

**UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN**  
**THEMES AND STYLE**  
**BY MUHAMMAD ABDEL HALEEM**  
**CHAPTER 6:**  
**TOLERANCE IN ISLAM**

Islam is generally regarded in the West as being anything but tolerant – a religion of the sword and belligerency. The previous chapter shows that this is the result of misinterpretation, and we continue here to examine the Islamic position on tolerance in general. A Muslim may wonder why this subject has assumed so much importance, but reference to European history shows that the history of the Christian West with regard to tolerance, by the admission of Western authors themselves, is shocking. In fact, it is this background that makes people now insist on tolerance and campaign for it to an extent for which Muslims, with their different background, do not see such a need.

Under the heading ‘Tolerance’ or ‘Toleration’, Western history books and encyclopedias actually recount a long history of *intolerance*, and hesitant movements – only in recent times – of attempts to alleviate it. The Toleration Act of 1689 passed in England granted to religious dissenters freedom of worship, under certain conditions. Roman Catholics and those who did not believe in the Trinity were not covered by the Act. Political disqualifications were not removed by the Act and dissenters were not allowed to hold public office until the Occasional Conformity Act of 1711. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 came to repeal earlier penal laws, which subjected the Irish Catholics to persecution. Such was the state of intolerance even within Christianity itself, let alone towards non-Christians.

**What is Tolerance?**

The lexical meaning of ‘tolerance’ is ‘to bear, to endure, to put up with’. In the Encyclopedia Americana we read:

Toleration, however, has a peculiarly limited signification. It connotes a refraining from prohibition 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 ... However lamentable the fact may be, it should not surprise us that greater intolerance has been found amongst the Christian nations than among any other people.

Traditionally, campaigns for tolerance were confined to the sphere of religion in a limited sense. In recent years, however, the meaning and the scope of the concept have become much wider, as we shall see later. When we come to consider the issue of tolerance in Islam we find a different situation altogether. First of all there was no ready equivalent term in the Arabic language to mean what is traditionally understood in English by 'tolerance'. When Muslims began to talk about this subject as a reaction to its use in English, the word they used in Arabic was *tasamu*, which has become the current term for 'tolerance'. The root form of this word has two connotations: 'generosity' (*jid wa karam*) and 'ease' (*tasahul*). Thus the Muslims in Arabic talk about *tasamu* *al-Islam* and *al-tasamu* *al-dini*, in a quite different way from the English usage. Where 'tolerance' indicates a powerful authority grudgingly 'bearing' or 'putting up with' others who are different, the Arabic term denotes generosity and ease from both sides on a reciprocal basis. The term is always used in the reciprocal form. In fact, tolerance is born out of the very nature of Islam – which seems to be the only religion that is not named after a race of people, like Judaism and Hinduism, or after any single person like Buddhism or Christianity. 'Islam', the name given to the religion in the Qur'an by God Himself, means 'devotion to God', 'dedication to God alone', conventionally translated as 'submission to God'. God, in Islam, is not the Lord of the Arabs or the Muslims but the Lord of all human beings and all the worlds, *Rabb al-'alamin*, who states in the Qur'an,

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

NOW, INDEED, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of Our creation: (17:70)

Islam, moreover, is not an exclusive or novel religion; it is part of the whole history of religion. Its book, the Qur'an, 'continues' and 'confirms'

the previous scriptures (12:111)

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson for those who are endowed with insight. As for this revelation, it could not possibly be a discourse invented by man: nay indeed, it is a divine writ confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations, clearly spelling out everything, and offering guidance and grace unto people who will believe.), and its Prophet is only one in the long

line of prophets Muslims have to believe in. For example, eighteen prophets are mentioned in one place in the Qur'an, and Muhammad is told:

*These are the people God has guided. Follow the guidance that has been given to them.*

2:136

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Say: "We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and, their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus; and that which has been vouchsafed to all the other prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves."; 6:83-96

وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ ۖ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْ نَّشَاءٍ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ  
وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا ۚ وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِن قَبْلُ ۚ وَمِن دُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ  
وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ  
وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَإِيلَاسَ ۚ كُلٌّ مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ  
وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيُوسُفَ وَلُوطًا ۚ وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ الْعَالَمِينَ  
وَمِن آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ ۚ وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ  
ذَٰلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ مِّنْ عِبَادِهِ ۚ وَلَوْ أَشْرَكُوا لَحَبِطَ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ  
أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنَّبُوءَةَ ۚ فَإِنْ يُكَفِّرْ بِهَا هَؤُلَاءِ فَقَدْ وَكَلْنَا بِهَا قَوْمًا لَّيْسُوا  
بِهَا بِكَافِرِينَ

