

## **Jews, Gentiles, and Muslims: Theoretical Reflections on Interreligious Boundaries, Ethical Interaction, and Public Responsibility**

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### **Abstract**

The comparative study of religion shows that religious communities rarely define themselves in isolation. They are shaped through revelation, law, ritual discipline, moral imagination, historical struggle, and encounter with religious others. This article offers a theoretical and comparative reflection on Jewish conceptions of Gentiles and Islamic conceptions of non-Muslims. It argues that Judaism and Islam both maintain meaningful boundaries, but these boundaries are not reducible to hostility, ethnic superiority, or social prejudice. Rather, they function as theological, ethical, legal, and communal frameworks through which believers understand covenant, revelation, moral responsibility, and public order. Drawing on the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic tradition, the Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic legal categories, and contemporary scholarship, the article examines how Jews, Gentiles, Muslims, and non-Muslims have been imagined within sacred and social worlds. It uses theoretical insights from Mary Douglas, Talal Asad, Robert Bellah, Daniel Boyarin, Rene Girard, Joshua Sabih, Magnus Zetterholm, Christine Hayes, Mark Cohen, and other scholars to interpret boundaries as identity-forming structures that can become either protective disciplines or exclusionary instruments. In keeping with the structure and scholarly pattern of a recently published article on faithful and responsible public ethics, this study also connects interreligious boundaries with contemporary concerns such as plural citizenship, minority rights, interfaith harmony, social unity, human dignity, and public responsibility. The article concludes that the religious other is not merely outside the community. The other often becomes the mirror through which the community clarifies its own identity, tests its ethical maturity, and discovers the universal implications of its particular faith.

**Keywords:** Judaism; Islam; Gentiles; Non-Muslims; Interreligious Boundaries; Covenant; Ahl al-Kitab; Dhimma; Interfaith Ethics; Religious Other

### **Introduction**

The comparative study of religion highlights that faith traditions rarely explain themselves in isolation. They usually emerge through dialogue with revelation, memory, community, law, ritual practice, and the presence of “the other.” Judaism and Islam are especially concerned with

divine law, moral order, communal discipline, and public responsibility. Their attitudes toward outsiders are therefore neither merely social prejudices nor fixed historical stereotypes. They are theological, ethical, legal, and political frameworks through which believers understand humanity, difference, and accountability before God.<sup>1</sup>

This article studies how Jews have perceived Gentiles and how Muslims have perceived non-Muslims. Its central claim is that Judaism and Islam both maintain porous but meaningful boundaries: particular in covenantal or revelatory identity, yet universal in moral aspiration. Judaism organizes identity through Torah, covenant, election, purity, Sabbath, circumcision, dietary law, and the continuing memory of Israel's vocation. Islam organizes identity through tawhid, revelation, ummah, prophetic finality, shari'ah, moral accountability, and the Qur'anic recognition of earlier scriptural communities. In both traditions, the outsider is not a simple enemy. The outsider may be a danger, neighbor, convert, protected person, covenant partner, righteous person, interlocutor, or moral test.

The article is written in the academic pattern of the already published article *Faithful and Responsible Artificial Intelligence: An Ethical Framework for Education, Faith Communities, and Public Life*, which combines scriptural reasoning, public ethics, interdisciplinary literature, contemporary relevance, and practical implications.<sup>2</sup> The present study applies that same pattern to interreligious boundaries. It begins with a theoretical framework, then examines Jewish and Islamic categories, develops a comparative analysis, connects the discussion with contemporary interreligious ethics, and ends with recommendations for scholarship, faith communities, and public life.

The discussion is not intended to flatten Judaism and Islam into the same religion. Their doctrines, histories, and legal forms are different. Yet they share a deep Abrahamic concern: how can a community remain faithful to God's truth while living among people who do not fully share its revelation? This question remains urgent in an age of migration, plural citizenship, religious minority rights, interfaith dialogue, Islamophobia, antisemitism, digital communication, religious nationalism, and global conflict.

