



ACCEPTING OTHERS FOR PEACE FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: A Theological-Historical Analysis

Machasin

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

Email: machasin@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract: This article attempts to answer the question regarding the possibility of building peace in an Islamic perspective, which is known for various teachings and practices that are contrary to peace, such as the teaching of waging holy war against the infidels and that Islam is triumphant and no other religion may defeat it. Some writers say it is impossible to speak of peace from Islamic teachings. For them, Islam is a religion of violence and not compatible whatsoever with the discourse of peace. However, it is not difficult to find in Islam materials of teaching by which one may develop concepts about peace, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. Islam itself means getting into peace and that Islam teaches justice, enjoins people to goodness, and prevents evil. Loving rather than hating is very much endorsed in Islam's ethical teaching; accepting others as they are is one way to love them. Peace not only exists but will continue forever; it must be constructed and maintained continuously.

Keywords: Islamic perspective, truth, peace, theology

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Introduction

SOME MUSLIM writers are aware of passages in the Quran about war and peace that contradict each other. However, most of them usually highlight the verses that support peace and those that can reinforce the choice of nonviolence. The verses that end in or advocate war and the use of violence are left without any thorough discussion. It is not the ambit of this paper to go through the whole gamut of Islamic sources that appear to be anti-peace

but rather to discuss a few aspects often overlooked in theological studies.¹

Makram Abbès reminds us in one of the conclusions of his discussion on war and peace in Islam that the notions of peace and war in Islam are closely related to the Muslims' view of their relations with the nations around them. Muslims' notion of war and peace is closely associated with their political theory, which is based on the relationship between text and reality. The position of peace in the Islamic system of thought has received less attention from Muslim thinkers as their attention has been devoted more to the discussion of war.² While the discussion of the definition of peace in his writings is adequate, it does nothing to resolve the conflict between texts that advocate the use of violence and those that advocate peace.

Abderrahim Lamchichi mentions that there are no descriptions from Islamic thinkers of a war that is free without limits but rather a war that is limited by norms, not a war that indulges in ambitions to dominate and defeat opponents. This issue, which significantly impacts life, must be carefully considered with an awareness of the adverse consequences it may cause.³ He presented some interpretations of the word *jihād* that seem more fitting to the fact that the enemy is not always in a particular group. However, his writings have not sufficiently discussed the passages from Islamic sources that support nonviolence and peace.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer's study of nonviolence and peacebuilding in Islam concludes that many signs, symbols, values, and rituals in Islam—as a religion and culture—provide

¹ Cf. Özçelik, Sezai and Öğretir, Ayşe Dilek. "Islamic Peace Paradigm and Islamic Peace Education: The Study of Islamic NonviolenceNonviolence in Post-September 11 World". *4th Arab-Turkish Congress of Social Sciences: Economy, Education and Development*. Amman, Jordan 2014. Vol. 1, p. 235-254; and Wani, Nasir Hassan. "Peace in Islam in the Light of the Holy Quran and Hadith," *Journal of Islamic and Education Studies*, vol. 2 No. 3 (2023), pp. 162-170.

² Makram Abbès, "Guerre et paix en islam: naissance et évolution d'une « théorie », in *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 73, 2003, pp. 48, 57.

³ Abderrahim Lamchichi, "Jihād. Un combat contre quel adversaire?" in *Mot. Les langages du politique*, 79, 2005, pp. 21-33.

provisions for people who pursue and take the non-violent option in responding to conflict and war.⁴ However, with an anthropological approach, his study does not deal with theological problems around the notion of peace in Islamic understanding.

