

## TOLERANCE AND PEACE BUILDING: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract:** Tolerance is a universal value which is expected to bring about mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, and the appreciation of differences and opinions. It is commonly used to express the state of mutual recognition and the willingness to accept others who do not belong to one's beliefs, race or ethnicity. In contemporary times, religious intolerance has been linked to extremism with damning consequences for peace in the world. Although Muslims generally show tolerance in their daily dealings with others in society, in several instances, Islam has been implicated and labelled as an intolerant religion because of the activities of some extremist Islamist groups. This paper examines the notion of tolerance from the Islamic perspective and its connection to communal peace and stability. I argue that tolerance is an immutable value in Islamic peacebuilding; and that Muslims should leverage the replete nuances of tolerance in their religion to promote intra-faith and inter-religious peacebuilding for the common good of humanity.*

**Key Words:** Intra-faith; Inter-religious; Muslim societies; Qur'an; Sunnah; Tolerance; Peacebuilding.

### **Introduction**

In the era of Islamist extremism and radicalization, an examination of peacebuilding from the perspective of Islam and Muslims has become imperative and highly desirable. This is because activities of militant groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaida among other extremist groups which unleash deadly violence in societies in which they operate. These groups use the Qur'an to justify this use of indiscriminate violence around the globe and display a high level of intolerance of any other views contrary to theirs. The recent unwarranted brutal killing of Deborah Yakubu, a level 200 student of the Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto in Nigeria by a mob on the allegation of blasphemy, is a clear example of growing intolerance within some Muslim communities.

Such gross intolerance exhibited by a group of young Muslims in a Muslim-majority country such as Nigeria brings to the fore the need to engage Muslims on tolerance as an immutable value for relational peace. From the Islamic perspective, tolerance is a value envisioned to engender communal peace through respect for diversity, the recognition of other beliefs and cultures, and the acceptance of all facets of pluralism inherent in the human race.<sup>1</sup> Because of the blatant Muslim intolerance exhibited in the Deborah Yakubu case, the critical question begging for answers is what is the cause of this high level of intolerance in Nigeria, especially among the youth? Is it (mis)interpretation of the Qur'an by some scholars that is breeding the intolerance or it is sheer ignorance of the teachings of Islam on tolerance?

Lexically, the word 'tolerance' emerged from the Latin word *tolerare* which means "to carry, bear in the sense of endure, hold out, resist."<sup>2</sup> According to Siblot, the word is applied to a discomfort endured in the face of views or behaviour regarded as unacceptable in respect of one's innermost beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the idea of tolerance first emerged within societies denominated by religious thought.<sup>4</sup> The terms tolerance and toleration are believed to have evolved in English culture after being used by John Locke<sup>5</sup> in his two texts: 'The Letter Concerning Toleration' and the 'Essays on Toleration.'<sup>6</sup> These texts inspired the 'Toleration Act' of 1689 in England which granted freedom of religion under certain conditions to people of different beliefs and creeds at the time.

This history of England indicates how the belief system of the Anglican Church dominated the socio-political life of England as a country and made intolerance of other beliefs a norm (public order) until the 'Toleration Act' of 1689 came in to ameliorate the situation after intensive advocacy against religious intolerance. This means that the usage and practice of the word 'tolerance' is a product of human right advocacy to eradicate intolerant practices in the past. But most importantly, as Béal and Calori explain, "...religious tolerance in Great

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Siblot, "Presentation," in *Defining Tolerance*, ed. Paul Siblot (Paris: UNESCO, 1997), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Siblot, *Defining Tolerance*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Siblot, *Defining Tolerance*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> John Locke (1632-1704) was an English Political Theorist and a Philosopher in the period of political discourse of the Enlightenment. See, Siblot, *Defining Tolerance*, 58.

<sup>6</sup> C. Béal and G. Calori, "Case Law and Legislation," in *Defining Tolerance*, ed. Siblot, 58.

