholish Madjid, "Islam Doktrin Dan Peradaban," in *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*, ed. Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019), 883, 977.

[6] Nasitotul Janah, "Nurcholish Madjid Dan Pemikirannya (Di Antara Kontribusi Dan Kontroversi)," *Cakrawala: Jurnal Studi Islam* 12, no. 1 (September 19, 2017): 44–63, https://doi.org/10.31603/cakrawala.v12i1.1655.

[7] M. Amin Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam," in *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts - Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, ed. Mohammed Hashas (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 189–99, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66089-5_11.

Madjid's interpretation of Islam which is, as revealed by Budhy Munawar-Rachman, the embarking point of all Madjid's facets of inclusive thoughts revolved on three points: Islam, Indonesia, and modernity. He preferred instead to discuss Madjid's attempts to enrich the horizons of Islamic thought, notably in response to the modern phenomenon of nationalism and, at the same time, to keep its progressiveness, which is the forerunner of modernity he coined, remaining amidst the engulfing emergence of Islamism.

Cahaya Khaeroni's *Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005): Gagasan-Gagasan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Kontemporer di Indonesi*a (Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005): Ideas on Contemporary Islamic Renewal in Indoensia),[8] and Zainal Abidin's *Teologi Inklusif Nurcholish Madjid: Harmonisasi Antara Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, dan Kemoderenan* (The Inclusive Theology of Nurcholish Madjid: A Harmonization between Islam, Indonesia, and Modernity)[9] are other works worthy of consideration. Both can be considered much closer to the present research in terms of the closeness to the elaboration of the meaning of *Islām*. They revealed that the inclusive theology Madjid advocated revolves around his preoccupation with the generic meaning of *Islām,* which later also resulted – referring to Ibn Taimiyyah – in the birth of the terms *Islam Khusus* (Specific Islam) and *Islam Umum* (Generic Islam). However, a thematic, integrated analysis of the meaning of *Islām* in the Qur'an was not there.

Based on the elaboration as the previous studies carried out, it seems now clear that a study focused on the response to Madjid's preoccupation with the generic meaning of *Islām*, chiefly through seeing it from a thematic analysis, is not there yet and hence needs to exist. It is to meet this gap that the present research aims to offer, specifically delving into the examination of some selected verses of al-Qur'an that deal with the word *Islām*. Through putting such Arabic linguistic structures as *al* (the) and *hum* (their), which are respectively part of the particles and pronouns, in broader contexts, i.e., the universality of Islam and how this religion had been formed, it seeks to determine which of the two above-mentioned meanings is closer to what is intended by al-Qur'an based on the context of its usage. In doing so, the present research, which can be considered to fall under literature study, will employ

[8] Cahaya Khaeroni, "Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005): Gagasan-Gagasan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Kontemporer Di Indonesia," *At-Tajdid : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 4, no. 02 (January 15, 2021): 178–90, https://doi.org/10.24127/att.v4i02.1464.
[9] Zainal Abidin, "Teologi Inklusif Nurcholish Madjid: Harmonisasi Antara Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemoderenan," *Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (October 30, 2014): 665–84, https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v5i2.3123.

two kinds of analysis methods: comparative and content. The former is relevant to compare some selected Qur'anic verses that consist of the word *Islām* while the latter pertains to deducing from that comparison, based on the scholars' agreed-upon opinion regarding the issue in question, a conclusion that seeks to figure out the true meaning of *Islām*. However, prior to delving into how such an examination will take place and what it results in, a presentation of who Madjid is and how his inclusive thought had been shaped would help make the analysis more comprehensive.

From Jakarta to Chicago

No single thought is born of an empty space. So was that of Madjid. A neo-modernist Muslim scholar,[10] Madjid was a type of scholar, as this happens to others, whose thought was shaped by the education he earned, the milieu he stayed in, and the challenges he was facing. While many Muslim scholars experienced a shift of paradigm, i.e., from traditionalism to modernism, just after they obtained the Western paradigm of Islam, Madjid seemed not to be among them. This is because he had held that Islamic modern paradigm, which is at some point in line with that of the Western, even before he commenced his study in the United States.

