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THE CONCEPT OF AHL AL-KITAB AND ITS RELATION TO POLYTHEISM (SHIRK) IN THE QUR'AN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EXEGESIS OF FAKHRUDDIN AL-RAZI AND MUHAMMAD RASHID RIDA

KONSEP AHL AL-KITAB DAN KAITANNYA DENGAN POLITEISME (SYIRIK) DALAM AL-QUR'AN: STUDI KOMPARATIF TERHADAP TAFSIR KARYA FAKHRUDDIN AL-RAZI DAN MUHAMMAD RASYID RIDA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of Ahl al-Kitab and its relationship with polytheism in the Qur'an through a comparative examination of the exegesis of Fakhruddin al-Razi and Muhammad Rashid Rida. The study is motivated by differing scholarly interpretations regarding the scope of Ahl al-Kitab and their theological status, particularly whether they are classified solely as disbelievers or also as polytheists. This research employs a qualitative-comparative method with a library research approach. Primary data are derived from Mafatih al-Ghayb by al-Razi and Tafsir al-Manar by Rashid Rida, while secondary data are obtained from relevant exegetical literature, books, and academic articles. The analysis focuses on interpretive methodologies, the use of textual evidence, the scope of the meaning of Ahl al-Kitab, and its theological implications in relation to the concept of shirk. The findings reveal a fundamental divergence between the two scholars. Al-Razi tends to regard Ahl al-Kitab, particularly Jews and Christians who attribute divinity to entities other than God, as both disbelievers and substantively polytheistic. In contrast, Rashid Rida asserts that Ahl al-Kitab are distinct from polytheists; they are categorized as disbelievers but not as polytheists, as the Qur'an differentiates between these two terms. Furthermore, Rida expands the scope of Ahl al-Kitab to include other religions that are presumed to have originated from divine revelation. This difference reflects a broader divergence in approach between classical exegesis, which is more normative-theological, and modern exegesis, which tends to be more contextual and inclusive.

Keywords : Ahl al-Kitab, Polytheism, Fakhruddin al-Razi, Muhammad Rashid Rida.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep Ahl al-Kitab dan relasinya dengan kemusyrikan dalam Al-Qur'an melalui studi komparatif atas tafsir Fakhruddin al-Razi dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha. Kajian ini berangkat dari perbedaan penafsiran ulama mengenai cakupan Ahl al-Kitab dan status teologisnya, khususnya apakah mereka hanya tergolong kafir atau juga musyrik. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif-komparatif dengan pendekatan library research. Data primer bersumber dari Mafatih al-Ghayb karya al-Razi dan Tafsīr al-Manār karya Rasyid Ridha, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur tafsir, buku, dan artikel ilmiah yang relevan. Analisis dilakukan terhadap metodologi penafsiran, penggunaan dalil, cakupan makna Ahl al-Kitab, serta implikasi teologisnya dalam kaitan dengan konsep syirik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa al-Razi dan Rasyid Ridha memiliki perbedaan mendasar. Al-Razi cenderung memandang Ahl al-Kitab, khususnya Yahudi dan Nasrani yang menetapkan unsur ketuhanan selain Allah, sebagai kelompok kafir sekaligus musyrik secara substantif. Sebaliknya, Rasyid Ridha menegaskan bahwa Ahl al-Kitab berbeda dari musyrik; mereka tergolong kafir, tetapi tidak musyrik, karena Al-Qur'an membedakan kedua istilah tersebut. Selain itu, Ridha memperluas cakupan Ahl al-Kitab hingga mencakup agama-agama lain yang diduga memiliki asal-usul wahyu. Perbedaan ini menunjukkan adanya perbedaan pendekatan antara tafsir klasik yang normatif-teologis dan tafsir modern yang lebih kontekstual dan inklusif.

Kata Kunci : Ahl al-Kitab, musyrik, Fakhruddin al-Razi, Muhammad Rasyid Ridha.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Ahl al-Kitab constitutes one of the key terminologies in the Qur'an, bearing significant theological, legal, and social implications within Islamic discourse. This term appears in several verses, including Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 105, Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 5, and Q.S. al-Bayyinah [98]: 1, indicating that Ahl al-Kitab occupies a distinct position in the construction of relations between Islam and other religious communities. The term refers to communities that received revealed scriptures prior to the Qur'an, particularly the Jews and Christians. Over time, however, the meaning and scope of Ahl al-Kitab have not been uniformly understood. These interpretive differences have given rise to broader questions, particularly regarding the boundaries of who may be categorized as Ahl al-Kitab and their theological status in relation to polytheism (Amaly & Rahmat, 2018).