A study on the Prophet's peaceful attitude in Media by Suleyman Sertkaya and Zuleyha Keskin shows that he and his companions did not always take a harsh stance against and attack those who acted unfavorably towards him and his followers.⁵

This paper attempts to answer the question of how to resolve the conflict between passages of the Qur'an that are anti-peace with enemies or competitors and those that advocate peace and living together in peace. The former takes the form of commands to fight, depictions of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad as people who are harsh to unbelievers, that the Prophet was sent with the religion of truth to defeat all other religions, and statements that the initiative for peace must come from the other side. On the other hand, the Qur'an encourages people to compete in doing what is best for humanity, regardless of their faith (2:148), to forgive (5:13), and to repay others with something better (41:34). The Prophet was reported as welcoming Christian leader from Yemen to Medina and allowing them to worship in his mosque, although some of his Companions objected.⁶

Some writers have discussed tolerance, respect, and reverence for others with various approaches.⁷ Still, no one has tried to

⁴ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *NonviolenceNonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice*. (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2003), p. 181.

⁵ Sertkaya, Suleyman and Keskin, Zuleyha. "A Prophetic Stance against Violence: An Analysis of the Peaceful Attitude of Prophet Muhammad during the Medinan Period," in *Religions*, 2020, 11, 587, pp. 1-13.

⁶ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah wa Ma'rifah Aḥwāl Ṣāhib al-Sharī'ah*, ed. A. M. Qal'ajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah and Dār al-Rayyān li-t-Turāth, 1988), V: 382.

⁷ On the empirical account on these topics, see for example, Mursyidin, Akmal Saputra, Baihaqi, Jumadil Saputra and Wardah Muharriyanti Siregar, "The Crisis of the Agency for Customary Institutions (Keujruen Blang): From the New Order, Reformation to Peace of Aceh" *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 11, no. 1 (2023): 363-378, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v11i1.911>; Erawadi and Fadlan Masykur Setiadi "Exploring Religious Harmony through Dalihan Na Tolu: Local Wisdom in Peacebuilding in Indonesia", *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (2024): 1379-1408, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1398>.

discuss it from the point of view of Islamic theology, especially about the understanding of the superiority of Islam over other religions and that Islam is the only true religion. This paper attempts to trace the origins of this view in other source texts and history.

It indirectly shows how indirectly I deal with this issue, i.e., theological-historical. Here, the theological method means the analysis of the source texts of Islamic teachings to conclude in the form of an understanding of the so-called teachings of Islam. The theological nature appears in the material based on authoritative texts in Islam, namely the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the analysis must be logical and reasonable. The Kalam science is called a combination of rational arguments and traditional evidence. This article puts forward a historical explanation as to why Muslim writers' presentation of peace is obscured mainly by expositions of war and the use of violence.

The truth is meant to be Acknowledge and Accepted

If related to religion, truth often means the validity of a religion in its function as guidance for human beings in orienting their/lives toward the right goal. This is something beyond the experience that human sensing cannot reach; only God can describe how one will reach the goal. In Islamic teaching, the description can be found in the Qur'an, and it is usually stated as the safety in the hereafter from Hell and being forgiven.⁸ Thus, the truth here means an assurance that the religion having it will lead the follower to the after-worldly life safety. The way is the only way and is called that of God.

Islam is believed to be this sole God's way drawn by Him for human. This belief is based on two verses of the Quran saying that

⁸ At least two passages can be used to change this definition of the proper goal of the religion of Islam. The first is the verse of the Qur'an saying that there are people who pray, "God, grant us fineness in this world and fineness in the hereafter, and protect us against the torture of Fire," as against those who pray, "God, grant us fineness in this world." Cf. chapter 2/al-Baqarah (She-Cow): 200-201. The other is a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "Work for your worldly life as if you will live forever and work for your hereafter, one as if you are going to die tomorrow."

the only religion for God is Islam (3:19) and that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam will be rejected (3:85). This kind of truth is a verbal or total truth, meaning that you may take it or leave it and any other religion after the advent of Islam is considered wrong. Therefore, it is challenging and even impossible for a Muslim to acknowledge the truth of different religions.

However, the word *al-islām* in those two verses can be understood as a proper name, i.e., Islam with a capital "I" or common noun *islām* meaning self-submission. Accordingly, using this latter meaning, those two verses may mean self-submission to God is the only way to safety. The problem is that this very word is used as the name of the religion that was institutionalized after Muhammad, making it almost impossible for Muslims to use its original generic meaning.