Born in Jombang East Java on March 17, 1939, Madjid started his education in a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)-based boarding school, Darul Ulum Jombang. Afterward, he continued his study at *Pesantren* Gontor[11] – a modern Islamic institution considered the root of the currently mushrooming widespread modern educational systems in Indonesia. It was perhaps Jakarta where he then experienced a kind of paradigm shift, namely from traditionalism to modernism. There, where he pursued his higher studies at the Jakarta State Islamic Institute (IAIN), Madjid became acquainted with some new ideas that were more diverse and challenging. With the presence of Harun Nasution, who was the interlocutor of Indonesia's Islamic modernism and at the same time as the Rector of the institute, it was possibly during this period that he came to be familiar with the so-called Islamic Western

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[10] Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual Ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-modernist Thought," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (October 1, 1997): 323–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419708721130; Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 2, no. 3 (1995), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v2i3.827.
[11] Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Emergence and Development of Liberal Islam in Indonesia: A Critical Evaluation* (IIUM Press, 2009), 53.

progressive paradigm.[12] With his BA, he wrote a thesis titled *Al-Qurān: 'Arabiyyūn Lughatan Ālamiyyūn Ma'nan* (Al-Qur'an: Arabic in Words, Universal in Meanings)*.* The thesis implicitly denoted that young Madjid was already familiar with the idea of the universality of Islam despite it being revealed in a particular region with a specific language, which is Arabic. The tracks of this universality could be found in the idea of cosmopolitan Islam which he disseminated when he was mature enough as a scholar.

Besides being active in college, young Madjid was also intensively involved as an activist, particularly with the Islamic Student Association (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* – HMI). At this organization where he served as its president for two consecutive periods, he became acquainted with some figures of progressive-minded Muslim scholars such as Johan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib, and others.[13] Later on, when he presented a paper at an international seminar, Fazlur Rahman and Leonard Binder caught his profound passion for Islamic thought.[14] It was this encounter, with the recommendation of both leading scholars, that eventually allowed Madjid to pursue his postgraduate studies at the University of Chicago in the United States, which then contributed to shaping the future of his thoughts and even Indonesia's constellation of Islamic religious discourse.

The Chicago period, as mentioned earlier, was not the first platform in which Madjid encountered the ideas of Islam and its relation to modernity. What is thus to be stated here is that the period could be considered as the phase of consolidation and strengthening which had then crystallized in what some may call the inclusive theology. This strengthening can be seen through the similarities in thoughts, particularly in relation to the meaning of *Islām,* between Madjid and those of Muhammad Asad, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Returning to Indonesia, Madjid then taught at the State Islamic Institute Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and later on established the University of Paramadina, where he seeded the ideas of modernity framed in the Islamic paradigm and contextualized in the case of a nation named Indonesia. Needless to say, no few scholars have opted to be in disagreement with Madjid's ideas*,* chiefly in relation to secularism, as perhaps

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[12] Together with Munawir Sadzali who was a former Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs (1983-1988 and 1988-1993), Harun Nasution was a pioneer in providing a Western paradigm in the dynamics of Islamic thoughts in Indonesia, i.e., by sending some young Indonesian Muslim scholars to study at some Western centers for Islamic studies attached to certain universities, among others.

[13] Solihin, *Emergence and Development of Liberal Islam in Indonesia*, 75.

[14] Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam," 191.

found in the works of Muhammad Rasjidi,[15] Abdul Qadir Djaelani,[16] and Faisal Ismail.[17] This kind of interplay of thought is common and, as long as carried out based on objective data and analysis, indeed should be maintained with both sides welcome to address their respective criticism and arguments. It is history that then witnesses and even examines which of the two is close to the benefits of the community and particularly the Muslim world. Regardless of that controversy, Madjid was inevitably a public Muslim intellectual who had contributed to shaping the face of Indonesia's Islamic thoughts, which are considered by some as dynamic – despite some controversies therein.

Islām: Between Particularity and Universality

The word *al-islām* is rooted in *aslama-yuslimu* which means *to surrender*, *to submit*.[18] *Al-islām* then carries the meaning of *an act of submission*, which is in Islamic terminology known as one's self-submission to God. The one himself is thus called a Muslim while the religion he adheres to is named Islam. Considering the central role of submission in one's Islamic religiosity, Nurcholish Madjid contended that the core spirit of a religion called Islam is submission, i.e., to surrender to Allah (S.W.T.), the One and Only Almighty God, the Creator of all heaven and earth. Embarking on this position, Madjid then posed a position that is slightly different from, yet has sparked a significant implication to, the opinions that the majority of Muslim scholars have held. Commenting on the part of two Qur'anic verses, i.e., *inna al-dīna 'ind Allāh al-islām* (Q 3:19) and *wa man yabtaghī ghayr al-islām dīnan* (Q 3:85), for instance, while many scholars have translated it as "indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam",[19] Madjid preferred to understand it respectively as "the true religion in the sight of the One and Only God is a pure self-surrender to Him, which is in the Qur'an known as *al-islām* (Q 3:19)

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[15] Mohammad Rasjidi, *Koreksi Terhadap Drs. Nurcholish Madjid Tentang Sekularisasi* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972).

[16] Abdul Qadir Djaelani, *Menelusuri Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam Nurcholish Madjid* (Bandung: Yadia, 1994).