Debates surrounding Ahl al-Kitab extend beyond terminological identification into the theological domain. Some scholars interpret Ahl al-Kitab in a limited sense, restricting it to Jews and Christians (Nasrullah, 2016). Others, however, broaden its scope to include additional religious groups considered to possess scriptures or teachings originating from divine revelation, even if such teachings have undergone alteration (Hitami, 2012, p. 90). These differing perspectives significantly influence how exegetes understand the relationship between Ahl al-Kitab and polytheists. At this point, the issue becomes particularly significant, as such classifications shape Islamic perspectives on other religious communities in matters of creed, law, and social relations.

This complexity becomes even more apparent when Qur'anic verses concerning Ahl al-Kitab are read alongside those addressing polytheism. In certain contexts, the Qur'an distinguishes Ahl al-Kitab from polytheists, while in others it presents theological critiques of some of their beliefs, which are considered deviations from monotheism (Amaly & Rahmat, 2018). Therefore, any discussion of Ahl al-Kitab requires both textual and contextual analysis, taking into account exegetical approaches, the intellectual backgrounds of the commentators, and the historical contexts in which their interpretations were produced.

Fakhruddin al-Razi as a representative of classical exegetical tradition characterized by a rational-theological approach that integrates linguistic analysis, philosophy, kalam, and logic (M. A. H. Mahmud, 2006, p. 323), provides a relevant framework for examining theological issues, including the boundaries of Ahl al-Kitab, their status of belief, and their relation to polytheism. The status of

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Mafatih al-Ghayb as an influential encyclopedic exegesis renders al-Razi's views significant, both in terms of interpretive substance and methodological approach.

Muhammad Rashid Rida in contrast represents a modern exegetical orientation that seeks to interpret the Qur'an within the broader context of social and intellectual transformations in the modern Muslim world (Anwar, 2001, p. 260). In his discussion of Ahl al-Kitab, Rashid Rida attempts to expand the category to include other religious communities such as the Magians, Sabeans, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of Confucianism, insofar as they are understood to have originally derived from divine revelation (Ridha, 1973, p. 186). This perspective reflects a significant shift from a narrow understanding toward a more inclusive and historically grounded approach. For Rida, not all non-Muslim communities can be automatically equated with polytheists, as the religious history of humanity suggests that every community has received messengers and divine guidance.

Al-Razi represents the strength of classical theological argumentation, whereas Rashid Rida offers a more contextual reading that takes into account the history of religions, the universality of prophetic missions, and the possibility of revelation within religious traditions beyond Judaism and Christianity. Both figures are thus highly relevant for comparison, as each represents a distinct intellectual horizon.

Based on these considerations, examining the thought of Fakhruddin al-Razi and Muhammad Rashid Rida becomes essential in order to understand how the concept of Ahl al-Kitab is constructed, delimited, or expanded within the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis. A comparative analysis of the two is expected to clarify points of convergence and divergence in understanding the theological status of Ahl al-Kitab, while also revealing the influence of intellectual background, exegetical methodology, and historical context on their interpretive frameworks. Accordingly, this study seeks to provide a conceptual foundation for reexamining the relationship between Islam and other religious communities within contemporary Islamic discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several previous studies have addressed the concept of Ahl al-Kitab. Among them, the study conducted by Muslim Djuned and Nazla Mufidah (2017) explains that Ahl al-Kitab refers to groups possessing revealed scriptures other than the Qur'an, with general agreement that this category includes Jews and Christians, although differences arise regarding its scope. Rashid Rida, for instance, expands the category to include the Magians, Sabeans, Hindus, and Buddhists (Djuned & Mufidah, 2017). While this study shares a similar focus on Rida's thought, it differs in that it does not adopt a comparative approach.

Furthermore, the research by Muhammad Arif and Dwi Sukmanila Sayska (2025) demonstrates that Rida interprets Ahl al-Kitab in a broader sense, whereas Thanthawi limits it to Jews and Christians, resulting in differing legal implications in social relations (Arif & Sayska, 2025). The similarity lies in the use of a comparative approach; however, the object of analysis differs, as the present study compares the exegesis of al-Razi and Rida.