## **Why Interreligious Boundaries Require Theological and Public Reason**

Religious boundaries are often criticized as sources of exclusion. This criticism is sometimes valid. Boundaries can become tools of arrogance, domination, scapegoating, or violence. Yet

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<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7; Joshua Sabih, *Islamic Hermeneutics and the European Context* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2021), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ataur Rehman, "Faithful and Responsible Artificial Intelligence: An Ethical Framework for Education, Faith Communities, and Public Life," published article manuscript, 2026.

boundaries also make moral life possible. A community without memory, discipline, and distinction cannot transmit a tradition. The question, therefore, is not whether boundaries exist. The real question is what kind of boundaries they are, how they are justified, how they treat vulnerable outsiders, and whether they serve truth, justice, mercy, and human dignity.

Mary Douglas famously explains that societies preserve order by classifying what belongs and what does not. Her phrase “dirt is matter out of place” is important because it shows that impurity is not merely physical. It is symbolic. It reveals how a community imagines order, danger, holiness, and disorder.<sup>3</sup> When applied carefully to Judaism and Islam, Douglas’s theory helps explain why food laws, ritual purity, marriage rules, and communal practices create identity. These practices are not random restrictions. They teach people how to inhabit a sacred world.

Talal Asad adds that religion should not be treated as a universal private feeling detached from history and power. Religion is a discursive tradition formed through texts, institutions, discipline, authority, and embodied practice.<sup>4</sup> This insight is useful because Jewish and Islamic views of outsiders were not produced by abstract philosophy alone. They developed through scripture, imperial politics, exile, conquest, minority life, legal reasoning, ritual habit, and collective memory.

Robert Bellah’s evolutionary sociology places religious differentiation within the broader development of human culture. He shows how religious consciousness moves from tribal and archaic forms toward axial moral reflection, where universal ethics becomes increasingly visible.<sup>5</sup> Judaism and Islam both contain this tension: they protect a chosen or revealed community, yet they also speak to humanity as a whole. Daniel Boyarin’s work on the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity demonstrates that religious identities are often produced through disputes about borders.<sup>6</sup> Joshua Sabih and Magnus Zetterholm similarly help explain how boundaries are neither accidental nor necessarily hostile. They can function as identity technologies that allow religious communities to endure in plural contexts.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, 322, 503.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Sabih and Magnus Zetterholm, lecture notes, *Religious Roots of Europe*, University of Copenhagen, 2024.

Rene Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating also offers a caution. Communities often protect themselves by projecting danger onto outsiders.<sup>8</sup> A faithful religious boundary should resist this mechanism. It should preserve identity without creating false enemies. This is where public ethics becomes crucial. Boundaries must be judged not only by their ability to preserve a community, but also by their treatment of the stranger, minority, convert, neighbor, and vulnerable person.

## Literature Review and Scholarly Context

This study is situated within several streams of scholarship. First, it draws on classic and contemporary theories of religion, purity, discourse, social formation, and boundary construction. Douglas explains ritual purity as a symbolic structure of order; Asad analyzes religion as embodied tradition and power; Bellah interprets religious development within the evolution of human moral consciousness; Boyarin reads Jewish-Christian separation as a boundary dispute; Girard warns that communal purity can become sacrificial exclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the study engages scholarship on Jewish identity, Gentile impurity, rabbinic categorization, and Jewish-Christian separation. Christine Hayes shows that Gentile impurity in rabbinic sources is not a simple racial claim but a complex symbolic and legal discourse.<sup>10</sup> Maimonides' discussion of righteous Gentiles and the Noahide laws demonstrates that the Jewish tradition preserves a path of moral recognition beyond ethnic Israel.<sup>11</sup> Zetterholm's social-scientific work on Antioch explains how Jewish, Gentile, and Jesus-movement identities developed through embodied practices, communal negotiations, and legal distinctions.<sup>12</sup>

Third, the article builds on Islamic studies scholarship about ahl al-kitab, dhimma, religious coexistence, Islamic hermeneutics, and Muslim life in plural societies. Sabih's work is especially valuable because it treats Islamic categories not merely as medieval legal vocabulary but as living interpretive resources within European and modern plural contexts.<sup>13</sup> Mark Cohen's study

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<sup>8</sup> Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27; Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, 322; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 10; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, trans. M. Hyamson (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1965), Hilkhot Melakhim 8-10.

<sup>12</sup> Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 56, 142.