[17] Faisal Ismail, *Sekularisasi; Membongkar Kerancuan Pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2008).

[18] Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, 4th ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Duwaliyyah, 2004), 446.

[19] M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 141–42, 40.

and any adherence to other than the religion of *al-Islām* cannot for itself be accepted by Allah (Q 3:85)."[20]

The difference Madjid proposed is called slight as it only replaces the word *Islām* with *a pure self-surrender to Him* where both are indeed intersected. Yet, it definitely poses a significant implication – more exactly debate – as it seeks to replace *Islām*, which is unanimously known as the name of religion, i.e., Islam with the complexity of its all laws, teachings, and practices, with merely a form of self-attitude one may belong to, i.e., surrender to God. More significantly, as Madjid argued, the difference was made possible with the aim of reconstructing the existing understanding of the term *Islām* in the Qur'an, which some Muslims – if not the majority of them – see it only associated with a particular religion, to be a kind of self-attitude that is more general and, hence, goes beyond the borders of a specific, organized religion. Consequently, by referring to Ibn Taimiyyah, [21] Madjid classified *Islām* into two: general Islam and specific Islam. The former refers to anyone who purely submits himself to the Almighty God regardless of whatever religion he may embrace, while the latter is associated with those who believe in and are committed to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.).[22] Trying to summarize the words of Madjid, one who is called Muslim is thus not only necessarily associated with the believers of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) as they can be seen today but also with those called Christians and Jews – and perhaps other people of religions – who sincerely surrender themselves to God.[23]

In defense of his argument, Madjid incorporated the opinions of some scholars, such as Muhammad Asad, who provided a similar insight that indeed sounds thought-provoking. Commenting on the same Qur'anic verses (Q 3:19 and 3:85), Asad opted to render them as "behold, the only (true) religion in the sight of God is (man's) self-surrender,"[24] and "for if one goes in search of a religion other than self-

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[20] Madjid, "Islam Doktrin Dan Peradaban," 883.
[21] This reference to Ibn Taimiyyah that Madjid made needs a further investigation with regard to its veracity, that is, whether that classification of general Islam and specific Islam was only intended to refer to those ancient people before Prophet Muhammad or the classification has applied till today. For, a quick investigation, even through Madjid's translation itself of the words of Ibn Taimiyyah, turns out to seemingly reveal that it was intended more for those before Prophet Muhammad. See Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khamīs, *Sharḥ Al-Risālah al-Tadammuriyyah [Li Ibn Taymiyyah]* (Riyadh: Dār Aṭlas al-Khaḍrā', 2004), 362.
[22] Nurcholish Madjid, "Islam Agama Kemanusiaan," in *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*, ed. Budhy Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019), 2085.
[23] Nurcholish Madjid, "Cendekiawan Dan Religiusitas Masyarakat," in *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid*, ed. Budhy Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019), 4133.
[24] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 110.

surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him."[25] Asad's choice to employ self-surrender instead of Islam to refer to the word *al-islām* was his preoccupation that the translation, and necessarily the understanding, of the Qur'an ought to take into account "the original purport and the meaning which it [the Qur'an] had – and was intended to have – for the people who first heard it from the lips of the Prophet himself."[26] So was that of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, saying, "the religion before God is Islam (submission to His Will)" (Q 3:19)[27] and "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him" (Q 3:85).[28]

In the event where Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) lived, as this was stated by Asad and later reinforced by Madjid, the use of the words *Islam* and *Muslim* were not constrained to refer to a particular community, denomination, or, to be more exact, an institutionalized religion called Islam, but rather to any attitude considered as a self-surrender to God and anyone of that kind of surrender though they might be outside of the boundary of the institutionalized religion. The very qualification for every one of those different communities is self-surrender; that is, as long as submitting himself to God, whatever community and denomination are, he can be thus deemed a Muslim. In this regard, Asad exemplified it through what is inherent in the Qur'an itself (Q 3:67, *kāna ḥanīfan musliman*) where Prophet Ibrahim, in addition to the historical fact that he has been widely considered as the father of the existing three major religions, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, who indeed lived a thousand years before Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) such that was assumed not part of the Muhammadan community, was called a Muslim. So were the disciples of Prophet Isa – where the Prophet himself has been at some point much associated with Christianity as seen today – called as well as Muslims (Q 3:52, *biannā muslimūn*).[29] Another example is to be found in Madjid's view where he understood that the verse *wa ilāhunā wa ilāhukum wāḥid wa naḥnu lahū muslimūn* (Q 29:46) is a clear justification of their similar status as those submit themselves

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[25] *Ibid.*, 127.

[26] *Ibid.*, 7. See also, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1991); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1981).