Additionally, the study by Mahmud Rifaannudin and Syamsul Hadi Untung (2019) emphasizes that Rida does not classify Ahl al-Kitab as polytheists and further discusses its social implications, such as dietary laws, intermarriage, and leadership (Rifaannudin & Untung, 2019). The similarity lies in the discussion of the theological status of Ahl al-Kitab, while the difference is that the study focuses primarily on social aspects.

In general, previous studies tend to examine the thought of Rashid Rida in a partial manner. This study in contrast offers novelty by presenting a comparative analysis between Fakhruddin al-Razi and Rashid Rida in understanding the relationship between Ahl al-Kitab and polytheism.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-comparative method with a library research approach. The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. The primary sources include *Mafatih al-Ghayb* by Fakhruddin al-Razi and *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad Rashid Rida, while the

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secondary sources are drawn from various works of Qur'anic exegesis, books, and academic journal articles relevant to the discussion of Ahl al-Kitab.

Data analysis is conducted by examining the interpretive methodologies of both exegetes, their use of Qur'anic and hadith-based evidence, the scope of the meaning of Ahl al-Kitab, and its theological implications, particularly in relation to the concept of polytheism. The comparative method is applied to systematically analyze and contrast the interpretations of the two scholars regarding Qur'anic verses related to Ahl al-Kitab, such as Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 105, Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 5, and Q.S. al-Bayyinah [98]: 1. This approach aims to identify points of convergence and divergence, as well as the underlying factors that shape their respective interpretive frameworks.

3. RESULT AND DISCCUSSION

The Meaning of Ahl Al-Kitab

Etymologically, the word ahl derives from the root letters *alif*, *ha*, and *lam*, which convey meanings of closeness, familiarity, and affiliation (Diknas, 1996, p. 11). The term refers to family, group, or community bound by particular relationships, whether based on lineage, religion, or shared social characteristics such as profession and ethnicity (Al-Raghib al-Ashfahani, n.d., p. 25). It is also used to denote groups with a special connection, as in the term Ahl al-Bayt, which refers to the family of the Prophet Muhammad. In the Qur'an, the term ahl appears in various contexts and is mentioned approximately 125 times (Al-Baqi, 1992, pp. 121–123), including references to the Prophet's family (Q.S. al-Ahzab [33]: 33), particular communities (Q.S. al-Qashash [28]: 45), and groups adhering to specific beliefs or teachings (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 105).

Meanwhile, the word al-kitab derives from the root letters *kaf*, *ta*, and *ba*, which literally mean writing, book, or a structured collection of statements (Munawwir, 1997, p. 1275). Al-kitab in the Qur'an refers to divine revelation bestowed by God upon the prophets in the form of sacred scriptures. The usage of this term in the Qur'an is broad and encompasses meanings such as law, decree, and divine ordinance. In its various forms, the term al-kitab appears approximately 319 times in the Qur'an, underscoring its significance within the structure of Islamic teachings (Muhammad, 2021). The term also includes scriptures revealed to earlier prophets, such as the Torah given to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus, and the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (Haniru, 2023).

From this, it can be understood that the term Ahl al-Kitab generally refers to communities or groups that are affiliated with sacred scriptures believed to originate from divine revelation. It is most commonly used to denote adherents of Judaism and Christianity as recipients of revealed scriptures prior to the Qur'an. However, the term may also be interpreted more broadly to include other communities that adhere to revealed religions and possess sacred texts as the foundation of their teachings. Thus, Ahl al-Kitab constitutes a religious category that is both historical and theological in nature, playing a significant role in shaping the understanding of the relationship between Islam and other scriptural religious traditions.

The Meaning of Polytheism (Shirk)

The term *mushrik* (polytheist) derives from the root word *shirk*, which etymologically denotes association, partnership, or the mixing of two or more entities. This root appears in various forms, such as *ishtaraka*, meaning "to share," and *sharika*, which indicates the involvement of two parties in joint ownership or activity. Another derivative, *sharik*, refers to a partner, while its plural forms include *ashraak* and *shuraka'*. The term is also used in a general sense to describe something jointly possessed, as in the expression *tariq mushtarak*, meaning a road shared by many people (Ar-Ruhailiy, n.d., p. 99).

In *Maqayis al-Lughah*, the root letters *shin*, *ra*, and *kaf* are said to carry two fundamental meanings. The first denotes partnership or association, in contrast to singularity or unity. The second conveys the sense of continuity and order (Zakariya, 1972, p. 265). From these foundational meanings emerge various derivative connotations, including mixture, portion or share, equality, disbelief, rivalry, counterpart (*nidd*), similarity, equivalence, and other meanings that reflect a relationship

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between two or more entities. Thus, the concept of *shirk* encompasses not only physical forms of association but also broader semantic dimensions, including theological implications.