<sup>13</sup> Sabih, *Islamic Hermeneutics*, 105, 112.

of Jews under Islam and Christianity provides a historically balanced comparison of Jewish minority life under Muslim and Christian rule.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, the article benefits from contemporary Islamic and interfaith scholarship that links religious identity with public ethics, social unity, interfaith harmony, compassion, tolerance, minority rights, charity, and the common good. The already published article on faithful and responsible artificial intelligence provides a methodological model for connecting faith-based ethics with public responsibility.<sup>15</sup> Related works on mosque-based social unity, interfaith harmony, religious obligations across revealed traditions, Islamophobia, charity across faiths, prayer, sacred texts, prophethood, tolerance, compassion, and minority rights show that comparative religious scholarship must address lived social concerns, not only doctrinal classification.<sup>16</sup>

Fifth, recent scholarship on Islamic ethics, artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, ecological responsibility, economic justice, education, character formation, mental health, and public welfare strengthens the present article's contemporary significance. These works show that religious categories are not relics of the past. They continue to shape debates about technology, governance, social cohesion, human dignity, and moral life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 97.

<sup>15</sup> Rehman, "Faithful and Responsible Artificial Intelligence."

<sup>16</sup> A. A. Raza, H. F. Rasool, and Aatur Rehman, "The Role of Mosques for the Social Unity in the Light of Sirat-e-Taiba," *Al Meezan Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2023): 37-50; A. A. Raza, A. U. Rehman, and H. F. Rasool, "Promoting Interfaith Harmony and the Common Challenges Facing the State System Regarding the Unity of the Ummah," *The Islamic Culture: As-Saqafat-ul Islamia* (2022); M. A. Nadeem et al., "Religious Obligations on Lenders and Borrowers," *Webology* 19, no. 2 (2022); H. F. Rasool and Aatur Rehman, "Countering Islamophobia," *Webology* 19, no. 3 (2022); A. F. I. Saeed et al., "Charity across Faiths," *Al-Aasar* 2, no. 1 (2025): 748-757.

<sup>17</sup> I. Hayat and S. Arif, "Islamic Ethical Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence and Digital Surveillance," *International Research Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2024); H. F. Rasool, A. Aziz, and M. Kiran, "Mental Health and Spiritual Well-Being in the Qur'an," *Ulum Al-Sunnah* 2, no. 2 (2024): 33-40; H. F. Rasool, S. M. Shah, and M. Nasrullah, "Islamic Responses to Environmental Protection and Sustainability," *Islamic Research Journal al-Qudwah* 2, no. 4 (2024): 78-85; H. F. Rasool et al., "Economic Justice in Islam," *Tanazur* 5, no. 4(a) (2024): 1-15; A. Atiq and H. F. Rasool, "The Character Building of Individuals by the Teachings of Islam," *Islamic Research Journal al-Qudwah* 3, no. 1 (2025): 96-105.

## Jewish Conceptions of Gentiles

### Biblical Foundations: Election, Separation, and Universal Hope

The Hebrew Bible describes the covenant between God and Israel as a defining religious identity. Israel is called *am segulah*, a treasured people, yet this election is placed within a wider creation narrative that begins with one humanity. Gentiles, or *goyim*, appear in multiple roles. They can represent idolatrous danger, imperial domination, moral contrast, future worshippers of the one God, or nations who will eventually recognize divine truth.<sup>18</sup>

The Torah commands Israel not to imitate the statutes of the nations, especially where idolatry and moral corruption are involved. At the same time, it commands love for the stranger because Israel itself experienced strangerhood in Egypt. This tension structures later Jewish reflection: covenantal election is balanced by moral universality. Israel is set apart, but not because other humans are outside God's concern. Separation is meant to preserve holiness and witness.

The prophetic tradition expands this vision. Isaiah imagines nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord. Israel is called to be a light to the nations. This does not abolish Israel's particular covenant. Rather, it suggests that particular election has universal implications. A community may be chosen not merely for privilege, but for service and witness.

### Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism

During the Second Temple period, Jewish communities lived under Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman rule. They confronted pluralism, assimilation, imperial pressure, and internal disagreement. Ezra's reforms against intermarriage sought to preserve communal identity within a setting of political vulnerability. Diaspora Jews had to negotiate accommodation and resistance in cities where Gentile culture shaped public life.

Zetterholm notes that in the Greco-Roman world Jewish boundaries were drawn through embodied practices such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary law.<sup>19</sup> These practices made Jewish identity visible. They also created social friction because they marked Jews as distinct within imperial society. Yet they were not merely social markers. They were covenantal practices through which Jews lived obedience to God.

