

The Relationship between Religions and Tolerance

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1- Introduction

Religion has always played a significant role in shaping societies and influencing individuals' beliefs and behaviors. It serves as a framework for understanding the world, providing moral guidance, and offering a sense of purpose and belonging (Atran & Ginges, 2012). Religion, which generally refers to a body of beliefs or dogmas about divinity, is said to have originated from the Latin verb "religare," which means "to unite, to tie" (Aulet & Vidal, 2018). However, the religious phenomenon is multifaceted, and religion has yet to have a universally agreed-upon definition (Aulet & Vidal, 2018). Scholars have proposed various perspectives, from religion as a universal supernatural phenomenon inherent to human nature to an atheistic view that sees religions as human creations. In this paper, religion is understood as a belief system that unites a community of believers who adhere to shared moral standards and engage in religious rituals based on their understanding of a higher power (Aulet & Vidal, 2018).

Religious texts affect people's behavior towards other faiths. In other words, one's religious beliefs strongly predict one's level of acceptance of others (Bilim & Düzgüner, 2015). The concept of religious tolerance gains significance within the context of religion. Religious tolerance refers to accepting, respecting, and accommodating different religious beliefs, practices, and traditions (Batool & Akram, 2020). It involves recognizing the rights of individuals to hold and manifest their religious convictions without facing discrimination or persecution (Galeotti, 2002).

Religious tolerance plays a vital role in diverse and multicultural societies by promoting peace, understanding, and respect among individuals with varying religious beliefs. It is crucial in fostering harmonious coexistence, societal cohesion, and the protection of individual freedoms and rights (Forst, 2017).

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This academic paper delves into the complex relationship between religions and tolerance. It examines the relationship between religions and tolerance and explores the concept of religious tolerance and its existence within Abrahamic religions. The study aims to deepen our understanding of the dynamics between religion and tolerance by considering historical perspectives, religious teachings, and contemporary issues.

2- The Concept of Religious Tolerance

2.1 Tolerance

Understanding the concept of religious tolerance requires an exploration of the broader notion of tolerance itself. Numerous definitions and debates exist among theorists regarding tolerance. Thinkers came up with different definitions of tolerance, which ranged from the negative meaning of nonintervention ("to allow, permit, not interfere with") to the positive meaning of "to acknowledge and respect" even if you don't agree with other faiths or behaviors (Hayden, 2002).

Galeotti (2002) proposes an advanced perspective on tolerance called egalitarian tolerance, which involves not only accepting and acknowledging minorities but also challenging negative stereotypes about them.

Walsham (2006) argues that tolerance is vital to the modern libertarian view of human rights. Triandafyllidou (2012) mentions that tolerance is a flexible concept that provides a space for various policies that protect everyone's rights to avoid tension and conflict between rival groups. Triandafyllidou also sees tolerance as a practice between intolerance (denying the beliefs and practices of minorities) and respect. However, she thinks that tolerance may fit better in some contexts than respect, which is only sometimes the best choice for accommodating differences.

According to King (2012), tolerance is a power relationship that exists when the "tolerator" has the authority and ability to prevent an act but does not use this power. In other words, only the majority can tolerate the minority, and the opposite is invalid simply because the minority doesn't have the power to do so. Powell and Clarke (2013) say tolerance only counts when done voluntarily and not compulsorily. If mandatory, it would be seen as "suffering" or "bearing" things one doesn't like but has no power to prevent.

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Critics, including Mill and Butterfield, argue that tolerance is a flawed virtue that implies negative judgment and disrespect for beliefs, practices, and opinions that differ from one's own, leading to relativism and apathy (Forst, 2017). They propose acceptance and recognition as alternatives to tolerance, emphasizing the need for genuine respect and equality (Galeotti, 2002; Engelen, 2008). Others contend that tolerance is challenging to maintain and can breed anger among both the tolerant and the tolerated, suggesting that it is insufficient to address the complexities of pluralistic societies (Avramenko & Promisel, 2018; Dumler-Winckler, 2019).