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۚ فَبِهَدَاهُمْ اقْتَدِهْ ۚ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ  
وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ إِذْ قَالُوا مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ بَشَرٍ مِّن شَيْءٍ ۚ قُلْ مَن أَنزَلَ الْكِتَابَ الَّذِي  
جَاءَ بِهِ مُوسَىٰ نُورًا وَهُدًى لِلنَّاسِ ۚ تَجْعَلُونَهُ قَرِاطِيسَ تُبْدُونَهَا وَتُخْفُونَ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَعَلَّمْتُمْ مَا لَمْ  
تَعْلَمُوا أَنْتُمْ وَلَا آبَاؤُكُمْ ۚ قُلْ اللَّهُ ۚ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ  
وَهَٰذَا كِتَابُ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ مُصَدِّقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَن حَوْلَهَا ۚ وَالَّذِينَ  
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۚ وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنْزِلُ  
مِثْلَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُو أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرَجُوا  
أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۖ الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنْتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ  
تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فِرَادَى كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَتَرَكْتُمْ مَا خَوَّلْنَاكُمْ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا نَرَى مَعَكُمْ  
شُفْعَاءَكُمْ الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّهُمْ فِيكُمْ شُرَكَاءُ ۚ لَقَدْ تَقَطَّعَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْكُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَالِقُ الْحَبِّ وَالنَّوَى ۚ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَمُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتِ مِنَ الْحَيِّ ۚ ذَلِكُمْ  
اللَّهُ ۚ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ سَكَنًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ حُسْبَانًا ۚ ذَلِكُمْ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

And this was Our argument which We vouchsafed unto Abraham against his people: for We do raise by degrees whom We will. Verily, your Sustainer is wise, all-knowing. And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; and We guided each of them as We had guided Noah aforetime. And out of his offspring, We bestowed prophethood upon David, and Solomon, and Job, and Joseph, and Moses, and Aaron: for thus do We reward the doers of good; and upon Zachariah, and John, and Jesus, and Elijah: every one of them was of the righteous; and upon Ishmael, and Elisha, and Jonah, and Lot. And every one of them did We favour above other people; and We exalted likewise some of their forefathers and-their offspring and their brethren: We elected them all, and guided them onto a straight way. Such is God's guidance: He guides therewith whomever He wills of His servants. And had they ascribed divinity to aught beside Him-in vain, indeed, would have been all the good that they ever did: but it was to them that We vouchsafed revelation, and sound judgment, and prophethood. And now, although the unbelievers may choose to deny these truths, know that We have entrusted them to people who will never refuse to acknowledge them- to those whom God has guided. Follow, then, their guidance, and say: "No reward do I ask of you for this truth: behold, it is but an admonition unto all mankind!" For, no true understanding of God have they when they say, "Never has God revealed anything unto man." Say: "Who has bestowed from on high the divine writ which Moses brought unto men as a light and a guidance, and which you treat as mere leaves of paper, making a show of them the while you conceal so much - although you have been taught by it what neither you nor your forefathers had ever known?" Say: "God has revealed that divine writ!" - and then leave them to play at their vain talk. And this, too, is a divine writ which We have bestowed from on high - blessed, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations -and this in order that you mayest warn the foremost of all cities and all who dwell around it. And those who believe in the life to come do believe in this warning; and it is they who are ever-mindful of their prayers. And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about God, or says, "This has been revealed unto me," the while nothing has been revealed to him? - or he who says, "I, too, can bestow from on high the like of what God has bestowed"? If you couldst but see how it will be when these evildoers find themselves in the agonies of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands and call: "Give up your souls! Today you shall be requited with the suffering of humiliation for having attributed to God something that is not true, and for having persistently scorned His messages in your arrogance!" And God shall say: "And now, indeed, you have come unto Us in a lonely state, even as We created you in the first instance; and you have left behind you all that We bestowed on you in your lifetime. And We do not see with you those intercessors of yours whom you supposed to have a share in God's divinity with regard to yourselves! Indeed, all the bonds between you and your earthly life are now severed, and all your former fancies have forsaken you! VERILY, God is the One who cleaves the grain and the fruit-kernel asunder, bringing forth the living out of that which is dead, and He is the One who brings

forth the dead out of that which is alive. This, then, is God: and yet, how perverted are your minds! He is the One who causes the dawn to break; and He has made the night to be a source of stillness, and the sun and the moon to run their appointed courses: all this is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.