Rabbinic literature elaborated important Gentile categories. The *ger toshav*, or resident alien, refers to a non-Jew who accepts the basic Noahide prohibitions and can live within the moral order recognized by Israel. The *ger tzedek*, or righteous convert, refers to a Gentile who fully joins Israel through conversion. The Talmudic statement that the righteous among the

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<sup>18</sup> *The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)* (Jewish Publication Society, 1985), Deut. 7:6; Isa. 2:2; Isa. 49:6.

<sup>19</sup> Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 56.

nations have a share in the world to come is highly significant because it prevents salvation from being reduced to ethnicity alone.<sup>20</sup> Maimonides later develops this idea by linking righteous Gentile status with moral monotheism and obedience to the divine command as mediated through Noahide law.<sup>21</sup>

The rabbinic system therefore contains both boundary and openness. Full covenantal identity requires joining Israel, but moral recognition is available to righteous Gentiles. The boundary is covenantal and legal more than biological. This distinction is essential for avoiding simplistic readings of Jewish exclusivity.

### **Purity, Contact, and Symbolic Order**

Douglas's purity theory helps explain why Gentile contact was sometimes restricted. Rabbinic sources occasionally treated Gentile wine, food, or certain forms of contact as problematic because of association with idolatry or symbolic disorder. Hayes argues that impurity here should not be read as racial inferiority. It is a ritual and legal discourse shaped by concerns over idolatry, holiness, intermarriage, and communal coherence.<sup>22</sup>

This distinction matters. If impurity is read racially, the tradition appears to declare Gentiles inherently inferior. If impurity is read symbolically and legally, it becomes part of a broader system of holiness, separation, and moral pedagogy. This does not mean every application was ethically ideal. Boundaries can harden. Yet the theological logic is more complex than simple contempt.

### **Medieval and Modern Transformations**

In medieval Europe, Jewish life was often shaped by minority vulnerability, legal restriction, economic pressure, and Christian polemic. These conditions strengthened internal communal boundaries. Jewish intellectuals had to explain Jewish identity under conditions where Christian universalism often claimed to supersede Judaism. Boyarin argues that the idea of Judaism as a discrete religion developed partly through boundary disputes with Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Modern Jewish thinkers such as Spinoza, Hermann Cohen, Rosenzweig, and later ethical and liberal Jewish movements revisited the relation between particular covenant and universal morality. The contemporary idea of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, often reformulates

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<sup>20</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a-b, 105a.

<sup>21</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 8-10.

<sup>22</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 10.

chosenness as moral responsibility rather than superiority. In this form, Jewish identity becomes a vocation to serve justice beyond the Jewish community.

The evolving Jewish relationship with Gentiles therefore reflects a continuous tension between separation and universalism. Ancient texts emphasize purity and covenantal difference. Prophetic and philosophical traditions expand the moral horizon. Modern ethics often interprets Jewish particularity as responsibility for universal repair.

## Islamic Conceptions of Non-Muslims

### Scriptural Foundations: Tawhid, Revelation, and Human Diversity

The Qur'an addresses humanity through several categories: believers, hypocrites, People of the Book, polytheists, and disbelievers. These categories are theological and moral, but they also emerged in concrete historical contexts. The Qur'an repeatedly affirms that God created humanity in diversity and that the purpose of nations and tribes is mutual recognition, not contempt.<sup>24</sup>

Islam presents itself as the continuation and completion of the Abrahamic message. The Qur'an calls Muslims to say to the People of the Book that "our God and your God is one." It recognizes earlier revelations while criticizing distortions, theological exaggerations, and forms of unbelief. The Qur'an therefore combines affirmation and correction. Jews and Christians are not treated as identical to pagans. They are scriptural communities, but Islam claims that the final prophetic message through Muhammad, peace be upon him, completes and judges previous religious claims.

The Qur'anic principle "there is no compulsion in religion" is central to modern Muslim reflection on religious freedom.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the Qur'an also affirms that salvation after the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is connected to accepting Islam as the final divine guidance. This produces a structure similar to Judaism's covenantal tension: Islam recognizes human dignity and scriptural proximity beyond the Muslim community, but it maintains a clear theological claim about final revelation.