Britain for example, was a result of an accumulation of concessions made by the state” in the display of tolerance in the era of the political discourse of the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> This and other advocacy activities for religious freedoms across the globe in different cultural and linguistic settings brought the concept of tolerance to the fore and popularized the word in the context of pluralism and peaceful co-existence. However, concerning religious toleration, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* indicates how limited the evolutionary concepts of tolerance were when it states:

Toleration, however, has a peculiarity of limited signification. It connotes a refraining from prohibitions and persecution. Nevertheless, it suggests a latent disapproval and it usually refers to a condition in which the freedom which it permits is both limited and conditional. Toleration is not equivalent to religious liberty, and it falls far short of religious equality. It assumes the existence of an authority which might have been coercive, but which, for reasons of its own, is not pushed to extremes.<sup>8</sup>

Today, the word ‘tolerance’ has come to designate diversity and the idea of agreeing to put up with others who are different in diverse human endeavours and beliefs. Siblot encapsulates the general understanding of tolerance when he states that: “The first lesson to be learnt from our collective approach lies in the observation that humanity is only conceivable if we acknowledge others; in a mutual tolerance, a principle which is the very first of common rules.”<sup>9</sup>

In contemporary usage, tolerance is expected to promote an exchange of culture, common understanding and cooperation among people of diverse backgrounds and peaceful co-existence in all spheres of human life.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Abdel Haleem espouses that tolerance in contemporary times relates not only to views but also “beliefs and practices of others that differ from one’s own.”<sup>11</sup> In effect, a concept that was produced as a result of social pressure and political

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<sup>7</sup> Béal and Calori, “Case Law and Legislation,” 58.

<sup>8</sup> W. Adeney, “Toleration,” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings and John A. Selbie (London: T&T Clark, 1921), XII: 360.

<sup>9</sup> Siblot, *Defining Tolerance*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Tayseir M. Mandour, “Islam and Religious Freedom: Role of Interfaith Dialogue in Promoting Global Peace,” *Law Review* 3 (2010): 886.

<sup>11</sup> M. Abdel Haleem, “Tolerance in Islam,” *Islamic Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1998): 96.

expediency has become a social reality that is used to promote pluralism in all spheres of human interaction today.

The paper adopts the theological approach in its analysis and it is anchored on two main objectives. Firstly, the paper seeks to examine the primacy of tolerance as an essential Islamic value and its connection to communal peace and stability. Secondly, it seeks to show Muslims could leverage on the replete nuances of tolerance in their religion to promote intra-faith and inter-religious peacebuilding for the common good of humanity.

The relational peace model espoused by Lederach, Thistlethwaite and Stassen provides the theoretical framework for the paper. For Lederach, effective peacebuilding should hinge on reconciliation embedded in tolerance that emanates from a sustainable relationship with one another.<sup>12</sup> This peacebuilding framework focuses on relationship building that relies on non-state elements such as religion, culture and local environment which make immense contributions to communal peace.<sup>13</sup> Thistlethwaite and Stassen have argued that faith-based organisations can play crucial roles in peacebuilding through their religious or spiritual teachings and reaching out to other members of their communities.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, these peacebuilding models espoused by Lederach, Thistlethwaite and Stassen are predicated on the concept of tolerance as a tool for peaceful co-existence.

### **Tolerance in the Islamic Tradition**

Even though tolerance as a concept and practice is an important value in Islam, there is no specific equivalent for the word ‘tolerance’ or ‘toleration’ in the Qur’an. This is unsurprising, because as indicated earlier the origin and meaning of the word ‘tolerance’ was developed from an English political discourse and therefore could not have been a universal word which is known by all cultures and civilizations around the globe. This fact is rightly noted by Yohanan Friedmann<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Syracuse, NY: SUP Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Lederach, *Building Peace*, 20-26.

<sup>14</sup> S. Thistlethwaite and G.S. Stassen, “Abrahamic Alternative to War,” *Special Report* 214, (2008), 12-15.