Another meaning of truth is the effectuality of a method in realizing an "intermediary goal." If the meaning mentioned above is the final or ultimate truth, this kind of truth is like a tactical truth, which may lead to the ultimate truth. How human beings may arrive at the end of living a religion contains a working out concerning belief, comportment control, internal purification, orienting one's thought, and improving relations with others. The intermediary goal pertains to the goal that a faithful may reach in his/her worldly life by practicing religion, considering that the ultimate goal can only be reached in the hereafter.

This truth related to this intermediary goal means that some methods developed by certain religions concerning self-interior exercises may improve one's spiritual life, no matter what his/her faith. For example, in controlling carnal desires—where all religions share the suggestion of doing it—there are methods developed by different religious traditions, ranging from orienting them to better goals to suppressing them to the extreme. It can be likened to our state being faced with the sourness of a citron: one piece of advice suggests not taking it, and another says to suppress your senses so that you can no longer feel the sourness. Still, another reminds you to use a sweetening that may make a better taste.

It belongs to this category that most religions lead people to good deeds. Buddhism, for instance, teaches its adherents to

release the self from attachment to sensuous desires and cravings for material and immaterial things; Christianity teaches love; Hinduism teaches self-control, compassion, and mercy. What must be said then about those who do evil deeds for religion? In recent years, Islam has been accused of having taught its followers to launch some actions of violence and terrorism. Likewise, this religion has been portrayed as against family planning, seeing that some passages in the traditional literature of the Prophet Muhammad endorse having many children. One of them is the one reading, "Make marriage and have many children, for I will be competing with other people (in the quantity of the followers) with you, even with the miscarried fetus."⁹ We can also find the teaching of excessive sacrifice in some tribal religions. Can we consider such things as proof of the untenability of religion?

Yes, at first glance, but as we go deeper into the teachings of the religion, we may find that such religiously based evil deeds deviate from the religion's central teaching. This is the case of the tradition of great religions. At least there are always ways to show the existence of teaching in the same tradition that is not used to support evil deeds and is closer to the common good shared by other religions. Besides, there are always dynamics in the religious tradition by which some religiously based evil actions may be corrected by internal energy.

Going back to the criteria by which truth—the above-mentioned total truth—is recognized, the most common in Islam is compliance with God's statement, i.e., what is clearly stated in the Qur'an as the primary criterion. The reason is that we are in front of something unperceivable by our perceiving capacity (*gayb*), and therefore, it is God's word that we can count on.¹⁰ Compliance with the rational argument is recognized only as long as it is not discordant with the clear statement of the Qur'an.

The truth may be based on rational argument, but this matters only in what belongs to the domain of intellectual operation, while

⁹ Cf. al-Baihaqī, *Ma'rifa al-Sunan wa-l-Āthār*, vol. XI:207 and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-San'ānī, *al-Musannaf*, vol. VI: 173.

¹⁰ This stand is that of the Sunnite or the mainstream Islamic school. For the Mu'tazilite, those who advocate liberal thinking, it is only the rational basis that we count on in matters of principles of religion.

religion belongs more to the domain of belief. Any movement in History basing its position on the use of reason could manage to get reception from Islamic communities. Rational argumentation could only attract some elites from whom the common religious expressions are sometimes complicated to find. The Mu'tazilite, Muslim philosophers and scientists who were the backbone of rational movement in Islamic History, got even severe measurements from the advocates of orthodoxy, and some risked their lives.

Nevertheless, the truth of other religions can be acknowledged here, provided they comply with logical rules. Rational arguments transcend the boundaries of religious claims. Therefore, we can acknowledge any concept based on a rigor or rational basis, no matter the religious tradition from which the concept comes. The problem is that logic is not so significant in a matter of faith. Faith that comes from beyond the human realm, a faithful may argue, must not be put under the supervision of reason made operative by human beings. However, there is no guarantee for the coming-down of the faith from the extra human realm (*al-ghaib*, the non-present, in Qur'anic expression).