[27] Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary,* 126. However, it is recommended to see the veracity of the reference Madjid made to particularly Ali. For, compared to Asad, who rendered *al-Islām* in the Qur'anic verse (Q 3:19), for example, as purely *a self-surrender* without mentioning *Islam* as a name of religion, Ali opted to still use *Islam* as the translation of *al-Islām* with *submission to Allah* just following it afterward. See Madjid, "Islam Doktrin Dan Peradaban," 572.

[28] Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary,* 145.

[29] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 7.

to the same God. This qualification is perhaps that which subsequently led Madjid to further state that ""the submission to God", [is considered as] the spirit and hence becomes the main characteristic of all true religions. This is stated in the Qur'an in that all true religions fall under the religion of Islam simply because they all teach an attitude of self-surrender to God."[30]

Based on the elaboration above, Madjid seemed to argue that the word *al-Islām* in the Qur'an is definitely associated with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and the institutionalized religion that the so-called Muslim people in this modern time embrace. Yet, it may also include those outside the boundary of that religion, particularly those considered the followers of the true religions, as long as they observe a self-surrender to God. With that, it can also be stated that the crux of religiosity is a self-surrender to God and, with that foundational position, it may comprise any other religions, particularly what is referred to as the Abrahamic religions, as long as their followers submit themselves purely to God. All those religions may be plurality in look, but in essence, they are all equal in their ways to attain the pleasure of God. [31]

However, the essential meaning of *al-Islām* that Madjid offered sounds leaving room for discussion. It lies particularly in the fact that, while Madjid's *al-Islām* seems not to bear a requirement for the belief in Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) such that the belief itself is particular, the Qur'an appears straightforward in its assertion that the divine mission Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) came up with is universal. What to discuss is to investigate, based on the Qur'an, whether the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) are universal such that belief in them is a requirement, particularly for those who lived during his time until those who lived afterward throughout human history. In doing so, the following table that shows the distribution of the word *al-Islām* in the Qur'an is perhaps helpful.

Table 1. The Distribution of the Word *al-Islām* in the Qur'an[32]

No	Word	Verse	Definiteness	Singularity

[30] Nurcholish Madjid, "Islam Doktrin Dan Peradaban," in *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*, ed. Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019), 533-534.

[31] A similar idea can be found in Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*; John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oneworld, 1999).

[32] The table is arranged by the author himself, considering that the existing studies on the subject in question seem not to explore the issue yet from the perspective he is offering in this present study.

1	*Al-Islām*	*Wa man yabtaghī ghayr al-islām dīnan* (Q 3:185)	Defined	Single
2	*Al-Islām*	*Inna al-dīna 'ind Allah al-islām* (Q 3:19)	Defined	Single
3	*Al-Islām*	*Wa raḍītu lakum al-islām dīnān* (Q 5:3)	Defined	Single
4	*Al-Islām*	*Yashraḥ ṣadrahū li al-islām* (Q 6:125)	Defined	Single
5	*Al-Islām*	*Afaman sharaḥallāh Yashraḥ ṣadrahū li al-islām* (Q 39:22)	Defined	Single
6	*Al-Islām*	*Wahuwā yud'ā ilā al-islām* (Q 61:7)	Defined	Single
7	*Islāmakum*	*Qul lā tamunnū 'alāyya islāmakum* (Q 49:17)	Defined	Added
8	*Islāmihim*	*Wa kafarū ba'da islāmihim* (Q 9:74)	Defined	Added

Above is presented that the word *al-Islām* is mentioned eight times with all of them in the form of a defined noun (*ism ma'rifah*), though the style of definition from one to another may differ. The first six are presented in the form of a single noun (*ism mufrad*), i.e., *al-Islām*, while the last two are in an added noun (*ism muḍāf*), i.e., *Islāmakum* and *Islāmihim.* In line with the implication of a defined noun that shows a definition or clarity – rather than indefiniteness or ambiguity – of what the noun refers to as this is known in Arabic grammar,[33] the degree of clarity all of the six *al-islām* bears indicates that it must refer to an entity, an attitude, or a religion that one may belong to. Considering the fact, that *al-Islām*, as mentioned above, is not attached in a single verse to any prophet other than Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), the most possible statement to deduce is that the one meant is Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Furthermore, there are three out of the eight appearances in which *al-Islām* comes alongside one another with *al-Dīn.* This means that *al-Islām* refers to a religion (*dīn*) that is, in this regard, more logically associated with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) – instead of other prophets. The existence of *al-Dīn* in the three verses above, i.e., as a tool of differentiation and preference (*Adāt al-Tamyīz*) in Q 3:185 and as a tool of isolation and emphasis (*Adāt al-ḥaṣr*) in Q 5:3, also denotes that God acknowledges the existence of religions that human beings may produce and embrace. Nonetheless, when it comes to the one that pleases Him, the existence of the two tools provides a thesis that it would be only one.

