



The Concept of the Term *Sawa'* (Common Word) in the Qur'an According to Fakhruddin al-Razi in *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib*

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ABSTRACT

Religious pluralism is a complex issue in modern society that acknowledges religious diversity and the view that each religion has its own truth. Among Muslims, understanding pluralism without compromising faith principles poses a significant challenge. The concept of *Kalimat Sawa'* (Common Word) from Surah Ali Imran: 64, proposed by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the People of the Book, is relevant in this context. *Kalimat Sawa'* calls for the oneness of Allah and avoidance of associating partners with Him, providing a basis for fair interfaith dialogue. This study employs a quantitative approach with a comparative analysis of *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib* by Fakhruddin al-Razi and other commentaries, and utilizes digital sources to expand the scope of data. The findings indicate that *Kalimat Sawa'* emphasizes justice and equality in interfaith dialogue and the importance of returning to the principle of monotheism. Although deeply rooted in the socio-historical context of al-Razi, this concept must be adapted to digital dynamics and contemporary pluralism to remain relevant. In conclusion, *Kalimat Sawa'* offers a framework for fostering harmonious relationships amid religious diversity by emphasizing dialogue based on justice. However, its application needs to be adjusted to contemporary contexts to address the increasingly complex challenges of religious pluralism and contribute to interfaith harmony.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis, *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib*, Fakhruddin al-Razi, Digital Sources, Justice in Dialogue.

ABSTRAK

Pluralisme agama merupakan isu kompleks dalam masyarakat modern yang mengakui keberagaman agama serta pandangan bahwa setiap agama memiliki kebenarannya masing-masing. Di kalangan umat Islam, memahami pluralisme tanpa mengorbankan prinsip-prinsip keimanan menjadi tantangan yang signifikan. Konsep *Kalimat Sawa'* (Kata Sepakat) dalam Surah Ali Imran ayat 64, yang diajukan oleh Nabi Muhammad ﷺ kepada Ahli Kitab, relevan dalam konteks ini. *Kalimat Sawa'* menyerukan ketauhidan Allah dan larangan menyekutukan-Nya, serta memberikan landasan bagi dialog antaragama yang adil. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan analisis komparatif terhadap *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib* karya Fakhruddin al-Razi dan tafsir-tafsir lainnya, serta memanfaatkan sumber digital untuk memperluas cakupan data. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Kalimat Sawa'* menekankan prinsip keadilan dan kesetaraan dalam dialog lintas agama, serta pentingnya kembali pada prinsip tauhid. Meskipun berpijak pada konteks sosial-historis al-Razi, konsep ini perlu disesuaikan dengan dinamika digital dan realitas pluralisme kontemporer agar tetap relevan. Kesimpulannya, *Kalimat Sawa'* menawarkan kerangka kerja untuk membangun hubungan yang harmonis di tengah keberagaman agama melalui dialog yang berlandaskan keadilan. Namun demikian, penerapannya perlu dikontekstualisasikan ulang agar mampu menjawab tantangan pluralisme agama yang semakin kompleks dan berkontribusi pada harmoni antariman.

Keywords: Analisis Komparatif, *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib*, Fakhruddin al-Razi, Sumber Digital, Keadilan dalam Dialog.

Introduction

Religious pluralism remains one of the most debated issues in modern society. In this context, pluralism refers to the recognition of religious diversity and



the view that each religion holds its own values and truths. However, this inclusive approach often raises theological questions and challenges, particularly among Muslims (Armayanto, 2014). How should a Muslim engage with and respond to the reality of religious pluralism without compromising the core tenets of Islamic faith? One concept that offers potential insight into this dilemma is *Kalimat Sawwa'* (Common Word), found in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Ali Imran, verse 64 (A'yun et al., 2021).