There are essential components for tolerance to be present. The first component is an objection, as tolerance does not apply when noninterference stems from indifference or acceptance. For example, the dominant religious group may permit religious minorities to practice their beliefs even if they find them objectionable (Powell & Clarke, 2013; Forst, 2017). The second component is acceptance, which does not eliminate the negative perception of beliefs or practices but recognizes positive motives that outweigh the negative ones in a given context. For instance, the religious majority may not accept the practices of a religious minority but understands that suppressing them could lead to civil strife (Avramenko & Promisel, 2018). The third component, rejection, sets boundaries on tolerance, as certain motives for rejection may outweigh those for approval (Triandafyllidou, 2012; Powell & Clarke, 2013; Forst, 2017). Consequently, discussions on the tolerance of minority religious groups often involve debates on limiting or disapproving certain practices, such as banning the wearing of the niqab by Muslim women in public (Philipose, 2021).

2.2 Religious Tolerance

Religious tolerance blossoms within this mosaic of pluralism, nurturing an environment where equality and acceptance thrive. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a beacon of hope, calls upon nations to safeguard this fundamental freedom, upholding impartiality and transparency (Canetti-Nisim, 2004; Silk, 2007; Ellwood & McGraw, 2013).

Most attempts to define religious tolerance have generated some consensus within this context. The German theologian Gustav Mensching (1901–1978) explains that religious tolerance is a precious gift, granting everyone the freedom to hold and practice their beliefs without unnecessary obstacles. Mensching reveals two levels of tolerance. In negative tolerance, individuals hold firm

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to their own beliefs while respecting the rights of others to hold different views. Positive tolerance goes a step further, where individuals acknowledge and embrace the validity of diverse religious beliefs as equally meaningful paths in life (Powell & Clarke, 2013). Smith (2009) reflects this positive level of religious tolerance when he indicates that religious tolerance is the appreciation of different faiths even though one doesn't follow. It is the attitude that allows a person to stick to their faith without being disrespectful towards other faiths.

Powell & Clarke (2013) find that even though the negative sides of toleration have made many thinkers not see toleration as the highest moral ideal, it may be an essential achievement so far as the issue of religious tolerance is concerned. It is the first step toward understanding and respect for other religions. So, tolerance in the context of religion is an optimal thing, as it is drained of fanaticism and religious egotism.

3- The Relationship between Religion and Tolerance

Throughout the early 20th century, prominent pioneers of human science (e.g., James, 1902; Freud, 1927; Skinner, 1969) regarded religion as a belief system with a positive impact on society. They saw religion as a catalyst for pro-social behavior, curbing aggression, and promoting good morals (Forst, 2017). However, as the mid-20th century approached, the perception of religion began to shift. Critics started questioning the necessity of religions due to their potentially harmful effects on followers. Scholars like Stouffer (1955), Rokeach (1960), Filsinger (1976), Beatty & Walter (1984), Altemeyer & Hunsberger (1992), and Reimer & Park (2001) highlighted the direct link between religions and intolerance (Powell & Clarke, 2013).

The aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 attacks witnessed an increase in studies linking religion to intolerance. Dawkins (2001) described religion as a significant trigger for hostility and intolerance, advocating for its elimination. Wellman and Tokuno (2004) acknowledged patterns within religion that could lead to conflict and violence. Atheistic theorists like Dennett (2006), Hitchens (2007), and Stenger (2009) went further, attributing terrorism and racism directly to religion. They fostered a polemical atmosphere by attacking religions and advocating for their disempowerment. The claim was that faith, devoid of supportive evidence, should not be respected, as it often leads to societal ills (Stenger, 2009).

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More recent scholarly works have taken a more objective view, exploring the pro-social impact of religions. Some theorists highlight the nature of parochial altruism within religious groups, wherein positive attitudes toward co-religionists coexist with negative feelings toward others (Bernhard et al., 2006; Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011). Johnson et al. (2012) argue that religion has a paradoxical influence, fostering favoritism and fanaticism. Philpott (2013) draws parallels between religions and nationalism, suggesting that they contribute to identity formation, loyalty, and intergroup hostility. Additionally, religious rituals like pilgrimage and public prayers play a role in building these characteristics.

Some scholars adopt a middle-ground approach, acknowledging that religions have dual faces. For instance, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) argue that fundamentalism-related religiosity promotes hostility, whereas autonomous religiosity can foster tolerance. Faith can be a force for both tolerance and conflict (Scott & Cavanaugh, 2007). Viewing situations from a divine perspective has the potential to reduce intercommunal hostility. While attending religious services may enhance group identity and encourage hostility toward other religious groups, religious piety itself has no such impact (Ginges et al., 2009).