### Prophetic Practice and the Early Muslim Community

The Sirah and Hadith literature describe the Prophet Muhammad's engagement with Jewish, Christian, and pagan communities. The Constitution of Medina is especially important because it created a political framework in which multiple groups could belong to a single civic order while

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<sup>24</sup> *The Holy Qur'an*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49:13.

<sup>25</sup> Qur'an 2:256; 29:46; 5:3; 3:85.

retaining distinct religious identities.<sup>26</sup> This document is often interpreted as an early example of plural political organization under prophetic leadership.

The Prophet's treaties, letters, delegations, and interactions with non-Muslims show that Islamic identity did not require total social isolation. Islam maintained theological clarity while engaging in diplomacy, protection, argument, covenant, and public order. This is why Islamic tradition developed legal categories for non-Muslims rather than requiring immediate forced conversion.

### **Fiqh, Dhimma, and Social Boundary**

As Muslim rule expanded, jurists formulated the *dhimma* system. Jews, Christians, and some other communities could live under Muslim sovereignty with protected status, communal autonomy, and legal obligations such as *jizya*. Modern readers often view this system through the lens of equality-based citizenship and therefore see its hierarchy clearly. Historically, however, the system also prevented forced conversion and recognized the ongoing existence of non-Muslim communities within Muslim lands.<sup>27</sup>

Mark Cohen's comparison of Jewish life under crescent and cross argues that Jews often lived more securely under Muslim rule than under Christian rule, though Muslim societies were not modern egalitarian states.<sup>28</sup> This balance is important. The *dhimma* system should not be romanticized as full modern equality, but it should also not be misrepresented as simple persecution. It was a legal structure of hierarchy, protection, taxation, communal autonomy, and political sovereignty.

Islamic jurisprudence distinguished between Muslims, protected non-Muslims, treaty peoples, and hostile combatants. Some restrictions existed in marriage, public symbols, arms, political authority, and testimony, depending on the legal school and political context. Yet Islam did not generally treat non-Muslims as inherently physically impure in the same way some ritual systems might. The boundary was primarily theological, legal, and political rather than corporeal.

### **Philosophical, Mystical, and Ethical Perspectives**

Islamic philosophical and mystical traditions sometimes softened rigid boundary thinking by emphasizing divine unity, mercy, and the spiritual search for truth. Ibn al-Arabi's metaphysical vision has often been read as expanding the horizon of religious meaning, while Rumi's poetry

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, ed. and trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 231.

<sup>27</sup> Sabih, *Islamic Hermeneutics*, 105.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 97.

stresses that outward lamps may differ while the deeper light remains one. Such formulations should not be used to erase Islamic doctrine. Yet they do show that Muslim intellectual history contains universal and contemplative interpretations of religious diversity.

Bellah's account of moral evolution is helpful here. Religious traditions may begin by protecting group identity, but their deepest moral resources often push them toward broader human responsibility.<sup>29</sup> In Islam, this broader responsibility appears through the Qur'anic language of mercy, justice, witness, and the Prophet Muhammad's title as mercy to the worlds.

### **Modern Reformulations: Citizenship, Coexistence, and Public Ethics**

Modern Muslim scholarship has revisited classical categories in light of nation-states, constitutional citizenship, human rights, secular law, migration, and global pluralism. Reformers from Muhammad Abduh to contemporary European Muslim thinkers have asked how categories such as *ahl al-kitab*, *dhimma*, *jizya*, and *wala'* should be interpreted where Muslims live as minorities or citizens among religiously diverse populations.

Sabih argues that Muslim life in secular Europe requires a hermeneutics of coexistence that transforms inherited legal categories into ethical engagement.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean abandoning Islamic identity. It means asking how Islamic principles of justice, covenant, mercy, public welfare, and non-compulsion should guide Muslim participation in plural societies.

Contemporary Islamic scholarship on minority rights, interfaith harmony, mosque-based unity, Islamophobia, charity, tolerance, compassion, and religious obligations across traditions supports this move toward public ethics.<sup>31</sup> The Muslim relationship with non-Muslims is therefore not only a medieval legal issue. It is an urgent question of citizenship, neighborliness, institutional trust, and public responsibility.

### **Comparative Theoretical Analysis**

Judaism and Islam share structural similarities but differ in theological foundations and historical development. Judaism centers covenant, Torah, election, land, exile, and peoplehood. Islam

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<sup>29</sup> Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, 503.