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[33] Muṣṭafā al-Galāyīnī, *Jāmi' al-Durūs al-'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Manshurāt al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 1993), 147.

It can be hence stated that Madjid's preoccupation as elaborated above, that is, the word *Islām* in the Qur'an refers more to its generic meaning, i.e., self-surrender such that it may include any true religion other than the 'institutionalized' Islam and further implies that the mission of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) in particular, is less in accordance with what is theoretically articulated in the Qur'an itself that *Islām* is not associated with other than Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) which is why his mission is considered universal. At this juncture, even if the present research's thesis can be justified, the discussion is yet to stop. For, there is another issue to investigate, namely whether the inference that *Islām* indeed refers to a religion particularly associated with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) yet applies universally to the rest of human beings living since the commencement of his mission has an impact of neglecting the universality of the self-surrender itself. In dealing with this, the discussion may then revolve around the issue of whether the religion of *al-Islām* the Qur'an delineates is single or plural.

Is *Islām* Single or Multiple?

Madjid revealed that "there is an indication in the Qur'an that the outward manifestation of *"al-Islām"* may be differently multiple according to, among others, the surrounding time and space. Yet, within that multiplicity, every follower [of those different manifestations] (is supposed to) worship and sacrifice for the One and Only God to Whom a self-surrender has to be dedicated."[34] True is that in this passage he did not implicitly state that the different manifestations of *al-Islām* refer to other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and even others. Yet, combining it with another statement he made exactly on the page to follow, i.e., "due to the position of *"al-Islām"* as a common word among all true religions, there should be a close relation built as strong as possible among the sincere people of those religions, except in a compelling situation where one among them, for example, commits an injustice to others,"[35] among what Madjid indeed referred to by different manifestations are thus religions that can be here exemplified such as Christianity and Judaism. With this, a further implication can be inferred, i.e., the religion of *al-Islām,* to Madjid, is multiple.

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[34] Nurcholish Madjid, "Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan," in *Islam Doktrin Dan Peradaban*, ed. Munawar-Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2020), 977.
[35] Madjid, 978.

Nonetheless, interestingly, one fact seemingly needs to be taken into consideration, that is, the Qur'an turns out to also employ the word *Millah*, apart from *Dīn*, to refer to a set of comprehensive religious teachings that is called religion or quasi-religion. While *Dīn* is often referred to as a religion, *Millah* is probably the one meant to refer to the so-called quasi-religion. In navigating this issue further, the table to follow that reveals the distribution of *Millah*, as well as its relation to *Dīn* in the Qur'an, looks pertinent.

Table 2. The Distribution of the Words *al-Millah and al-Dīn* in the Qur'an

No	Verse	*Millah*	In Relation to Prophets	In Relation to *al-Dīn*
1	*Wa mā ja'ala 'alaykum fi al-dīn min ḥaraj millata abīkum Ibrāhīm* (Q 22:78)	*Millata abīkum Ibrāhīm*	Ibrahim	Related
2	*Qul innanī hadānī rabbi ilā ṣirāṭin mustaqīmin dīnan qiyaman millata Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan* (Q 6:161)	*Millata Ibrāhīma*	Ibrahim	Related
3	*Wa man aḥsanu dīnan mimman aslama wajhahu lillāhi wahuwa muḥsin wattaba'a millata Ibrāhīma ḥanīfan* (Q 4:125)	*Millata Ibrāhīma*	Ibrahim	Related
4	*Qul ṣadaqallāh fattabi'ū millata Ibrāhīma ḥanīfan* (Q 3:95)	*Millata Ibrāhīm*	Ibrahim	Not shown
5	*Thumma awḥaynā ilayka anittabi' millata Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan* (Q 16:123)	*Millata Ibrāhīm*	Ibrahim	Not shown
6	*Wa qālū kūnū hūdan aw naṣārā tahtadū, qul bal millata Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan* (Q 2:135)	*Millata Ibrāhīm*	Ibrahim	Not shown
7	*Wa man yarghabu 'an millati Ibrāhīma illā man safiha nafsah* (Q 2:130)	*Millati Ibrahīma*	Ibrahim	Not shown
8	*Wattaba'tu millata ābā'ī Ibrāhīma wa Isḥāqa wa Ya'qūba* (Q 12:38)	*Millata ābā'ī Ibrāhīma*	Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Ya'qub	Not shown
9	*Wa lan tarḍā 'anka al-yahūdu wa lā al-naṣārā ḥatta tattabi'a millatahum* (Q 2:120)	*Milatahum*	Jews	Not shown
10	*Innī taraktu millata qawmin lā yu'minūnun billāh* (Q 12:37)	*Millata qawmin*	Specific people	Not shown
11	*Innahum in yaẓharū 'alaykum yarjumūkum aw yu'īdūkum fī millatihim* (Q 18:20)	*Millatihim*	Specific people	Not shown
12	*Qadiftaraynā 'ala Allāh kadhiban in 'udnā fī millatikum ba'da idh najjānallah minhā* (Q 7:89)	*Millatikum*	Specific people	Not shown
13	*Aw lata'ūdunna fī millatinā faawḥā ilayhim rabbuhum* (Q 14:13)	*Millatinā*	Specific people	Not shown
14	*Lata'ūdunna fī millatinā qāla awalaw kunnā kārihīn* (Q 7:88)	*Millatinā*	Specific people	Not shown
15	*Mā sami'nā bi hādhā fī al-millah al-ākhirah* (Q 38:7)	*Al-Millah*	No Shown	Not shown