Smith (2009) emphasizes the crucial role of religions in social integration and the advancement of human civilization. He acknowledges that religions can have both constructive and destructive aspects, attributing intolerance to religious adherents' claims of possessing absolute truth and the lack of knowledge about other beliefs. Smith proposes adopting a liberal approach toward other religious groups' beliefs, promoting early exposure and friendly interactions with diverse religious communities through family, education, and media.

Many theorists contend that the link between religion or religiosity and intolerance is unfounded (Eisenstein, 2006). They argue that faith is not inherently associated with violent attitudes (Tessler & Robbins, 2007; Shapiro & Fair, 2010). Religions contribute to humanity by fostering positive qualities such as generosity, integrity, love, empathy, respect, and harmony (Fagan, 1996; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Pichon et al., 2007; Randolph-Seng & Nielsen, 2007). Religion also regulates values in daily life, playing a socializing role (Stark & Roger, 2000). Moreover, studies indicate that individual religiousness predicts support for democracy and tolerant behaviors (Gu

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& Bomhoff, 2012). Religious organizations also engage in faith-based humanitarian initiatives, further contributing to society (Olsen, 2019).

4- Religious Tolerance in Abrahamic Religions

All heavenly books emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence and respecting others' rights. In Judaism, Jews believe that God has made a covenant with all of humanity and that all people, including non-Jews, have a bond with God (B'Av, 2018). The evidence from the Old Testament is "God of the spirits of all flesh" (Numbers 27:16).

The Noahide laws, developed during the rabbinic and medieval periods, have significantly fostered religious tolerance within Judaism. In Noahide laws, there are seven principles that God asks the sons of Noah to obey: to create courts of justice; and to desist from committing blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, killing, theft, and consuming the flesh of living creatures (Spitzer, 2018).

Tish'a B'Av (2018) mentions many Jewish religious texts that show the fate of non-Jews who follow the Noahide laws: It is mentioned that "the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come" (Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13). Also, the Talmud declares, "God does not withhold reward from gentiles who perform His commandments" (Talmud Y. Peah 1:1).

The Midrash tells us: "Why does the Holy One, blessed be He, love the righteous? Because righteousness is not due to inheritance or family connections... If a man wants to become a Kohen or a Levite, he cannot. Why? Because his father was neither a Kohen nor a Levite. However, if someone wants to become righteous, even if he is a gentile, he can, because righteousness is not inherited" (Num. R. 8:2).

Religious tolerance in Christianity is about showing acceptance, respect, and love to other faiths (Mehfooz, 2016). According to the Bible, Christians have to show a high level of tolerance for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, even though others do not always reciprocate this. This may be found in Matthew 5:43–45: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.'" Saint Paul also says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14).

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However, accepting other faiths as the right ones, the present perspective of Christian tolerance is a hotly disputed topic among several Christian theologians. Some agree with accepting the other faiths but disagree that they are valid (e.g., Velarde, 2008; Moody, 2018; Dy, 2021). Supporters of this notion recite different texts from the New Testament in which Saint Paul says, "Formerly when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods" (Galatians 4:8). Also, Jesus tells us in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through Me."

Nonetheless, former Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013) expressed the Catholic Church's stance on the fate of non-Christians and atheists, stating that they are not condemned to hell. This authoritative view holds significance as Benedict XVI is known for his conservative beliefs. He emphasized that a loving and powerful God, who created non-Christians in various nations, would not subject them to eternal torment (Brown, 2016). Pope Francis (2015-current) shares a similar perspective, emphasizing the liberating power of grace and compassion in Christianity. He acknowledges the mistakes made in the history of evangelization, where attempts were made to impose a single cultural paradigm. Pope Francis laments that such errors have prevented the Church from embracing the cultural richness brought by diverse traditions (Mares, 2021).

In Islam, tolerance is a kind of behavior that is sensible, compassionate, and well-intentioned towards others, including family, friends, neighbors, and members of the local and global community (Vaezi, 2018).

The Quran (Chapter 49:13) declares, "O humanity! We created you from a male and a female and divided you into tribes and nations so that you could get to know one another. "Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you." The plurality of socio-religious groups is seen as divinely mandated since God intended to create humanity as a mix of various "tribes and nations" (Kalin, 2015). But righteous people are the best in the sight of God (Khan, 2011).