The Qur'an declares: 'Mu'ammad is but a messenger, before whom other messengers were sent' (3:144)

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ ۚ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ ۚ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا ۚ وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ

AND MUHAMMAD is only an apostle; all the other apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? But he that turns about on his heels can in no wise harm God - whereas God will requite all who are grateful to Him.) and he never said, 'No man cometh to the

Lord except by me.' Christians and the Jews who lived among an overwhelming Muslim majority are referred to in the Qur'an by the honorific term *ahl al-kitab* (the 'People of the Book') not as 'minorities', in the way that other religious groups in the Christian West, are described. The Qur'an does not brand the 'People of the Book' as a whole as unacceptable. It says:

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً ۚ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَانِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ  
وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ

But they are not all alike: among the followers of earlier revelation there are upright people, who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves before Him. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him.3:113-5

It does not brand them all as dishonest. It says:

وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِقِطَارٍ يُودِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَا يُودِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتُ عَلَيْهِ قَانِمًا ۚ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

AND AMONG the followers of earlier revelation there is many a one who, if you entrust him with a treasure, will faithfully restore it to thee; and there is among them many a one who, if you entrust him with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to you unless you keep standing over him - which is an outcome of their assertion, "No blame can attach to us for anything that we may do with regard to these unlettered folk": and so they tell a lie about God, being well aware that it is a lie."

3:75

Similarly, the Qur'an allows Muslims to eat the food of the 'People of the Book' and to marry their women who remain Christians and Jews (5:5)

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ ۖ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَلَلٌ لَّكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حَلَلٌ لَهُمْ ۚ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ ۚ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Today, all the good things of life have been made lawful to you. And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them. And lawful to you are, in wedlock, women from among those who believe in this divine writ, and, in wedlock, women from among those who have been vouchsafed revelation before your time -provided that you give them their dowers, taking them in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as secret love-companions. But as for him who rejects belief in God - in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come he shall be among the lost.

It does not allow Muslims to be carried away by fanciful hopes, but says:

لَيْسَ بِأَمَانِيكُمْ وَلَا أَمَانِي أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ ۚ مَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا يُجْزَ بِهِ وَلَا يَجِدْ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا  
وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا

It may not accord with your wishful thinking - nor with the wishful thinking of the followers of earlier revelation - that he who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him succour, whereas anyone - be it man or woman - who does whatever he can of good deeds and is a believer withal, shall enter paradise, and shall not be wronged by as much as would fill the groove of a date-stone.4:123-4

It instructs Muslims not to argue with the 'People of the Book' except in the fairest manner and to say to them:

وَلَا تَجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ ۚ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

*We believe in what has been revealed to us and in what has been revealed to you. Our Lord and your Lord is one and the same, and to Him we submit ourselves.*

29:46

Muslims are instructed to appeal to the 'People of the Book' through what is common between them and Islam.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

*Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God.' If then they turn back, say: 'Bear witness that we submit to God's Will'.*

3:64

In the Qur'an, God addresses Muslims and the followers of other religions, saying:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ ۚ لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا ۚ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ ۚ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

*We have ordained a law and assigned a path to each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation, but it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed upon you. Vie, then, with each other in good works, for to God you shall all be returned, and He shall declare to you what you have disagreed about.*

5:48

This command, to leave differences to be settled on the Day of Judgement, is repeated many times in the Qur'an. Even in their relations with polytheists, who stand as the extreme opposite of the fundamental Islamic belief of monotheism, Muslims are instructed in the Qur'an:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

*God does not forbid you, to be kind and equitable to those who do not fight you for your faith, nor drive you out of your homes: for God loves those who are just.*

60:8

Addressing all people, God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

*O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most Righteous of you, and God has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things.*

49:13

The variety of their colours, tongues, and races are regarded as a sign of God's power and mercy (30:22)

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And among his wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of innate knowledge!; 49:13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

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 to 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.), and as such should lead to closeness, rather than to discrimination or intolerance.

These instructions are not isolated or casual instances in the Qur'an, but are repeated many times and are part of the whole fabric of the message of Islam. On this basis, tolerance has been, from the beginning, a natural, inseparable part of Islam. It did not tolerate non-Muslims grudgingly, but welcomed them to live freely in Muslim society. At the height of Islam's success, the Qur'an set the principle, *la ikraha fi'l-din*, (2:256

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۚ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from the way of error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.). Here it employs the strongest and most

permanent negative form in Arabic, the *la* of absolute negation, used in the Qur'an for such fundamental negations as:

(47:19

فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنْبِكَ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مُتَقَلِّبُكُمْ وَمَثَوَاكُمْ

Know, then, O man, that there is no deity save God, and while there is yet time, ask forgiveness for your sins and for the sins of all other believing men and women: for God knows all your comings and goings as well as your abiding at rest.; 10:64

لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَى فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

For them there is the glad tiding of happiness in the life of this world and in the life to come; and since nothing could ever alter the outcome of God's promises, this, this is the triumph supreme!).