Kalimat Sawwa' represents a call from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) to unite upon a shared principle: the oneness of God and the rejection of associating partners with Him (Wijaya, 2016). This concept carries profound implications for interfaith dialogue, aiming to establish a common ground amid deep theological differences. Nevertheless, the interpretation and application of *Kalimat Sawwa'* within the framework of religious pluralism remains a subject of ongoing scholarly debate (A'yun, 2019).

One of the most comprehensive classical interpretations of this concept is found in *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib* by Fakhruddin al-Razi, a highly influential scholar in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Al-Razi interprets *Kalimat Sawwa'* through a rational and philosophical lens, emphasizing justice, equality, and the universal human quest for divine truth. His commentary presents *Kalimat Sawwa'* as a foundation for ethical engagement with religious others and a call to uphold shared moral and theological principles.

However, applying this concept to the complexities of contemporary religious pluralism presents a set of unique challenges. How can *Kalimat Sawwa'* be meaningfully integrated into current interfaith discourse without diluting Islamic religious identity? Can this approach address the increasing intricacies of religious coexistence in a digitally connected, globalized world?

This study aims to explore the conceptual framework of *Kalimat Sawwa'* as presented in al-Razi's tafsir, examine its relevance within modern pluralistic societies, and identify both the challenges and potential solutions it offers in responding to the evolving dynamics of religious interaction. By recontextualizing a classical interpretation within modern realities, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic theology can support constructive interfaith engagement without compromising doctrinal integrity.

Research Methods

Review of Research Methodology on *Kalimat Sawwa'* in *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib*: This research adopts a qualitative approach based on literature study by utilizing print and digital sources to explore the concept of *Kalimat Sawwa'* in depth (Fadli, 2021). Specifically, it integrates two methods of Qur'anic interpretation: *mudhu'i* (thematic) method for holistic analysis of the theme of *Kalimat Sawwa'*

across verses in Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib and its comparison with other scholars, and tahlili (analytical) method to examine in detail al-Razi's interpretation of specific verses (such as QS Ali Imran: 64) through linguistic, historical, and theological approaches. The research stages include primary-secondary data collection, content analysis (combining tahlili and maudhu'i), comparative analysis of other scholars' interpretations, and contextualization of the findings within a socio-historical framework and modern pluralism. Although this combination of tafsir methods is a strength that enriches the depth of analysis and succeeds in revealing the uniqueness of al-Razi's interpretation, the research needs to further clarify the operationalization of the tahlili method and include strict selection criteria for digital sources. Thus, this research has the potential to contribute significantly to contemporary tafsir studies and interfaith dialog.

Results and discussion

1.1. The Etymology of *Kalimat Sawa'*

Etymologically, the phrase *kalimat sawa'* consists of two words: *kalimat*, which literally means "word" or "utterance," and *sawa'*, which means "equal" or "same." Upon further examination, the word *kalimat* (كَلِمَة) is the singular form of *kalim* (كَلِم), derived from the verb *kallama-yukallimu* (كَلَّمَ - يَكَلِّم). According to linguists, this term refers to any expression articulated by humans, whether in the form of a single word or a compound phrase (*al-lafzhah mā yanṭiqu bihi al-insān, mufradan kāna aw murakkaban*). Ibn Faris, a renowned literary scholar and expert in Arabic linguistics, explains that the word *kalima* has two meanings: first, an intelligible expression (*nāṭiqin muḥimīn*), and second, a wound or injury (*jarāḥin*). In the first sense, *kalima* refers to a comprehensible utterance (*al-lafzhah al-wāḥidah al-muḥimīyah*). This definition is supported by al-Fairuz Abadi in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, where he defines *al-kalimah* as "a word and its meaning."