<sup>30</sup> Sabih, *Islamic Hermeneutics*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Salman Arif, "The Qur'anic Framework for Minority Rights: Upholding Justice, Dignity, and Religious Freedom," *Al-Asr* 5 (January-March 2025); Raza, Rasool, and Rehman, "Role of Mosques"; Raza, Rehman, and Rasool, "Promoting Interfaith Harmony"; A. A. Raza, H. U. Ismail, and Q. A. Manan, "The Social Importance and Requirements of Tolerance," *Al Manhal Research Journal* 3, no. 3 (2023); A. A. Raza, W. Ali, and G. D. Ahmad, "Social Importance and Requirements of Compassion and Gentleness," *Al-Durar* 4, no. 1 (2024).

centers tawhid, final revelation, prophethood, ummah, shari’ah, and universal invitation. Both traditions must answer how a divinely guided community relates to outsiders.

Aspect	Judaism	Islam
Primary boundary basis	Covenant and Torah	Revelation and Qur’an
Main outsider category	Gentile ( <i>goy</i> ), resident alien, convert	Ahl al-kitab, dhimmi, non-Muslim
Path of full integration	Conversion into Israel	Shahadah and entry into Islam
Moral recognition outside full membership	Noahide ethics and righteous Gentiles	Ahl al-kitab recognition, covenant, protection, justice
Ritual/legal distinction	Purity laws, circumcision, Sabbath, dietary law	Creedal, legal, political, and communal distinction
Universal vision	Light to the nations	Mercy to the worlds
Contemporary ethical language	Tikkun olam, covenantal responsibility	Khilafah, maslahah, maqasid, justice, mercy

Douglas’s model explains why ritual laws preserve identity. Asad shows that these laws are maintained by institutions, authority, and practices rather than abstract ideas alone. Bellah places the movement from particular community to universal ethics within broader religious development. Boyarin and Zetterholm show that religious identities are often sharpened through disputes with neighboring communities. Girard warns that boundary formation can become scapegoating if the religious other is made into the carrier of communal anxiety.

This comparative analysis suggests that exclusion and inclusion are twin processes. A community draws a sacred line in order to preserve revelation, but that same revelation often demands ethical responsibility toward those beyond the line. In Judaism, the stranger is both a boundary figure and a recipient of commanded love. In Islam, the non-Muslim is both outside the ummah of faith and inside the moral horizon of justice, mercy, and human dignity.

## Interreligious Ethics and Contemporary Implications

In the contemporary world, Jewish and Muslim ethics increasingly meet around pluralism, citizenship, religious minority rights, public welfare, and interfaith responsibility. The Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* and the Islamic concept of *khilafah* both frame human beings as responsible moral agents within creation. Both traditions insist that life before God cannot be reduced to private belief. It must shape justice, social care, neighborly duty, and public conduct.

The Qur’an states that God made humanity into nations and tribes so that they may know one another. This verse provides a powerful theological basis for encounter without erasure. It does not say that difference exists so that people may despise one another. It says difference can become knowledge. In Jewish tradition, the righteous Gentile and the love of the stranger similarly prevent covenantal identity from becoming simple contempt.

Yet contemporary conflict shows that boundaries can become dangerous. Antisemitism, Islamophobia, religious nationalism, sectarian hostility, and political manipulation can turn sacred identity into social suspicion. Girard's warning about scapegoating remains relevant. Communities under pressure often purify themselves by expelling or demonizing others. A genuine Abrahamic ethic must reverse this mechanism. It must turn fear of the other into disciplined encounter, moral clarity, and protection of human dignity.

Recent Islamic and comparative works on interfaith dialogue, charity across faiths, prayer, sacred texts, prophethood, tolerance, compassion, Islamophobia, minority rights, and public welfare demonstrate the practical importance of this approach.<sup>32</sup> Comparative religion should not only describe boundaries. It should help communities live with difference responsibly.

### **The Interreligious Boundary and Public Good Model**

This article proposes an Interreligious Boundary and Public Good model. The model has three layers: theological clarity, ethical restraint, and public responsibility.

The first layer is theological clarity. Judaism and Islam should not be forced into vague sameness. Each tradition has its own claims about revelation, authority, law, and salvation. Honest interfaith work begins by allowing traditions to speak in their own voice. A boundary that has no clarity becomes meaningless.