In the Qur'an, the practice of *shirk* is closely related to the historical development of human communities and the prophetic mission, as exemplified in the narrative of the people of Prophet Noah. As discussed in studies on the primacy of monotheism over polytheism, Prophet Adam lived in a state of pure monotheism, and this belief was transmitted to his descendants across generations. Early human societies remained committed to monotheism until the time of Prophet Noah (Ar-Ruhailiy, n.d., p. 167).

This view is supported by a report from Ibn Abbas, which states that the period between Prophet Adam and Prophet Noah spanned ten generations (*qurun*), all of whom adhered to the teachings of Islam, understood here as monotheism. The term *qarn* may refer either to a century, as commonly understood, or to a generation of people. This usage is consistent with Qur'anic expressions that describe the destruction of generations following the time of Noah, as indicated in the verse: "And how many generations after Noah have We destroyed." (Ar-Ruhailiy, n.d., p. 167). Therefore, the emergence of *shirk* in human history is understood as a phenomenon that arose after a prolonged period of monotheism and became a central focus of prophetic missions aimed at restoring humanity to the doctrine of divine unity.

Scholarly Debates on The Boundaries of Ahl Al-Kitab and Poltheists

Scholars generally agree that the category of Ahl al-Kitab includes the Jewish and Christian communities (Turnip, 2021). However, the differs arises regarding whether this category is limited exclusively to these two groups or extends to other religious communities beyond them (Ilham, 2020). This debate has further developed alongside evolving interpretations of the concept of Ahl al-Kitab, particularly in relation to Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 5, which addresses the permissibility of consuming the food of Ahl al-Kitab and marrying their women (Daud et al., 2022). This verse serves as a crucial reference point in determining the boundaries and legal implications of who qualifies as Ahl al-Kitab, as well as their relationship with groups outside Judaism and Christianity (Arsal, 2018).

In the early period of Islamic development, the term Ahl al-Kitab was used specifically to refer to Jews and Christians (Andi Eka Putra, 2016). Other groups, such as the Magians, although known during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, were not explicitly classified as Ahl al-Kitab (Dzulhadi, 2014). Nevertheless, certain treatments toward these groups resembled those accorded to Ahl al-Kitab, as reflected in the Prophet's instruction that they be treated similarly to them (Hidayat, 2001, p. 30).

As Islamic thought developed, the scope of Ahl al-Kitab underwent significant expansion. Some scholars began to include other religious communities such as the Magians, Sabeans, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of Shinto within this category (R. Mahmud, 2018). This view is exemplified by Maulana Muhammad Ali, who argued that followers of these religions fall under Ahl al-Kitab, despite the presence of elements in their practices that may resemble polytheism. According to him, such communities should still be regarded as Ahl al-Kitab rather than as polytheists (Ali, 1977, p. 412).

This broader perspective is grounded in the assumption that existing religions, including those beyond Judaism and Christianity, ultimately originate from divine revelation conveyed through earlier prophets and messengers, even though their teachings may have undergone transformation and deviation over time (Yazid, 17 C.E., p. 7823). Indeed, Christianity itself is viewed by some as having diverged from the original teachings brought by Prophet Jesus (Kurahman, 2017).

Conversely, other scholars maintain the classical limitation of Ahl al-Kitab. Sayyid Qutb, in his exegesis, asserts that Ahl al-Kitab refers exclusively to Jews and Christians, both in the past and the present, without extending the term to other groups (Qutb, 2000, p. 199). A similar position is held by Quraish Shihab, who states that Ahl al-Kitab encompasses all adherents of Judaism and Christianity regardless of time, place, or lineage. This view is based on the Qur'anic usage of the term, which, within the context of Arab society at the time of revelation, referred specifically to these two

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communities (Shihab, 1994, p. 367).

The debate over the boundaries of Ahl al-Kitab thus reveals two primary interpretive tendencies: one that restricts the category to Jews and Christians, and another that expands it to include other religious traditions. This divergence is not merely conceptual but also carries significant theological and legal implications, particularly in defining the relationship between Ahl al-Kitab and the category of polytheists within Islamic thought.