The term *kalimah* appears in various places throughout the Qur'an with diverse meanings. In its singular form, it is mentioned 28 times, and in its plural form, it appears 14 times. Other derivatives, such as *kalim*, occur 4 times, *taḵlīmān* once, and *kalām* 4 times. The past tense verb form (*fi'l māḍī*) appears 6 times, while the present tense form (*fi'l muḍāri'*) is used 18 times. Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī identifies at least three core meanings of the word *kalimah*. In Surah al-Baqarah [2]:124, *kalimāt* refers to tests from Allah given to Prophet Abraham, such as the command to perform circumcision and to sacrifice his son, among other trials. In Surah Āli 'Imrān [3]:39, *kalimah* signifies the declaration of monotheism. Meanwhile, in Surah al-An'ām [6]:115, it denotes *al-qaḍiyyah* (a decree or decision), suggesting that any divine ruling—verbal or actionable—may be referred to as

kalimah. Consequently, some scholars interpret *kalimatu rabbika* as the divine law decreed and clarified by God to His servants, as reflected in Surah al-A‘rāf [7]:137, Ṭāhā [20]:129, al-Shūrā [42]:14, and Yūnus [10]:82 (Al-Farāhīdī, 1988).

The word *sawa’* (سَوَاء) is derived from the root *sawwā* (سَوَّى), which comes from the verb *sawwā-yusawwī-taswīyah* (سَوَّى - يُسَوِّي - تَسْوِيَةٌ), with the root letters *sīn-wāw-yā’*. According to Ibn Faris, this root conveys the meaning of *istiqāmah* (uprightness or firmness), which implies *i‘tidāl* (balance or equality between two elements). This meaning is associated with the idea of “perfection,” as something is considered perfect when it is stable and firmly established. Therefore, the central part of a house is referred to as *sawa’* because it is the most structurally secure section. Al-Fairuz Abadi in *al-Muḥīt* states that *sawa’* denotes justice and centrality (*al-‘adl wa al-wasat*). Al-Aṣḥfahānī adds that *sawa’* is derived from *sawā*, and therefore, *al-musāwah* signifies equality in measure. In Arabic, the expression *وذهب مثل ذلك من اللباس* means “this garment is equal in size to that one”. Al-Aṣḥfahānī notes that the derivations of *sawa’* in the Qur’an carry numerous meanings. For instance, the word *istawā*, meaning “to be equal,” can be applied in two contexts: first, where two or more subjects (*fā’il*) are involved, as in Surah al-Tawbah [9]:19; and second, to describe a particular type or form, as seen in Surah al-Najm [53]:6 and al-Mu‘minūn [23]:28. Another form, *al-sawīyy*, refers to someone who is free from excess (*ifrāt*) or deficiency (*tafrīt*), in terms of either measure or behavior, as mentioned in Surah Maryam [19]:10 and Ṭāhā [20]:135, among others (Fāris, 2011).

Based on this etymological analysis, *kalimatu sawa’* may be translated as “equal word” or “agreed-upon word.” However, some scholars interpret it as “a point of convergence” or “common ground.” Others use both interpretations simultaneously, such as Hamka in his *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to it as “a common word,” while Nurcholish Madjid frequently translates it as either “common platform” or “common word.” Such variations in translation are to be expected, considering the structural differences between the Arabic and English languages. Nonetheless, the choice of translation often reflects a particular ideological or interpretive inclination on the part of the translator (Armayanto, 2022).

1.2. The Context of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* of Surah Āli ‘Imrān: Verse 64

The interpretation of Surah Āli ‘Imrān:64 is not solely dependent on the opinions of scholars, but is also closely tied to the socio-historical context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in which the verse was revealed. Understanding the historical background of a Qur’anic verse enhances one’s insight into its intended meaning. Based on the

chronology of revelation, this verse is classified as *Madaniyyah*—revealed after the Prophet Muhammad’s migration (*Hijrah*) to Medina. At that time, Medina was a highly diverse society, both ethnically and religiously. Within the Muslim community itself, there were two primary groups: the *Muhājirūn* (emigrants) and the *Anṣār* (helpers), the latter of whom came from various tribes, primarily the Aws and Khazraj. Beyond the Muslim community, there were other religious groups, including Jews and Christians, who collectively comprised more than twenty tribal clans (Fatih, 2022).