16	*Wa qālū asāṭīr al-awwalīn iktatabahā fahiya tumlā ʻalayh bukratan wa aṣilan* (Q 25:5)	*Tumlā*	Not shown	Not shown
17	*Walyumlil al-ladhī ʻalayh al-ḥaqq ... aw lā yastaṭīʻu an yumilla huwa falyumlil waliyyuhū bi al-ʻadl* (Q 2:282)	*Yumlil, Yumlil, Yumilla*	Not shown	Not shown

There are some indications inferred from the data above. First, the word *Millah,* along with its derivatives*,* appears 19 times in 17 Qurʼanic verses, i.e., *Millah*, *Tumlā, Yumlil*, and *Yumill* are mentioned respectively 15, 1, 2, and 1 time(s). In accordance with *al-Islām, Millah*, in its position as the most cited word, continuously appears in the form of a defined noun (*maʻrifah*) which means that this quasi-religion is not open to be associated with everyone as its main promoter. Yet, by contrast, every *Millah* is associated uniquely with one out of the existing thousands of prophets. In this respect, grounded on the aforementioned fact that *Millah* is mentioned closely to Ibrahim, as in the phrase *Millata Ibrāhīm*, with eight out of fifteen mentions, among such main promotors is thus Ibrahim. This reinforces al-Shahrustānī's statement that the predominant *Millah* at the time was that of Ibrahim called Hanīfiyyah.[36] Other promotors, despite not being mentioned by name, may also be revealed such as the predecessors of Ibrahim (*millata ābāʼī Ibrāhīma*) and a group of people (*millata qawmin*) as well as those mentioned in pronouns like our *Millah* (*millatinā*), your *Millah* (*millatikum*), their *Millah* (*millatihim*). Noteworthy, among the entirety of the Qurʼanic mentions of *millah*, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) seems never to be directly associated with one or some of those *Millahs.* Like in No 4 (Q 3:95), Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) indeed acted as the addressee of the verse being spoken. Yet, the *Millah* is associated with Ibrahim while Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was there to be just asked to follow it. Capitalized with the previous statement that *al-Islām* and *Dīn* are closely attached to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), this fact then leads to a conclusion that *Millah* is a quasi-religion God presented to prophets before Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and *Dīn* which is intimately related to *al-Islām* is a fully-fledged religion entrusted merely to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.).[37]

Second, the word *Millah*, in its relation to *Dīn* in a single verse as presented above, is mentioned three times, i.e., No 1 (Q 22:78), No 2 (Q 6:161), and No 3 (Q 4:125) and, compellingly, the former occurs always after the latter. Taking into

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[36] Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Karīm Ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahrustānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Muʼassasah al-Ḥalbā, 1968), 38.
[37] Regading the intimacy between *dīn* and *millah*, see al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāẓ Al-Qurʼān*, ed. Ṣafwān ʻAdnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2009), 773.

consideration the fact that the addressee of those three verses was Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), the more possible situation is to state that the *Dīn*, which is the subject matter of each verse, is associated with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) while the *Millah* – as each verse clearly states – is with Prophet Ibrahim. In addition to emphasizing the first previous conclusion, this situation also bears another implication that *Dīn*, i.e., *al-Islām*, is a continuation of a large number of *Millahs*. In this regard, though both are interconnected, an attempt to provide some aspects of the difference between them seems to be helpful.