As for the partial truth related to the "intermediary goal," the sole criterion is the method's effectiveness in realizing the intended goal. With this criterion in mind, it is not so difficult for a Muslim to acknowledge the truth of specific methods proven to be effective. One possible hindrance to such an acknowledgment is the worry that it will damage the purity of one's faith.

Islamic Acknowledgement and Acceptance of other's truth

Acknowledgment is recognizing or admitting the existence, reality, or truth of something without necessarily agreeing with, approving, or internalizing it. At the same time, acceptance actively embraces something as valid, legitimate, or worthy of respect, even if it differs from personal beliefs or preferences. While acknowledgment is recognizing something that exists or is true, without emotional engagement, acceptance is embracing or validating something with understanding and emotional openness. In the former, others are recognized for their existence and truth, while in the latter, people embrace togetherness by

respecting the different beliefs whose existence is recognized. Recognition does not necessarily continue with togetherness, while acceptance includes different people in the unity of the container while still respecting the beliefs held.

The problem is the possibility of a Muslim saying yes to another religion's truth. Referring to the above-mentioned verbal truth, the answer is always negative. Nevertheless, there is a possibility of forming another opinion within the Quran. For example, there are two verses in his scripture declaring that (1) those who believe, (2) the Jews, (3) the Christians, and the Sabeans will have no fright nor sorrow in the hereafter.¹¹ In Islamic History, one can find instances where Muslims regarded other religions than Islam as ways leading to God. Take, for example, Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (560/1165-638/1165), who stated that there is no difference between *heavenly* and *earthly* religions since all worshiped the same Sole God manifesting His self in their images and in the forms of all religions. The actual end of a servant worshipping his God is to realize the unity of his reality with His, and, accordingly, it is wrong to confine his God in one manifestation.¹² This Islamic thinker even called Judaism the way of Moses (*tarīqa mūsawīya*) and Christianity that of Jesus (*tarīqa 'īsawīya*), while Islam that of Muhammad (*tarīqa muhammadiya*).

With this refusal in mind, we may develop at least three attitudes by which Muslims may live peacefully with people of other faiths. First, the judgment of the faith should be left to the owner, without any ado, whether or not it is valid for others. A short statement, *lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn*, concludes a very short chapter in the Qur'an (109/al-Kāfirūn, the infidels or the refuters), meaning "Keep your religion and I will keep mine." This chapter

¹¹ Cf. These verses may be translated as: [Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve (2:62)] and [Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good -- they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve (5:69)].

¹² Cf. Note of A. E. Affifi in *Dā'ira al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmīya*, Arabic translation of *EI* by Muhammad Thābit al-Fandī, et al., I: 233, and Abd al-Qādir Mahmūd, *al-Falsafa al-Sūfīya fī al-Islām* (Cairo.: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1966-1967), 516.

orders the Prophet Muhammad to tell the infidels that he will never worship their object of worship as they will never worship his. In this situation, the most appropriate attitude for both sides will be keeping their religious positions. Then, they may build mutual understanding and work together in social matters and other instances.

It is true that the Qur'an reprimands, in many places, some elements of religious practices found in Arabia at the time of its revelation, such as the Christian trinity and human worship. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Muslims should not live side by side with the adherence to religion, the element of which is criticized. However, in encounters with people of different religious backgrounds, questions about religious practices may arise and judge whether they are true. The argument of this judgment will be based on a rational argument or common ground, where all attitudes are different. This attitude is concluded from the fact that the Qur'an criticized the religious practices because the Book deviated from what was taught by the prophets. If we put the case in the present situation, we may say that interfaith dialogue should not be confined to matters outside of faith. It can address matters of faith as long as it is done with wisdom (*bil hikmah*) and the best way (*allatī hiya ahsan*); seeking mutual understanding and ways of living together.