The second layer is ethical restraint. Theological difference must not justify cruelty, humiliation, or injustice. Sacred texts must be read with the moral disciplines they themselves command: justice, mercy, truthfulness, hospitality, and protection of the vulnerable. A boundary that lacks restraint becomes oppression.

The third layer is public responsibility. Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others now share cities, schools, workplaces, hospitals, digital spaces, and political institutions. Religious communities must therefore ask how their self-understanding contributes to peace, social trust, minority protection, and public welfare. A boundary that refuses public responsibility becomes socially dangerous.

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<sup>32</sup> A. A. Raza and M. S. Khalid, "Interfaith Dialogue: Ethical Commonalities in Judaism, Christianity and Islam," *Islamic Studies Research Journal Abhath* 7, no. 26 (2022); Saeed et al., "Charity across Faiths"; A. F. I. Saeed, A. A. Raza, and H. A. Fatima, "Prayer as the Heart of Worship," *Islamic Research Journal al-Qudwah* 3, no. 1 (2025): 1-8; A. F. I. Saeed, H. A. Fatima, and A. A. Raza, "The Sacred Texts of Abrahamic Faiths," *Harf-o-Sukhan* 8, no. 3 (2024): 1085-1094; A. F. I. Saeed, A. A. Raza, and K. tul Kubra, "Prophethood in the Abrahamic Faiths," *Islamic Research Journal al-Qudwah* 2, no. 4 (2024): 126-133.

This model does not eliminate difference. It orders difference toward moral maturity. It allows Judaism and Islam to preserve theological identity while contributing to shared public goods.

## Recommendations

First, scholars of Judaism and Islam should study outsider categories with historical care. Terms such as *Gentile*, *ger*, *ahl al-kitab*, *dhimmi*, and *kafir* must be interpreted in their scriptural, legal, historical, and political contexts.

Second, religious educators should teach both boundary and mercy. Students should learn that tradition includes identity-preserving limits as well as obligations toward strangers, neighbors, minorities, and the vulnerable.

Third, interfaith dialogue should avoid shallow harmony. It should not erase real differences about revelation, law, prophethood, covenant, and salvation. Mature dialogue requires honesty and respect.

Fourth, mosques, synagogues, churches, universities, and public institutions should develop educational programs on religious literacy, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the ethics of disagreement.

Fifth, Muslim and Jewish scholars should collaborate on shared themes such as divine law, minority rights, charity, modesty, family ethics, Sabbath and worship, halal and kosher practice, social justice, and public responsibility.

Sixth, policy makers should recognize that religious communities are not only private belief groups. They are moral institutions that can support social trust, humanitarian service, and civic responsibility.

Seventh, comparative religion programs should connect classical texts with contemporary issues: migration, citizenship, human rights, digital misinformation, religious hate, and public ethics.

Eighth, scholars should continue developing faith-informed public ethics in the pattern of recent work on responsible artificial intelligence, public good, interfaith harmony, and minority rights.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Rehman, “Faithful and Responsible Artificial Intelligence”; Hayat and Arif, “Islamic Ethical Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence and Digital Surveillance”; Arif, “Qur’anic Framework for Minority Rights”; Rehman, “Integrating Islamic Ethics with Artificial Intelligence.”

## Conclusion

From the law of Moses, peace be upon him, to the mercy of Muhammad, peace be upon him, religious boundaries have been shaped through revelation, law, ritual practice, and moral responsibility. Judaism and Islam both construct boundaries to preserve faith, communal order, and sacred memory. Yet their scriptures, legal traditions, prophets, philosophers, mystics, and modern scholars repeatedly reopen the gate toward ethical universality, compassion, justice, and public responsibility.

The Jewish perception of Gentiles and the Muslim perception of non-Muslims are therefore not merely historical attitudes. They are enduring theological conversations about identity, otherness, covenant, revelation, justice, and the moral meaning of human diversity. The religious other is never simply outside religion. The other is often its mirror. To study these boundaries is to study how communities understand themselves before God and before humanity.

The most responsible conclusion is neither boundaryless universalism nor harsh exclusivism. Judaism and Islam both teach that sacred identity matters. They also teach that the stranger, neighbor, minority, and religious other must not be stripped of dignity. A faithful community is not one that forgets its boundary. It is one that lets its boundary become a discipline of truth, mercy, justice, and public good.

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