

Mohammadmahdi Morvarid

The Diversity of Religious Experience: A Ṣadrāean Perspective with Contemporary Reflections

This paper examines the diversity and shared features of religious experience through the lens of Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendent Theosophy, with particular attention to his interpretation of Qur'anic accounts of encounters with the divine. It explores whether religious experiences display common features across different cultural, historical, and doctrinal contexts, while attending to their distinctive gradations. Ṣadrā's philosophy of graded existence (*ṭaskik al-wujūd*) and substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawharīyya*) provides a systematic framework for understanding how the soul's capacities develop, enabling progressively deeper engagement with the sacred. Within this schema, variations in religious experience, from perceptual awareness and intellectual intuition to the highest form of experiential knowledge of God, reflect real metaphysical distinctions, rather than mere interpretive differences.

Qur'anic accounts illustrate varying gradations of religious experience. For instance, they range from basic awareness and assent to divine guidance (28:53), to reception of revelation via angelic mediation (2:97), and to direct encounters with the divine (7:143). Analyzing these accounts through Ṣadrā's framework clarifies how classical Islamic thought conceptualizes engagement with the divine. Ṣadrā's metaphysical structure provides a coherent ontological grounding for religious diversity, showing that experiential knowledge of God is both intelligible and classifiable. This structure integrates cognition, perception, and spiritual realization, highlighting the internal logic of Islamic philosophy in accounting for graded experiences, from initial awareness to direct engagement with the sacred.

Alongside, the paper places Ṣadrā's model in relation to contemporary questions in philosophy of religion. Rather than reducing the diversity of religious experiences solely to interpretive or sociocultural factors, the Ṣadrāean framework allows for a realist understanding of graded experiences, illuminating and, in certain respects, reframing ongoing debates on the nature, recognition, and justification of religious experience. By centering Qur'anic exemplars and grounding the analysis in classical Islamic sources, this study contributes to discussions regarding religious experience in philosophy of religion. It underscores the relevance of Ṣadrā's thought, enriching ongoing discussions by offering new perspectives on the metaphysical, epistemic, and existential dimensions of encounters with the sacred.

Keywords: Mullā Ṣadrā, religious experience, Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic philosophy,



Mohammadmahdi Morvarid

Concordia University

Mohammadmahdi Morvarid is originally from Iran and has been living in Montreal, Canada, since 2022. He holds a bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, alongside parallel studies at the Mashhad seminary. Following his academic interests, he pursued a master's degree in Philosophy of Religion at the University of Tehran, and subsequently completed a second master's degree in Philosophy at Concordia University in Montreal, which was the reason he came to the city. His primary academic interest lies in the philosophy of religion, with a particular focus on Islamic thought and comparative studies between traditional Islamic paradigms and modern Western philosophical frameworks. He is currently a PhD student in Philosophy at Concordia University, having begun his studies in Winter 2026; his doctoral research proposes a comparative study of religious experience across traditions, placing Islamic thought in dialogue with contemporary theories.