In side-by-side the Qur'an,

"And not alike are the good and evil. Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! he between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend."¹³

The second attitude is to take other's faith as a mirror in which one can see his/her own devotional life. This attitude may strengthen and enhance one's faith in front of many choices available. Human beings share many things related to spiritual experience and inner life. Therefore, each can draw lessons from what others feel, develop spiritual strength, and hold at times despair and hopelessness. As for fear of contamination—for those who do not recognize religions other than their own as accurate—

¹³ Sū a 41/Fuṣṣilat: 34.

this attitude may be built on the awareness that they will not take anything from other religion(s) save to have a medium by which they can delve into some pits of their religious tradition that other choices of religious practices have so far covered.

The third attitude is to be humble and not to monopolize the truth; for example, "I believe in the truth of my faith, but I do not know if others' faith is wrong." There are many instances where two faiths are in contradictory positions, and accordingly, if you take the one, you must throw the other. However, sometimes we find many different faiths go to the same goal, and the difference is only a giving emphasis on one particular aspect in one and another in the other.

The existence of people holding fast their faith other than ours, who often show as good comportment as—or even better than—what we find in our community, can be taken as a reminder that one has to be careful not to claim that one's way is not the only way to arrive at the truth. God reveals the truth through the Qur'an; it is true, but we must remember that he reveals His truth through different modes of revelation. The deviation in the Qur'an regarding some religious practices of the people of the *Book Ahl al-kitāb* may not mean that the people related to them should do the same thing forever. The gate is always open for everyone to enter the way of God, and this last is not only drawn by Islam. It is possible that peoples of those communities in another time and place in the Book develop concepts reprimanded by the Qur'an, such as the Trinity and human worship, and arrive at meanings different from those found in Arabia during the lifetime of Muhammad. Or, the meaning of the concepts that the Qur'an "has in mind" is not the same as what is meant by those peoples, and the dialogue may disclose the difference.

Besides, the Qur'an also states that the people of the Book are not all the same. There are among them individuals who read God's "signs" at night, prostrating themselves to Him. They believe in God and the Hereafter, enjoin what is universally accepted, forbid the abominable, and strive with one another in hastening

good deeds.¹⁴ This statement indicates at least that truth is not confined to one single community and or religion but is with anyone who has certain qualities and fulfills specific "ethical" requirements. However, we should not deny the fact that there are many pages in the Qur'an dealing with people as if they are an entity having a single attitude, like the Jews (*al-yahūd*) and the Christians (*al-nasārā*) or even the people of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). It is also a fact that group-based judgment—often unfair—cannot be avoided. However, the Quran tries to amend it by reminding people of the possibility of the existence of good individuals in a group judged as bad and vice versa.

The Qur'an considers the truth when it is referred to religion as one and carried out by many prophets. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad came as *musaddiq*,¹⁵ one who says yes to what is in the Tora and the Evangel, and he sometimes criticized the practices of religious people of his time that did not comply with what was written in the Scriptures. However, it is also stated in the Qur'an that every community has its own rules and method of worship.¹⁶ Here, we may not confine the truth only to the religious traditions mentioned in the Qur'an, i.e., the Abrahamic ones, Jewish and Christian, or probably Sabian, since it states as well that for every community, God sent a messenger or reminder,¹⁷ Moreover, some of the messengers were told by God to Muhammad, while others were not.¹⁸

Thus, it can be said that although Muslims may not acknowledge the truth of other religions *in toto*, they may live with people of other religions, accepting the existence of adherents of other religions within certain borders. First, to keep faith of

¹⁴Cf. This verse may be translated as: *They are not all alike; of the followers of the Book, there is an upright party; they recite Allah's communications in the nighttime, and they adore (Him). They believe in Allah and the last day, enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and strive with one another to hasten good deeds, and those are among the good.*

¹⁵Cf. sūra 3/Al 'Imrān: 81.

¹⁶Cf. sūra 5/al-Mā'ida: 48 that reads *Likullin ja'alnā minkum shir'atan wa-minhājan*.

¹⁷Cf. sūra 10/Yūnus: 47; 35/Fātir: 24.

¹⁸Cf. sūra 40/Ghāfir: 70.

judgment, leaving anyone free to believe or not to believe and work by his/her belief. Second, to say this first attitude does not mean that each side has to forget the differences but to be aware that there are many things in the other side's belief that he/she cannot agree with. Third, each side can accept the other as a friend with another faith. Faith is only an instance in life when it is essential and may not ruin other ties that bind many people of different religious convictions together.