<sup>15</sup> Professor Yohanan Friedman is a Jewish Scholar of Islam at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. See, Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (New York - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32.

when he states that: “The Qur’ān does not have a specific term to express the idea of tolerance, but several verses explicitly state that religious coercion (*ikrāh*) is either unfeasible or forbidden...”<sup>16</sup>

Abdul Rashid Omar confirms this and espouses that the Arabic word *tasamuh* and its verbal derivatives *samaha* normally used by contemporary Islamic scholars to denote tolerance are not also found in the Qur’ān.<sup>17</sup> However, the lack of an explicit word for ‘tolerance’ in the Qur’an does not preclude the concept and its practice in the Islamic tradition. The Qur’ān and the Sunnah are replete with various teachings on tolerance and beyond. Moreover, because the Islamic tradition and its concepts and lexical expressions are conveyed in the Arabic language, any Islamic concept that is rooted in linguistics must be traced to the Arabic language and its user societies. As such, Ben Naoum traces the lexical foundation of the word which has been used to denote ‘tolerance’ in Islamic and Arab civilizations to the verbs: ‘*Ha Ma La*,’ ‘*Sa ma ha*’ and ‘*Sa Hu La*.’<sup>18</sup>

The hadith states: “*ahabbu al-din ila Allah al-hanifiyya al-samha*”. This is translated as: “the religion most beloved to God is the kind *hanifiyya*.”<sup>19</sup> Another hadith in which the word ‘*samha*’ is mentioned and utilized by contemporary Islamic scholars states: “Let the Jews know that in our religion there is latitude; I was sent with the kind (*samha*) *hanifiyya*.”<sup>20</sup>

However, in his analysis of the above texts, Friedmann argues that in Prophetic traditions (*ahadith*) in which the word ‘*samha*’ is mentioned, the meaning has to do with the simplicity and lenient nature of

<sup>16</sup> Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> A. Rashied Omar, “*Ta’aruf: Islam beyond Tolerance*,” *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action* 16 (2011): 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmed Ben Naoum, “Equality in Principle and Discrimination in Practice,” in *Defining Tolerance*, ed. Siblot, 65. In this work, Ben Naoum explains that the verb *hamala* means to “carry, transport, carry a child, be pregnant” and it is expressed in its transitive form to mean to “overburden someone” which implies making an effort to accept what is abnormal which can be rejected. However, the verb *sā ma ha* which means “gentleness and permissiveness” is used in relation to norms; and connotes one having the capacity to forgive. Therefore, the idea of kindness, forgiveness, facility, of the possible and permitted dispensation, leniency, conciliatoriness and tolerance are all expressed through this stem in its various derivations. In this regard, the most lexically utilized derivatives are *ta Sā Ma Ha* and *mu Sā Ma Ha* which imply reciprocity in tolerance and equality between two individuals.

<sup>19</sup> Sahih Bukhari, *Kitab al-Iman* Vol. 1 Hadith Number 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Hanbal, “Musnad,” 6, al-Maktab al-islami li-‘itibā’a wa al-nashr (1978), 116.

Islam and not tolerance.<sup>21</sup> In as much as this argument of Friedman holds and makes considerable sense, it can also be argued that the similarities inherent in the meanings of tolerance and leniency make it possible to draw on the words interchangeably for social good. Therefore, the use of *tasāmuḥ* by contemporary Muslim scholars concerning tolerance in the contemporary context cannot be completely off tangent. In dealing with the substantive matter of the use of the word tolerance in the Qur'an, Rashied Omar argues that even though the word 'tolerance' has no precise lexical equivalent in Islam, it is immaterial to Islam's indelible recognition of the existence of other religions and cultures. For instance, Omar states that: "The fact that there is no precise linguistic equivalent for the term tolerance does not however imply that Islam does not accept the existence of other religions."<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the existence of these words that denote tolerance in Muslim societies resonates with the contemporary concepts of tolerance which has implication for peaceful co-existence, respect for the beliefs of others and the recognition of the cultures and lifestyles of others.