As the political and spiritual leader of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad faced the challenge of establishing a harmonious and just social order in the midst of this diversity. To address this, he formulated a constitutional document known as the *Constitution of Medina* (*Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīnah*), regarded as the first social contract in Islamic history, predating Western notions of constitutional government. This document functioned as a binding agreement among all elements of the Medinan society, guaranteeing religious freedom and regulating intercommunal relations to ensure peace and unity. Accordingly, Surah Āli ‘Imrān—as a *Madani* chapter—deals with issues faced by the Prophet in Medina, including the challenge of managing a religiously pluralistic (Masruchin, 2016).

Exegetes explain that the initial portion of Surah Āli ‘Imrān, including verse 64, was revealed in connection with the visit of a Christian delegation from Najrān, who came to meet the Prophet Muhammad in the 9th year of Hijrah. Al-Suyūṭī, citing a narration from Ibn Ishāq, reports that when the delegation arrived, they raised questions regarding Jesus (‘Īsā ibn Maryam), prompting the revelation of the first eighty or so verses of the surah. Specifically, verse 64 was revealed in the context of the event known as *mubāhalah*, referenced in verses 56–63. According to Ibn Kathīr, Allah commanded the Prophet to challenge those who denied the truth about Jesus with *mubāhalah*, as stated in Surah Āli ‘Imrān:61. *Mubāhalah* is a solemn invocation in which both parties—each accompanied by their families—call upon God to curse the liars among them. The call to *Kalimatun Sawa’* in verse 64 represents the final appeal following this divine instruction (An-nuur et al., 2025).

According to reports, the Najrān delegation consisted of approximately sixty individuals, led by al-‘Āqib and accompanied by two advisors: al-Sayyid and Abū Ḥārithah ibn ‘Alqamah. These three leaders held differing theological views concerning Jesus: some regarded him as divine due to his ability to raise the dead and his knowledge of the unseen; others considered him the Son of God; while others viewed him as part of the Trinity. The Prophet Muhammad refuted their arguments using Qur’anic reasoning, although the majority of the delegation remained steadfast in their beliefs. It was at this juncture that Allah revealed the verse concerning *mubāhalah*. The delegation ultimately refused to proceed with the challenge and instead requested that a companion of the Prophet be sent to them as

a sign of peace. The Prophet responded by appointing Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh as his envoy (Pamuji, 2023).

Another view suggests that the verse was revealed when the Prophet sent a letter to Emperor Heraclius. However, these differing opinions regarding the exact occasion of the verse’s revelation do not affect its essential message: a *da‘wah* (invitation) to the People of the Book to return to the worship of Allah alone and to abstain from associating partners with Him (*shirk*) (Romdoni, 2023).

1.3. The Interpretation of *Kalimat Sawa’* (Common Word) in the Qur’an According to Fakhruddin al-Razi in *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib*

Following the dialogue between Prophet Muhammad and the Christians of Najrān—a debate that revealed their inability to refute the arguments of monotheism presented by the Prophet—the delegation ultimately acknowledged their intellectual defeat. In the context of diplomacy and Islamic law, they chose to pay *jizyah*, a special tax that symbolized their acceptance of Islamic political authority without having to convert to Islam (MIRZA, 2011).

At this point, Allah commanded the Prophet to bring the debate to a close, as it had reached its climax, and to invite them to a more fundamental and universal agreement. Allah emphasized the importance of fair and rational dialogue, steering away from polemics that merely amplify theological differences (Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, 2007). The proposed agreement was a call to return to universal principles of justice recognized by all people of sound reason and upright human nature: to worship Allah alone without associating any partners with Him, and not to deify any human being (Fathony & Sleman, 2023).

This invitation reflects not only a peaceful and inclusive approach to *da‘wah* (Islamic proselytization), but also underscores the importance of mutual understanding and peace among religious communities. Here, Allah instructs that the best method of interfaith interaction is through justice, rationality, and sincerity—without coercing others into submission through combative arguments. This principle places interfaith dialogue in a highly respected position within Islam, where a fair consensus is prioritized over confrontational victories (Masruchin, 2016).