War and Peace in Islamic History

The Prophet did wage war on the Quraysh of Mecca (Badr), defended against their attacks (Uḥud), attacked the Thaḳīf (Hunain), defended against the attacks of the Arab tribes around Medina (Aḥzāb-Khandaq), waged war on the Jews around Medina. However, he restrained himself from the hypocrites living in Medina. During the opening of Mecca, he also forbade his Companions from using violence.

Thus, the Madinah verses that encourage fighting the disbelievers cannot be understood as commands to fight non-Muslims. The phrase "who believe neither in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which God and His Apostle forb d, nor acknowledge the true religion" (9:29) should not be understood in general terms but must be placed in the context of Medina when Muhammad lived.

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad was sent with compassion for all humanity (21:107). As a bearer of glad tidings (17:54, 25:56, 34:28) and warnings and as a clear messenger (16:82, 24:54, 29:18, 64:12). These statements are strong evidence that the use of violence was not a significant part of Prophet Muhammad's mission. Indeed, after he migrated to Medina, the formerly divided Arabs were united under the banner of Islam, which seems to have dominated Islamic History. These lasted over a century after his death, covering a vast territory from India and the Chinese border in the East to the Pyrenees mountains in France. Although the wars of expansion stopped after that, they have never ceased in the Islamic world. Be it civil wars between fellow Muslims, wars of independence, or wars against external powers. Against this background, the teachings of Islam were

formulated to include the war in the cause of Allah in the Islamic system.

As a result, the voices of peace became faintly audible even though many thinkers thought about it. The fuqaha tried to reduce the brutality of war by writing down the guidelines that must be observed in war, such as not destroying crops and not killing the elderly, women, and children.

The Sufis tried to define jihad by fighting the destructive tendencies of the self. Sufi mystics (Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, al-Ḥallāj, Suhrawardī, ibn al-'Arabī, and others) used Quranic verses (especially eschatological verses) to justify their stance. They advocate allegorical or even metaphorical interpretations and reject philosophical or casuistic speculations in favor of intuition and close contact with God.

Correspondingly, the reformists reread the Quran in the context of today's challenges, preferring only the call for peace and emphasizing the ethics of recognition and dialogue between civilizations. The position of modernist Muslims has the advantage of trying to calm minds, bring Islam and the West closer together, and contribute to the necessary dialogue of civilizations.¹⁹

This is supported by historical evidence from Prophet Muhammad's choice of action. For example, when the Najran delegation came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), they entered his mosque after noon, when it was time for their prayer, and they stood up to pray in it. Some people wanted to stop them, but the Messenger of Allah said: "Let them pray." Then they turned to face the East and prayed their prayer.²⁰

The Quran contains many verses that favor forgiveness and peace over reciprocal retaliation. "The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah." (42:40). Even

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah wa Ma'rifah Ahwāl Šāhib al-Sharī'ah*, ed. A. M. Qal'ajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmīyah and Dār al-Rayyān li-l-Turāth, 1988), V: 382.

if someone from the enemy group asked the Prophet for protection, he was ordered to grant it. "If one amongst the Pagans ask you for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah. and then escort him to where he can be secure." (9:6)

It also contains a verse that allows Muslims to do good to disbelievers who do not take a hostile stance. "Allah forbids you not, about those who fight you not for (your) faith nor drive you out of your home, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just." (60:8)

Taking a peaceful attitude by respecting each other and jointly organizing peace and peaceful coexistence is not prohibited in Islam's primary source.