### **Beyond Tolerance**

Interestingly, Omar, Safi and Afsaruddin have all argued that the word tolerance is even a limited concept for Muslims when it comes to dealing with the 'religious other.' These and other scholars have argued that dealing with the 'other' in Islam goes beyond mere tolerance. For instance, Omar is of the view that the word that resonates well with Muslims and expands beyond tolerance is the Qur'ānic concept of *ta'aruf* which, literally means 'getting to know the other.'<sup>23</sup> According to Omar, the idea of *ta'aruf* as contained in Qur'an 49:13 implies "embracing the other as an extension of yourself" and offers an alternative vision to the British 'tolerance paradigm' which does not necessarily create mutual understanding and respect.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Safi avers that because Muslims already recognize the ultimate interconnectedness and oneness of humanity, Muslims rather need a "higher calling" than just tolerating those different from

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<sup>21</sup> Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Omar, "Ta'aruf: Islam," 19.

<sup>23</sup> Omar, "Ta'aruf: Islam," 19.

<sup>24</sup> Omar, "Ta'aruf: Islam," 19.

them.<sup>25</sup> Safi's 'higher calling' proposal appears to connect with the Qur'ānic concept of *ta'aruf* explained above. In the same vein, Afsaruddin observes that Islamic history indicates that Muslims understood the Qur'ānic injunctions on pluralism; and that the earlier Muslims heeded the call to show understanding to people who professed other religions, and lived with them peacefully.<sup>26</sup>

These views expressed by Omar, Safi, and Afsaruddin ought to serve as a reawakening reflection for the contemporary Muslim. This is because their views reinforce the position that the Qur'an has already taught higher tolerance and therefore Muslims ought to show magnanimity to people of other faiths and cultures they come into contact with. Also, the views postulate that, if *ta'aruf* is properly understood and applied by Muslims, it could strengthen Muslim relationships with non-Muslims not only for just societal peace and harmony but also to engender social good.

Indeed, this Qur'ānic concept of *ta'aruf* resonates with the relational theory as espoused by peacebuilding scholars such as Lederach, Thistlethwaite, Stassen and Oda. For instance, a key argument for effective peacebuilding put forward by Oda is the rationality to others; and this encompasses the restoration of relationships with others, and attention to their historical context which means relations to memory and history of war, armed conflict or colonial rule; and social practice.<sup>27</sup> By this, Oda meant peacebuilding practice by non-state actors utilizing various resources to create amicable relationships with national, ethnic, racial, religious or political others and to build a social structure which can promote sustainable peace.

### Religious Diversity in the Qur'ān

Even though the word 'tolerance' or its equivalent has not been used specifically in the Qur'ān, as earlier stated, there are many explicit texts within the Qur'ān that promote religious diversity and pluralism. Most of these verses directly suggest Islam's recognition of the

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<sup>25</sup> Omid Safi, "Tolerance," *The Chronicle Review*; <http://www.chronicle.com/article/an-era-in-ideas-tolerance/128488> [Accessed September 23, 2017].

<sup>26</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, "Tolerance and Diversity in Islam", *Peace Colloquy* 2 (2002), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Hiroshi Oda, "Peacebuilding from Below: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations toward an Anthropological Study on Peace," *Journal of the Graduate School of Letters* 2 (2007): 1-16.

existence of other religions, beliefs and creeds. One of such verses is Qur'an 2:256 which states:

Let there be no compulsion in religion; truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy handholds that never breaks and God heareth and knoweth all things.<sup>28</sup>

Though the context in which the above verse was revealed relates to the freedom either to belong to Islam or opt out,<sup>29</sup> on its face value, it unambiguously expresses the need for Muslims to accommodate others who do not profess the same faith as them. This verse presupposes that those unwilling to accept Islam must be tolerated and their religious freedom must be upheld. In this regard, Muhammad Asad posits that all Islamic jurists (*fuqahā*) without exception agree that forcible conversion to Islam is abhorred and not acceptable.<sup>30</sup>

Asad further asserts that all Islamic Jurists agree that any attempt to coerce a non-Muslim to accept Islam is null and void; and that it is a grievous sin to do so.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Khaled Abou El Fadl argues that the above verse presents at the most rudimentary level of Islam's clear prohibition of any duress conversion to its fold; thereby clearly showing Islam's recognition of religious pluralism.<sup>32</sup> It is in this light that Taysier Mandour contends that the idea of coercing people to accept Islam nullifies the essence of religion, as Islam is expected to present a choice to human life; and that the freedom to submit to the religion of one's choice establishes the foundation of the person's belief as Islam seeks to emphasize.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, forcing people to accept Islam takes away the very human liberty the religion seeks to promote. These positions espoused by Islamic Jurists then make it imperative for Muslims to respect and tolerate other beliefs and cultures. It is clear from the verse that the Qur'ān acknowledges religious plurality and therefore Muslims should be tolerant of others. Closely related to the above-quoted verse

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<sup>28</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an* (Benton Harbor, MI: Amana Publications, 1989), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 112.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Bristol: The Book Foundation, 2003), 70.