Scholarly Debates on The Boundaries of Ahl Al-Kitab and Poltheists

The debate over whether Ahl al-Kitab should be classified as disbelievers (*kafir*) or polytheists (*mushrik*) constitutes a significant issue in Qur'anic exegesis (Engariano, 2020). The Qur'an frequently describes Ahl al-Kitab as a group that does not believe, as explicitly stated in Q.S. al-Bayyinah [98]: 1. This classification of disbelief is generally understood as a rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad and the message he conveyed (Dadang, 2023). This perspective is further supported by al-Ghazali, who argues that disbelief, in the context of Ahl al-Kitab, refers to the rejection of the Messenger despite knowledge of the truth. Accordingly, Jews and Christians are categorized as disbelievers due to their rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad (Madjid, 1994, p. 162).

The issue becomes more complex when addressing whether Ahl al-Kitab also fall under the category of polytheists. This complexity arises from the conceptual distinction between the terms *kafir* and *mushrik* (Subhan, 2022). Al-Tabathaba'i classifies *shirk* into two primary forms: *shirk zahir* (manifest polytheism) and *shirk khafi* (hidden polytheism). The former refers to explicit belief in deities other than God, while the latter encompasses implicit forms of association that contain elements of polytheism. Certain beliefs held by Ahl al-Kitab, such as the doctrine that Jesus is the son of God, may be categorized as a form of hidden polytheism. Nevertheless, they are not explicitly labeled as polytheists in many Qur'anic verses (Thabathabai, 1983, p. 202).

This condition explains why the Qur'an does not unequivocally equate Ahl al-Kitab with polytheists, thereby leaving room for different of opinion among scholars (Bariyah, 2019). Some scholars do not classify Ahl al-Kitab as polytheists, while others argue that elements of polytheism may be attributed to them in certain respects (Andriani, 2018).

Muhammad Rashid Rida, in *Tafsir al-Manar*, maintains that Ahl al-Kitab are essentially adherents of monotheism, although, in the course of historical development, some among them have fallen into practices resembling polytheism (Ridha, 1973, p. 178). This, according to him, occurred because they did not fully abandon earlier traditions that contained elements of *shirk*. For this reason, God distinguishes clearly between Ahl al-Kitab and polytheists.

In defining the scope of Ahl al-Kitab, Rashid Rida refers to Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]: 5, which permits Muslims to consume the food of Ahl al-Kitab and to marry their chaste women (*muhsanat*) (Uup Gufron, 2018). In interpreting the term *muhsanat*, scholars differ in opinion (Robikah, 2020). Some, such as al-Shafi'i, argue that it refers specifically to free and chaste women, thereby excluding female slaves from the permissibility of marriage, based on Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 25 (Amri, 2020).

Rashid Rida asserts that Ahl al-Kitab among Jews and Christians do not fall into the category of polytheists (Nasution, 2022). He emphasizes that the term *mushrik* in the Qur'an primarily refers to the Arab polytheists who lacked revealed scriptures, often described as *ummiyyun* (those without scriptural knowledge) (Ridha, 1973, p. 186). Based on this understanding, Rida also includes groups such as the Sabeans and Magians, as well as religions presumed to possess sacred scriptures, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism within the category of Ahl al-Kitab rather than polytheists (Mujiburrahman, 2016).

Rida's argument is grounded in several Qur'anic verses, including Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 105, Q.S. al-Bayyinah [98]: 1, and Q.S. al-Hajj [22]: 17, where the term *mushrik* appears alongside Ahl al-Kitab connected by the conjunction *waw*. In Arabic linguistic principles, this conjunction indicates separation between two distinct categories, suggesting that Ahl al-Kitab and polytheists are not identical (Ridha, 1973, p. 186).

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Furthermore, Q.S. al-Tawbah [9]: 31 states that some among Ahl al-Kitab took their rabbis and religious scholars as "lords" besides God. However, according to Rida, this does not necessarily render them polytheists in the same sense as idol worshippers. He interprets this as a form of *shirk* in the domain of *rububiyyah*, namely attributing legislative authority to humans instead of divine revelation. This differs from *shirk* in *uluhiyyah*, which characterizes the Arab polytheists who directly worship entities other than God (Cawidu, 1991, p. 167).

Rashid Rida thus conceptualizes Ahl al-Kitab in a broader sense, extending beyond Jews and Christians to include various religious communities that possess sacred texts or teachings rooted in revelation, even if these have undergone alteration (Karim, 2022). He argues that the Qur'an does not explicitly mention religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism due to the limited knowledge of the Arab audience at the time, and to avoid referencing unfamiliar concepts (*ighrab*) (Ridha, 1973, p. 272).