Living peacefully in a pluralistic world

Based on the Qur'an (2:208) views tolerance as a necessary prerequisite for coexistence. It assumes social, cultural, and religious differences that require toleration, even if these differences do not meet the parties' approval. Tolerance without greater acceptance indicates a sense of conditioned approval. Tolerance is an important starting point for establishing greater peace. The Quran seeks to establish peace between various religious communities and acknowledges differences in beliefs and cultures. It emphasizes maintaining good relations between adherents of various religions, as religious freedom is an important basis for sustainable peace.²¹

Religious tolerance does not mean that one should be subject to other religious claims or force other believers to accept any specific religion, but it means an attitude of respect for other religions and readiness to hear and understand other religious teachings or principles that can be formed through discussions, dialogues, and reading.²²

A Medinan Jew—who later converted to Islam—'Abd Allāh ibn Salām relates that on his first occasion of seeing the Prophet Muhammad, he heard him saying, "O people, spread peace, feed

²¹ Abur Hamdi Usman. "Does Islam Practice Tolerance? Some Notes from Quranic Perspective". *Preprints*, July 2018, 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

the poor and the needy, maintain the bonds of brotherhood, and pray. You will enter Paradise in peace."²³

Nevertheless, many Muslims still assume that Islam is the only true religion revealed by God to overcome other religions. The basis for this is, among other things, the statement that Muhammad was sent with the true religion to make it dominant over all religions (Qur'an 9:33). This is the literal meaning of *li-yuzhirahū 'alā al-dīn kullih*.

Some state that Islam is the conclusion of religions, and it is a universal religion for all people since it was brought by the Seal of Prophets and Messengers, Muhammad bin Abdullah, peace be upon him, until the Day of Judgment... There is no prophet or messenger after Muhammad, no religion or message after Islam. Islam is not a religion for a people, a tribe, or a place, and it is not limited by time because humanity has grown it, and it is a religion that addresses the mind at all times and places.²⁴

Based on some passages in the Qur'an, the late Ibn Bāz states that Islam is a valid religion and all inhabitants of the earth are required to accept it. God has labeled the Jews and Christians as disbelievers for what they said about God, for what they twisted and changed in their books, and for exceeding the limit in word and deed according to what their tongues describe and their souls are tempted to do. The law of Muhammad has superseded Judaism and Christianity, so may Allah bless him and grant him peace. What is true in them has been proven by Islam, and what is false in them is what the people have distorted and altered according to their whims. To buy it for a small price is the worst of what they buy. The religion of Islam is the true religion required of the people of the earth, and it is the religion that all the prophets preached.²⁵

²³ Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaḥ fī al-Aḥādīth wa-l-Āthār*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Lebanon: Dār al-Tāj, Riyad: Maktabah al-Rushd and Medina: Maktabah al'Ulūm wa-l-Ḥikam, 1409 AH/1989 CE), VII:257.

²⁴ Tawfīq Muḥammad Shāhin, "Al-Islām Dīn 'Ām Shāmil Kāmīl". *Da'wat al-Haq*. Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Su'ūn al-Islāmīyah, al-Mamlakah al-Magribīyah. Vol 276/1410 AH-1989 CE.

²⁵ Ibn Bāz, "al-Islām Huwa al-Dīn al-Haqq wa-Mā Siwāhu min al-Adyān Bāṭil", in: <https://binbaz.org.sa/articles/60/الاسلام-هو-الدين-الحق-وما-سواه-من-الاديان-باطل>

Of course, such a reading is not compatible with peace efforts on the part of Muslims in pluralistic societies.²⁶ God may have revealed the Quran, but its reading is always influenced by the reader as a member of a different society from that of the first generation of Muslims who witnessed and were often the ones to whom the Book was revealed. The inner state of the Arabs at that time may be said to be comparable to the state of the Muslims today when the power of the world is not in their hands, while poverty, ignorance, helplessness, and so on are. It is, therefore, not strange that some people are then infected with a superiority complex characterized by inflating themselves to appear more significant than others.