<sup>31</sup> Asad, *The Message*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>33</sup> Mandour, "Islam and Religious Freedom," 886.



is another verse in the Qur'an which lays the foundation for religious tolerance and pluralism in Islam. Qur'an 18:29 states: "Say, The truth is from your Lord. Let him who wills believe, and let him who wills, reject (it)."<sup>34</sup>

A classical exegete of the Qur'an, al-Zamakhshari<sup>35</sup> holds the view that this verse gives the individual the choice to follow the truth; which is to surrender to God or turn away from it.<sup>36</sup> For Tayseir Mandour this verse points to the Qur'an's acceptance of other religions.<sup>37</sup> In the view of Mandour, one's commitment to any religious belief or system is contingent on one's freedom to choose a religion.<sup>38</sup> These views imply that Islam allows for religious freedom and therefore, a Muslim has no right to coerce people to join Islam. It can also be inferred from the al-Zamakhshari explanation in particular that because Allah has given free will to individuals for religious choice, the Muslim ought to respect the individual for whatever religious choice he or she makes. If this understanding is appreciated and practised by the majority of Muslims, it will lead to peaceful and harmonious relations with non-Muslims.

Another passage of the Qur'an which promotes and ought to inspire the value of tolerance in the context of religious pluralism among Muslims is Surah al-Kafirun (Qur'an 109:1-6) which states:

Say: O ye that reject faith. I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way, and to me mine.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ali, *The Meaning*, 716.

<sup>35</sup> Abu'l Qasim Mahmud Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari(d.538/1144) was one of the renowned Classical Exegete of the Qur'an. His exegesis of the Qur'an is titled: "*al-kashshaf 'an ghawamid haqa'iq al-tanzil wa 'uyun al-aqawil fi wujub al-ta'wil*".

<sup>36</sup> Nasr, *The Study*, 739.

<sup>37</sup> Mandour, "Islam and Religious," 886. Professor Taysier M. Mandour of Al-Azhar University was a Member of Egypt's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs' Commission of Dialogue and Foreign Islamic Relations and Member of Egypt's Council for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>38</sup> Mandour, "Islam and Religious," 886

<sup>39</sup> Ali, *The Meaning*, 1708.

Even though the above passage of the Qur'ān contextually implies the rejection of pre-Islamic Arab polytheism for Islamic monotheism,<sup>40</sup> it also connotes the appreciation of the existence of other beliefs and cultures. For Abdullah Yusuf Ali, faith is a matter of personal conviction and sincerity as opposed to coercion and intimidation.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing and accepting religious diversity among humanity is therefore a religious duty on the part of Muslims. Again, the verse amplifies the voice of Allah that everybody's religion is important and obliges the need for mutual respect that engenders communal understanding among people of diverse faiths and beliefs. This is where the contemporary concept of relational peace models comes to play. Lederach posits that relational peace is the most enduring and sustainable one because it is the beginning and ending points for appreciating a system;<sup>42</sup> and this could produce the needed understanding and cooperation for communal peace.

Historically, there is evidence that points to the suffering of the early Muslims as a result of religious intolerance in Makkah before they migrated to Yathrib (Madinah). Against this background, Muslims ought to know the difficulty religious intolerance brings onto people with different faiths particularly if they are in the minority. But Qur'ān 60:8 exhorts Muslims to have a kind and fair relationship with non-Muslims who do not fight them. Clearly, this categorical statement implies that engagement with the 'other' is underpinned by tolerance and respect for diversity.