Surprisingly, religious tolerance in Islam is characterized by accepting religious plurality, which legitimizes the presence of religious variations in society (Alabdulhadi, 2019). According to verse 56 of chapter 2, "Surely those who believe and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabians—

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whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord. And there will be no fear for them, nor shall they grieve." The previous verse shows that whoever believes in God's existence and does good things is promised heaven (Ladak, 2016). Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayyeb says, "Allah has created us all equal in terms of rights and duties, no matter how different we are in color, religion, and race" (Tornielli, 2019).

Islam believes in peaceful communication, such as conversation and discourse, and values persuasive reasoning. The holy Quran (16:125) urges its adherents to "invite them to the path of your Lord with intelligence and good teaching, and debate with them in the best manner" (Akhtar et al., 2016). Muslims are allowed to have friendly relationships with non-Muslims. "Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes." "Surely Allah loves those who are fair," says the Quran in Chapter 60, Verse 8 (Al-Sheha, 2013).

Islam refuses forceful conversion, as God tells us in Chapter 1, Verse 256, that "there is no compulsion in religion." God also restricts the use of force to just those who assault Muslims. Chapter 2, Verse 190 of the Quran says, "Fight in the name of Allah those who fight you, but don't cross the line. Allah doesn't like people who do that." So, in Islam, the only reason for holy war is to put an end to aggression without going too far in retaliation. And it's not about forcibly converting people to Islam.

5- Discussion

Despite the promotion of tolerance and equality among believers in religious texts, the persistence of killings carried out in the name of religion remains a perplexing question. Let's consider the Islamic faith, which has frequently been accused of supporting terrorism since the onset of the third millennium. Many thinkers have analyzed Islamic terrorism. Bar (2004) says that even though political and social factors are undeniably crucial in jihadist terrorism, the role of religious factors cannot be ignored. Modern Islamic ideology finds perfection in the methods of the Prophet and the events of his time. Therefore, theological innovations, philosophy, and politics are seen as disgusting. He adds that Muslims think that the West is better because Muslims stopped following

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the Prophet's teachings. So, the first step in fixing the problem was to "re-Islamize" Muslim society and set up an Islamic government based on Islamic law (shari'ah). In this system, jihad was mainly used against secular Muslim governments and societies, and the Muslim world's offensive jihad against non-Muslims was put on hold until the caliphate was restored.

Jacobsen (2019) mentions that most intellectual Islamic schools, sects, and movements do not support or promote terrorism. The problem is Salafi Islam, especially Salafi jihadism, which is tied to Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and other terrorist organizations. These groups depend on the misinterpretation of Quranic Verses.

To prevent a misleading application of religious texts, Muslims must comprehend the original situation in which the verses arose. Typically, Quranic verses arose in response to social and political issues during Islam's formative era. Let's take an example from the Quran, verse (5:51): "O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people." The uninformed reader of this verse's historical context will conclude that God instructs Muslims to avoid allegiance to Christians and Jews. The reason behind the emergence of this verse was that Arab tribes, as well as the Christian and Jewish populations, harassed the newly formed Muslim community at the time. They outnumbered the Muslims and had significant political and social influence. In these circumstances, which were characterized by wars, joining with the hostile parties might harm the tiny and vulnerable Islamic community's cohesion. The historical background of this verse requires that it be read in the context of Muslims establishing their religious identity at the time. It is valid for a specific time and situation and has nothing to do with other Muslim generations. The meaning and intent of the verse may be lost if a single verse is taken out of its original context. Meanwhile, believers might benefit from studying the historical and cultural background of their holy texts to understand their meaning and significance.

6- Conclusion

This paper explored the complex role of religion in shaping societies and individuals concerning religious tolerance. While earlier perspectives emphasized religion's positive role, some recent

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debates acknowledge its potential for favoritism and conflict. Overall, the paper found that religions can foster important prosocial values while contributing to identity formation and intergroup loyalty in ways that influence tolerance. Studies indicate individual religiousness predicts democratic support and tolerant behaviors when cultivated autonomously rather than through fundamentalism. Extremist misinterpretations of religious verses still risk fueling intolerance, as evidenced by debates on religious terrorism.

Promoting religious tolerance requires a liberal approach through family, education, and media to encourage exposure and interaction between faiths based on understanding and respect. Overall, this paper concluded the relationship between religion and tolerance is context-dependent. It is a multifaceted relationship that depends on factors like fundamentalism, autonomous religiosity, and how religious texts are interpreted.

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