For *Millah,* it is rather partial and temporal. Called partial because every *Millah* was brought by a given prophet and, as the Qur'an intends it, presented to a certain community who were deemed his people. Consequently, it may be stated that a *Millah* is given and assigned to a community to which a certain prophet was commissioned, yet it might also be either followed by or taught to – and this is not an obligation – people from other communities. Hence, what to underscore here is that the mission that the *Millah* bears is basically partial. For example, in terms of the basic specialty of the prophetic mission to a certain community, the message Prophet Yūsuf brought was indeed basically assigned to the Israelites (Q 40:34, *wa laqad jā'akum min qabl bi al-bayyināt*). Yet, in terms of the possibility of cross-communities adherence, he was also allowed to call people, either intentionally or unintentionally, from other communities to embrace his teachings. In this respect, the story of a prophetic call that Prophet Yūsuf made to his two friends (Q 12:41, *a'arbābun mutafarriqūn khayrun amillāh al-wāḥid*) – who were assumed not among the Israelities – when they were in jail might be considered a case in point. Moreover, the message of Prophet Musa assigned to Pharaoh (*Fir'awn*) and his people (Q 43:46, *arsalnā Mūsā biāyātinā ilā Fir'awn wa mala'ih*) as well as that of Prophet Isa to the Israelities (Q 3:49, *wa rasūlan ilā banī Isrā'īl*) are perhaps among other evidence that the mission that the *Millah* carries is indeed basically partial. *Millah* was also considered temporal in the sense that the form of teaching sent down to a prophet relatively applied during the life of the prophet himself as it would be eventually refined by the teaching of the prophet to follow. Prophet Adam's teaching, for instance, contained nouns (*asmā*), which would be completed by Prophet Nūḥ coming up with the meanings of those nouns. This continued up to the advent of Prophet Ibrāhīm, who tried to combine the nouns and their meanings,

and of Prophet Musa with *al-Tanzīl* and Prophet 'Īsā with *al-Ta'wīl*, until being collected and sealed by the coming of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.).[38]

Realizing that there would no longer be a prophet to come after the advent of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) (Q 33:40, *wa khātama al-nabiyyīn*), it is thus logical if there is then a difference between the *Millah* of each prophet before him and the *"Millah"* of his. It is his *"Millah"* that was then called *al-Dīn*, which is *al-Islām*. In contrast to *Millah,* which is partial and temporal, *al-Dīn* is comprehensive and perennial in nature. Apart from the Qur'anic assertion over its capacity as guidance for both Muslim (Q 2:2, *Hudan li al-Muttaqīn*) people and humanity at large (Q 2:185, *Hudan li al-Nās*), the comprehensiveness of *al-Dīn* can be seen also from the semantic perspective Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas offers. He contends that there are at least four meanings of *Dīn*, i.e., state of indebtedness, self-surrender, justice, and natural tendencies. *Dīn* comes from the word *Dāna-Yadīnu* meaning being indebted such that a debtor, for instance, is called *Dā'in*. A true believer is a person who feels indebted to his Creator, Allah (s.w.t.), by appreciating what He has granted to him that enables him to navigate worldly life. To pay back that debt, their task is to believe in Him and to do good deeds for himself, his family, society, and so forth. Also, *Dīn* means submissiveness. The interconnectedness between the two lies in the fact that those having debt must submit and surrender to the rules and ordinances – as well as all logical consequences the self-surrender may bear – upheld by the one that they owe to. This one is that which is referred to by the third meaning of *Dīn*, namely *Dayyān* – a judge. A judge, in his relation with the debtors, is not but to act based on the principle of justice – as this is in line with justice, which shares the root word with the judge. The willingness of a debtor to submit himself to obey the ordinances upheld by the creditor and the inclination of the creditor himself to act and deal with debtors based on the spirit of justice is then in line with the fourth meaning: natural tendencies. Man, whatever religion, culture, or community he embraces, is by default committed to justice.[39]

So, *Dīn* is a very broad concept and unique, in which there is a willingness to do good deeds for each other, total obedience to the rules upheld by the government, commitment to justice, and awareness that all of those good deeds are innate human nature. All this kind of comprehensive meaning that *Dīn* comprises is not to be

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[38] al-Shahrustānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal*, 1:38–39.
[39] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 42–44.

found in the partial *Millah* but in the comprehensive *Dīn.* As for the perennial aspect of *Dīn,* it can be shown through, *first,* the absence of other prophets and the teachings he is to be entrusted with. Based on the principle that God will always provide human beings with guidance throughout their stages of history, this absence indicates that the last teaching, i.e., that of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), would survive eternally. *Second,* the eternity of *Dīn* also lies in the selected diction the Qur'an employs. Like the redundant words of *O Mankind* (Q 2:21, Q 35:3, Q 22:49, *yā ayyuha al-nās*), it is not but to reveal that the mission of the Qur'an which is the biggest miracle of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is perennial, eternal, and basically presented for all human being living in different stages of human history since the commencement of his prophetic mission.