In religious discourse, superiority complexes are usually expressed by claiming to be a new prophet, a wise and visionary leader of the people or elder, a powerful healer, and in communities—by claiming to be the "only saved community" led by a charismatic leader. One day, a Khārijī approached Imām Ḥasan Baṣrī, asking for his opinion on their group of devout worshipers who were sincere in fighting for their faith. "They are experts of the world." The man argued by saying, "One of them is willing to leave his wife and children to fight in the cause of Allah." Imam Hasan Basri asked, "Did the sultan they were fighting forbid them to pray, pay zakat, perform Hajj and Umrah?" "No". The Imam said, "The ruler only prevents you from seizing the world [read: power], so you fight him."²⁷

In such circumstances, it is almost impossible for peace efforts to come from the initiative of a person afflicted with a superiority complex like many of today's Muslims. The pious predecessors were indeed role models, but not just in the form of boasting. That self-aggrandizement should be replaced by their quality of striving and connecting with people who can be comrades in the pursuit of

²⁶ On the most recent studies on Muslim empirical experience about multiculturalism, see, for example, Saepudin Mashuri, Sauqi Futaqi and Ahmad Sulhan, "Spiritual Base of Pesantren for Building Multicultural Awareness in Indonesian Context", *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 24, no. 1 (2024): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i1.17141>.

²⁷ Abū Ḥayyān l-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-Dhakḥā'ir*, ed. Widād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1408 AH/1988 CE), I:156.

a better life. The high moral qualities, humanism, responsibility for the fate of humanity, justice, simplicity, and modesty of the Prophet and his companions should not be abandoned and replaced by boldness in taking up arms, as if the essence of Islam is only war.²⁸

Conclusion

To conclude, we need confidence and reading skills to share with others to establish peace. Sometimes, when you feel insecure about your safety, you may not believe that others will not harm you. The feeling of being threatened may make you misunderstand; however, a gesture others may launch and translate as a threat or even offense. Theology, as a human understanding of God's message, is influenced by the psychological condition of the theologian and/or those he or she represents. Therefore, we must do our best together to have people of religion gain their confidence and feel secure if we want peace to be the center of theology.

In a world where people of different faiths and cultures live together, the readiness to share the space is only natural. The awareness of the public sphere, where all may work and express their feelings or beliefs, should be developed. Since every individual and every group has enough room, each has to respect the other's right to have the same. This means that each person must limit his/her freedom and needs. The failure to do this will cause collision and conflict, and theology may be used to fuel war.

Theology may support peace or war, and therefore, there should be wisdom in choosing options of understanding available for the theologians to get the most appropriate to the dignified life for all community members. It is sure that peace is closer to that kind of life than enmity and violence. To successfully promote peace, we must promote justice, whether in the distribution of wealth or the chance to develop an individual's potentialities and express one's beliefs. Without justice and fair treatment in the relations between human beings, the temptation to use violence is

²⁸ V.S. Polosin, "Religious Superiority Complex: A Psychological Perspective," *Minbar Islamic Studies*. 2023;16(3): 701–717. (In Russ.)

always there, and those who feel being treated unfairly or marginalized in the decision-making process may take it using theology as their basis for doing so.

The change of situations usually requires theological attitudes that are no more than the product of specific situations where the past generation lived. Theology is always a human-made formulation of faith in connection to life problems faced by adherence to the legion. However, it is always challenging to change theological formulation since it is usually regarded as divine guidelines containing the only truth. To change it—many believe—means to undermine God's authority. Therefore, sometimes, we must take an indirect way to get the change done. Speaking of Islam, matters needed for making theological change are available in the sources of teaching, the human capability of observing and making conclusions, and the long history of religious thought.

Although the theological attitude of the average Muslim towards others' truth is refutation, it cannot be concluded that Muslims will have no theology of peace in relation to people of different faiths. Living in peace with others does not require acknowledgment of their truth. One may live with others peacefully, each believing in his/her truth while developing a common ground on which all may stand, leaving the faith as something private.

As for the "partial truth," fewer difficulties hamper the acknowledgment. Some concepts of spiritual life are ways of developing the internal capacity to overcome carnal desires. They are very much developed in the Buddhist tradition and are taken by some Muslims, which means their acknowledgment that those concepts and ways are true, or—to be precise—effective. However, there are other Muslims who refuse to take anything—in religious matters—from any other tradition, like those who refuse the Sufi way on the basis that this way originates from non-Islamic tradition.

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