In his exegesis of the above-quoted verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi<sup>43</sup> contends that it becomes imperative for Muslims to relate well with non-Muslims. Moreover, he suggests that because the majority of Islamic theologians and exegetes of the Qur'ān agree that the verse has not been abrogated<sup>44</sup> Muslims are enjoined to respect and co-exist peacefully with others. To support his position Al-Qurtubi cited an incident reported by Bukhari and Muslims that Asmā' bint Abu-Bakr asked the Prophet (pbuh) if she could receive and be kind to her non-Muslim

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<sup>40</sup> See, *Tafsir Jalaalayn*, trans. Muhammed Anis Gad Khalil (El-Mansoura: Dar Al-Manarah, 2010), II: 1767.

<sup>41</sup> Ali, *The Meaning*, 708, commentaries 6289-6291.

<sup>42</sup> Lederach, *Building Peace*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> His full name is Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmed al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1272). His exegesis work is known as al-Jāmi' li ahkām al-Qur'ān. See, Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'ān*, lviii.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Qurtubi, quoted by Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda in his *Islamic Manners* (Riyadh: Awakening Publications, 2001), 76-77.

mother who wanted to visit her in Madinah and the Prophet (pbuh) said “Yes”.<sup>45</sup> In his exposition on the verse Imam Tabari<sup>46</sup> states that “the most credible view is that the verse refers to people of all kinds of creeds and religions who should be shown kindness and treated equitably.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-Jawzi<sup>48</sup> explains that the verse permits relations with non-Muslims who have not declared war against the Muslims and allows kindness towards them, even though they may not be allies.<sup>49</sup>

The views of these classical scholars and theologians emphasise Islam’s stance on peace-making with non-Muslims through tolerance and show of kindness and justice to them. But this also has implications for the recognition and respect of their rights by Muslims. It then provides an important impetus for the establishment of the basis for promoting religious tolerance in contemporary pluralistic societies where Muslims live.

Perhaps the most profound and explicit Qur’ānic verse which seals the culture of pluralism and diversity for Muslims is Qur’an 49:13 which states:

O men Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware.<sup>50</sup>

This verse is one of the most popular verses of the Qur’ān as Seyyed Hossein Nasr alludes;<sup>51</sup> that this text is the clearest religious support

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Cf. Sahih Bukhari, 3 no.789 for the hadith.

<sup>46</sup> His full name is Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabarī (d. 310/923). His exegetical work is titled: *Jāmi’ al-bayan ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*. See, Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur’ān*, lix.

<sup>47</sup> al-Tabarī, quoted in Taha Jabir Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thoughts, 2003), 26.

<sup>48</sup> The full name is Abul-Faraj Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). His commentary of the Qur’ānis called *Zād al-masīr fī ‘lm al-tafsīr*. See, Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur’ān*, lvii.

<sup>49</sup> al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ‘lm al-tafsīr*, vol. 8, p.39, quoted in Taha Jabir Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: some Basic Reflections* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thoughts, 2003), 26.

<sup>50</sup> Asad, *The Message*. 51.

<sup>51</sup> Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur’ān*, 1262.

for pluralism and diversity within the Islamic tradition resonates with Abdulaziz Sachedina argument that through this verse the Qur'an has clearly indicated that human variety is not supposed to be a source of tensions but rather one of human unity which "is indispensable for a particular tradition to define its common beliefs, values, and traditions for its community life."<sup>52</sup>

Abou El Fadl goes further to suggest that the Qur'an does not only expect diversity among humanity but even accepts the reality of difference and diversity amongst them.<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, the Qur'an is replete with avenues for understanding human beings. However, these avenues do not represent the superiority of one human entity over the other be it tribe, race, ethnicity, language, nationality or religion. Rather, the important message that emanates from the verse is that righteousness (*taqwa*) should be the measure of supremacy in all what humankind engages in. And since the knowledge of human righteousness rests with God only, any intolerance of the other based on tribe, race, ethnicity, language, nationality and religion cannot be of the Qur'an and Islam.