Based on the elaborations above, the following image may represent the conclusion the present research seeks to draw:
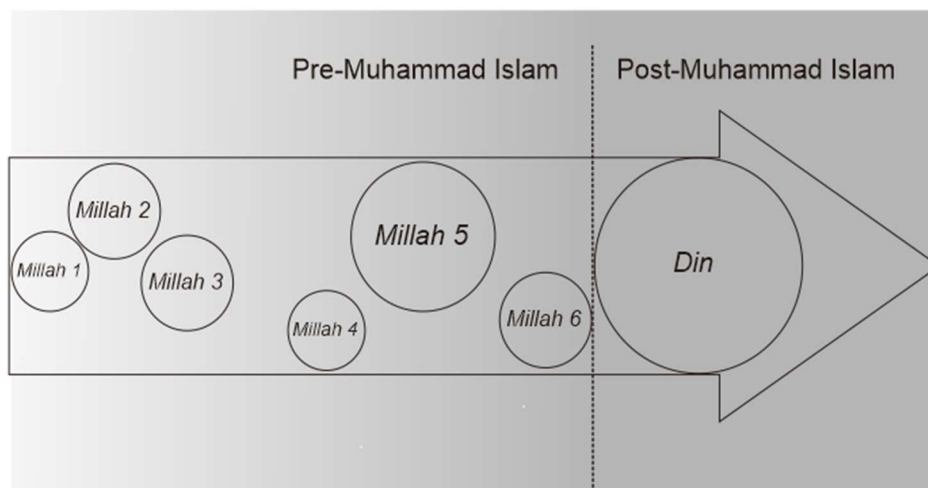

Image 1. Islam before Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Islam after Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

The image generally classifies, through the imaginary vertical line, the formation stages of Islam into two, i.e., the pre-Muhammad period, called *Millah*, and the post-Muhammadan one, named *Dīn*. As the image refers to the shape of each circle, those before Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) tend to be smaller and more particular compared to the one after him, which is the biggest and fullest. It can be thus concluded that the religion of Islam is basically one, yet this oneness may be classified into two. At the stage of *Millah*, the oneness of Islam was distributed among a large number of prophets, with each of them having a set of unique characteristics, as this is referred to by the small and particular shapes of *Millah*-based circles. As for the stage of *Dīn,* the oneness of Islam is entrusted only to the one and final Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), with his teachings comprising, directly

or indirectly, all aspects of human life, as this is indicated by the biggest and fullest shape of the *Dīn*-based circle above. The solid color of *Dīn*, compared to that of *Millah*, also denotes the comprehensiveness of Islam during the reign of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) which was not found in the prophets before him. liquidity All this, again, corresponds to al-Sharustānī's view that the formation of a religion Allah (S.W.T.) is pleased with is like a creation of His creatures,[40] namely incorporating the principle of graduality from one phase to another, from differently multiple *Millah* to a complete religion called Islam. Thus, to comprehend the universality of *Islām*, stopping merely at its generic meaning, i.e., self-surrender, and not incorporating all other logical implications that the self-surrender bears as this all was held by Madjid can lead to a conclusion a little bit far away from the stance of moderation. Taking *excellence* as one of the meanings of moderation,[41] which can be meant also as *comprehensiveness*, this immoderation lies in the absence of Madjid's inclusion and integration of all possible arguments the Qur'an provided about the meaning of *Islām*.

Conclusion

The present research embarks on the issue that in the discourse of religious pluralism with its limitation to the context of the transcendent unity of religion, the meaning of *Islām* as contained in the Qur'an, either the name of a particular religion or merely the attitude of submission, has not received a fairly comprehensive elaboration. Success in ascertaining which one of both is closer to logic will contribute to offering a new perspective to the ongoing heated debate in the discourse. An attempt to enable the present research closer to logic will then be manifested, at the analysis stage, in the employment of comparative and content methods in which every Qur'anic verse containing the word *Islām* is seen interconnected and integrated from one to another such that all of them serve rather as a web of meaning instead of each being isolated.

Taking the thoughts of Nurcholish Madjid, who was among the leading Indonesian Muslim thinkers, as the main case and employing the Arabic semantic theory of defined (*ism maʿrifah*) and undefined nouns (*ism nakirah*), the research

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[40] Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm Ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahrustānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal* (Cairo: Muʾassasah al-Ḥalbā, 1968), 39.
[41] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh Al-Wasaṭiyyah al-Islāmiyyah Wa al-Tajdīd: Maʿālim Wa Manārāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009), 44.

revealed that, *first,* the word *Islām* in the Qur'an carries from the very outset its generic and universal meaning, i.e., self-surrender. However, the nature of this universality can be divided into two: partial and temporary, which applied in the ages before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), and comprehensive and perennial, which has applied from the time of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) onwards. Based on this, *second,* while the pre-Muhammad '*Islām*' is considered as having manifested in the form of *Millah*, which was multiple, the post-Muhammad *Islām* is the so-called *Dīn*, which was single. Therefore, *Islām* in the Qur'an is closer to being defined as the name of religion.

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