Thus, the call in this verse highlights not only the essence of *tawḥīd* (monotheism), but also teaches how this principle should be implemented in broader social interaction, especially in interreligious contexts. This approach exemplifies Islam as a religion that upholds justice, peace, and respect for religious diversity, so long as such diversity does not compromise the fundamental principle of divine oneness (Manshur, 2019).

The phrase “*return to a common word*” in this context signifies a profound call toward justice and balance in interfaith relations. It is not merely a call to linguistic

agreement, but rather an emphasis on a foundational principle that must be accepted by all parties: the principle of justice, wherein no group claims superiority or gains unfair advantage over another (Supawi, 2024).

In the context of interfaith relations, this agreement serves as a universal foundation—one that is acceptable to anyone guided by upright human nature and sound intellect. These principles are not limited to Muslims but are also applicable to people of other faiths, especially those engaged in interreligious dialogue. The agreement affirms that all humans must submit to a universal truth—one that is impartial and transcends religious partisanship (Razi, 1862).

The three principles mentioned in the verse are as follows:

1. **To worship Allah alone:** This principle emphasizes pure monotheism—devotion that is sincere and exclusive to Allah. In Islamic teachings, any form of worship directed toward other than Allah is considered a deviation from the truth.
2. **Not to associate Him with anything:** This reinforces the prohibition of *shirk* (polytheism), which includes associating Allah with any other being or concept, including the Trinitarian doctrine upheld by some Christian denominations. In other words, this invitation rejects all forms of deification besides Allah.
3. **Not to take human beings as lords besides Allah:** This principle criticizes the practice of granting religious leaders or other human figures ultimate authority in matters of divine law. It addresses the tendency among some Christians to bestow upon their clergy powers that equate them with God in terms of legal and theological authority (Nuraeni, 2020)vv.

These three principles are specifically directed at Christians, who, from the Islamic perspective, have deviated from pure monotheism by deifying Jesus and adopting the concept of the Trinity. Furthermore, they have granted their religious authorities a degree of power that, in Islam, belongs solely to God. Hence, this call is ultimately an invitation to return to the original monotheistic message and to reject all forms of idolatry.

In the context of interreligious dialogue, this invitation holds profound significance, as it offers a fair and rational common ground. It is a call to uphold universally acceptable principles—especially for those involved in fostering peace and harmony across religious divides. In other words, the agreement is not only theologically relevant but also socio-politically significant, given that religious and ideological differences often lead to conflict (Razi, 1862).

The call to “return to a common word” is an invitation to recognize and honor universal truths that transcend religious and doctrinal boundaries. It promotes dialogue rooted in justice, rationality, and recognition of *tawhīd* as the core principle of Islam. This represents the essence of Islam’s message in its interaction

with other faiths: the affirmation of the oneness of God and the rejection of all forms of association with Him (Wagay, 2022).

Conclusion

In addressing the challenges of religious pluralism in the modern era, the concept of *Kalimat Sawa'* as articulated in Surah Āli 'Imrān:64 provides a critical foundation for interfaith dialogue. This concept, as elaborated in *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib* by Fakhruddin al-Razi, emphasizes the principles of justice and equality, calling for a return to the fundamental belief that Allah alone is worthy of worship, without any partners. This understanding seeks to bridge theological differences while maintaining the integrity of Islamic faith principles. The implementation of this principle within today's pluralistic context offers a pathway to fostering harmonious relationships amidst religious diversity, without compromising religious identity.

However, applying *Kalimat Sawa'* in an increasingly digital and pluralistic world is not without its challenges. The concept must be adapted to account for evolving social and technological dynamics to remain relevant and effective in addressing contemporary religious issues. By promoting dialogue grounded in values of justice and rationality, this invitation holds significant potential to contribute to interreligious harmony and to mitigate conflicts arising from differences in belief.

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