### **The Peacebuilding-Tolerance Nexus**

In his definition of peace in Islam, Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Kareem Al-Sheha explains that peace is comprehensive and encompasses the inner and spiritual peace of the individual, the outer social peace, and the global vision of peace for the entire humanity.<sup>54</sup> Al-Sheha asserts that the Islamic concept of peace includes the global vision of general universal peace for all humanity since the principles underpinning it include stability, mutual respect, and non-aggression.<sup>55</sup> A critical analysis of Al-Sheha's exposition on the Islamic understanding of peace reveals that in Islam, peace goes beyond Muslims and their communities to feed into the global vision of peace for all people irrespective of location, tribe, race and religion. This understanding resounds with Ibrahim Kalin's concept of peace which suggests that peace in Islam

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<sup>52</sup> Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>53</sup> El Fadl, *The Place*, 15-16.

<sup>54</sup> Abdur-Rahman Abdul Kareem Al-Sheha, "Islam is the Religion of Peace," *Islamland*; [www.islamland.com](http://www.islamland.com) [Accessed: September 30, 2022].

<sup>55</sup> Al-Sheha, "Islam," 12-13.

is a positive one because it engenders resultant effects of justice, co-operation, dialogue, and co-existence.<sup>56</sup>

In this regard, it can be said that peace in Islam transcends the absence of war and conflict; and the pursuit of it is a collective responsibility of all individuals with the objective of integrating human society, as the originator of the concept of ‘positive peace’ Johan Galtung indicates.<sup>57</sup> Achieving this requires a great deal of tolerance and useful engagement with the other. Thus, in the pursuit of communal or global peace, the role of tolerance cannot be over-emphasized.

It is because of this that Korostelina argues that tolerance plays a crucial role in establishing a peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims; and that religious tolerance paves the way for dialogue between people of different cultures and faiths which could bring mutual understanding and respect.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Gulen contends that inter-faith tolerance promotes peacebuilding and can be effective because all revealed religions are based on peace, security, and harmonious relationship in the world.<sup>59</sup> In the same vein, Abdur-Rahman Abdulkareem Al-Sheha avers that it is in order to promote peace and harmony in the world, that Islam advocates for tolerance among other values to humanity regardless of religious affiliation.<sup>60</sup> The views expressed by these scholars amply suggest that tolerance plays a crucial role in Islamic peacebuilding; it must be the gateway for intra-faith and inter-religious peacebuilding.

## Conclusion

This paper set out to explore tolerance in Islam and how it could be leveraged for peacebuilding by Muslims. Particularly, it examined the replete nuances of tolerance in Islam in promoting intra-faith and inter-religious peacebuilding for the common good of humanity. The paper establishes that tolerance is an imperative Islamic religious

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<sup>56</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition,” *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005), 332-333.

<sup>57</sup> Johan Galtung, “Editorial,” *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no. 1 (1964), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Karina Korostelina, “Dialogue as a Source of Peaceful Coexistence”, in *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gulen Movement Initiative*, ed. J.L. Esposito and I. Yilmaz (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2010), 103.

<sup>59</sup> Fethullah Gulen, *Essays, Perspectives, Opinions* (Rutherford: The Light, 2002), 34.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Sheha, “Islam,” 12-13.

value that must be espoused by all Muslims; and that if Muslims across the globe practice tolerance as a dictate from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), they can contribute immensely to building sustainable peace among themselves and with others. Qur'anic injunctions, prophetic exemplary practices, and communal lives of earlier Muslims collectively implore the practitioners of the Religion of Islam to exercise a great deal of tolerance and respect in their dealing with fellow humankind, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. From the examples of religious tolerance unearthed from Islamic sources and traditions in this article, one can extrapolate that Muslim tolerance can help a great deal in fostering good relationships that inure to sustainable peace in the communities in which they live. It cannot be over-emphasised that faith-based organisations have to play crucial roles in peacebuilding through their religious or spiritual teachings and practices. And if this becomes part of their everyday practice, they can ensure that peace reigns in the communities in which they live by reaching out to other members of the communities. Indeed, it is believed that if Muslims spread tolerance through their day-to-day relationships with others as espoused by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, they will not only be fulfilling the essence of their religion but also, they will be effectively and meaningfully contributing to peacebuilding urgently needed by the world today.

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