This view contrasts with that of his teacher, Muhammad Abduh, who maintained that Ahl al-Kitab includes only Jews, Christians, and Sabeans, as inferred from Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 62 (Abduh, 1999, p. 172).

In contrast, Fakhruddin al-Razi, in his interpretation of Q.S. al-Tawbah [9]: 30–31, argues that the beliefs of Jews and Christians, particularly those affirming the notion of a son of God indicate a fundamental *'adam al-iman bi Allah* (lack of true faith in God). According to him, anyone who attributes partners to God in any form, including in the concept of the divinity of Jesus, has essentially fallen into polytheism. Al-Razi emphasizes that there is no substantial difference between idol worshippers and those who worship entities other than God, as the essence of *shirk* lies in directing acts of devotion to anything besides God (Ar-Razi, 1985, p. 59).

Al-Razi further argues that the disbelief of Christians is even more severe than that of idol worshippers, as the latter do not claim their idols to be creators of the universe but merely intermediaries. In contrast, Christians are seen as affirming doctrines such as *hulul* (incarnation) and *ittihad* (union), which he regards as grave forms of disbelief (Ghalib, 1998, p. 74). Thus, in essence, there is no difference between them and polytheists, although Islamic law continues to distinguish between them, for example, in the acceptance of jizyah, due to their association with prophets and revealed scriptures.

Al-Razi also explains that taking rabbis and scholars as lords does not imply belief in them as creators, but rather obedience to them in establishing laws contrary to divine revelation. This interpretation is supported by a narration from 'Adi ibn Hatim, which clarifies that such "worship" refers to obedience in matters of lawful and unlawful. Al-Razi further notes that this phenomenon is not limited to earlier communities but can also be observed among Muslims, where some individuals prioritize scholarly opinions over the Qur'anic text (Ar-Razi, 1985, p. 27).

He outlines several possible meanings of this form of divinization: (1) obedience to scholars in matters *mukhalif lil wahyi* (contrary to revelation) (Billah, 2022, pp. 195–232), (2) acceptance of teachings containing elements of disbelief (Ar-Razi, 1985, p. 30), (3) belief in doctrines such as incarnation and union, and (4) excessive veneration of religious figures (Ar-Razi, 1985, p. 32). According to him, all these forms constitute manifestations of *shirk* that may occur across different communities.

From this perspective, al-Razi affirms that all revealed scriptures, including the Torah and the Gospel, fundamentally teach monotheism, as stated in the verse: "And they were not commanded except to worship one God" (Q.S. al-Tawbah [9]: 31) (Alawiyah, 2023, pp. 99–105). This verse reinforces the principle of monotheism and rejects all forms of association with God, whether in worship, legislation, or veneration (Ar-Razi, 1985, p. 35).

In conclusion, Rashid Rida tends to draw a clear distinction between Ahl al-Kitab and polytheists while expanding the scope of Ahl al-Kitab. In contrast, Fakhruddin al-Razi emphasizes the theological dimension, highlighting the essential similarity between certain beliefs of Ahl al-Kitab and polytheism, although they remain legally distinct. This divergence reflects broader differences in

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methodology and intellectual context between classical and modern exegesis in understanding the relationship between Ahl al-Kitab and the concept of *shirk*.

4. CONCLUSION

The primary difference between Fakhruddin al-Razi and Muhammad Rashid Rida lies in their determination of the theological status of Ahl al-Kitab in relation to the concept of polytheism. Al-Razi tends to argue that the beliefs of Ahl al-Kitab particularly those concerning theological doctrines such as the attribution of a son of God and adherence to religious authorities beyond divine revelation contain elements of associating partners with God. Consequently, in essence, they fall into the categories of both disbelievers and polytheists.

In contrast, Rashid Rida firmly maintains that Ahl al-Kitab are not to be classified as polytheists, but rather solely as disbelievers, on the basis that the Qur'an explicitly distinguishes between the two categories through the use of the conjunctive particle (*waw*). Furthermore, Rida expands the scope of Ahl al-Kitab to include other religious communities possessing sacred scriptures, differing from al-Razi's tendency to emphasize a stricter theological framework grounded in monotheism. These differences reflect broader methodological distinctions: al-Razi adopts a more normative-theological approach, whereas Rashid Rida employs a more contextual and inclusive perspective.

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