We also

find the repeated pattern:

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

'Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!"; (109:6);

وَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ لِي عَمَلِي وَلَكُمْ عَمَلُكُمْ ۚ أَنْتُمْ بَرِيءُونَ مِمَّا أَعْمَلُ وَأَنَا بِرِيءٌ مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

And so, O Prophet, if they give you the lie, say: "To me shall be accounted my doings, and to you, your doings: you are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for whatever you do." (10:41).

The Qur'an affirms that God has created people to be different, and they will always remain different, not only in their appearance but also in their beliefs (11:118–19

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۚ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ ۚ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

And had your Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but He willed it otherwise, and so they continue to hold divergent views'all of them, save those upon whom your Sustainer has bestowed His grace. And to this end has He created them all. But as for those who refuse to avail themselves of divine guidance, that word of your Sustainer shall be fulfilled: "Most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!") and it is up to each person whether to become a

believer or not.

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا ۖ أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

And thus it is: had your Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that you couldst compel people to believe,  
10:99

The two key expressions: *wa law sha'a rabbuka* (had your Lord wished) and *fa man sha'a* (whoever wishes to) occur more than twenty times in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an not only 'tolerates' Christians and Jews who live in a Muslim society, but instructs the Prophet:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ تُقِيمُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا ۖ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

Say: "O followers of the Bible! You have no valid ground for your beliefs -unless you truly observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your Sustainer!" Yet all that has been bestowed from on high upon you O Prophet by your Sustainer is bound to make many of them yet more stubborn in their overweening arrogance and in their denial of the truth. But sorrow not over people who deny the truth:.  
5:68

God speaks, saying:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ ۖ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ ۖ فَلَا تَخْشَوُا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْا اللَّهَ وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith; and so did the early men of God and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of God's writ had been entrusted to their care; and they all bore witness to its truth. Therefore, O children of Israel, hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me; and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain: for they who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth!.  
5:44

وَلِيَحْكَمْ أَهْلُ الْإِنْجِيلِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ ۖ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high-it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!.

5:47

In accordance with the instructions of the Qur'an, in ad 638 when the Muslims, under the Caliph 'Umar, entered Jerusalem, then called Aeilia, 'Umar made the following covenant with the inhabitants:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! This is the security which Umar, the servant of God, the commander of the faithful, grants to the people of Aeilia. He grants to all, whether sick or sound, security for their lives, their possessions, their churches and their crosses, and for all that concerns their religion. Their churches shall not be changed into dwelling places, nor destroyed, neither shall they nor their appurtenances be in any way diminished, nor the crosses of the inhabitants, nor aught of their possessions, nor shall any constraint be put upon them in the matter of their faith, nor shall any one of them be harmed. This was not a freak piece of history: it is modelled on what the Prophet said and did, in obedience to the Qur'an, the authority for all Muslims at all times.

Another example of Islamic treatment of non-Muslims is the generosity shown by Saladin in 1188, when he repossessed Jerusalem from the Crusaders. In the first campaign (1096), the Crusaders had ransacked the city and slaughtered a great number of Muslims and Jews. One of the Frankish chronicles records that:

They also ordered that all the corpses of the Saracens should be thrown outside the city because of the fearful stench; for almost the whole city was full of their dead bodies. The Saracens who were still alive dragged the dead ones out in front of the gates, and made piles of them, as big as houses. Such a slaughter of pagans no one has ever seen or heard of; the pyres they made were like pyramids.<sup>5</sup> When Saladin came, he found the Crusaders defiling the mosque by keeping pigs in it. Even European historians concede that he did not retaliate, but forgave the Crusaders, with the exception of a very few individuals who had been more vicious. He accepted ransom money from some of these and let others who could not pay go free.

Again, in 1492, when the last Muslim king of Granada surrendered the city to the Christian King Ferdinand, with a treaty that stipulated that all Muslims in the city should not be harmed, the Christians ignored the treaty and started the infamous Inquisition. Muslims in their own lands did not take revenge on any Christians living there. Moreover, Jews who were forced to flee from Spain came to the Muslims in North Africa and Turkey to continue enjoying the protection they had always received under Muslim rule in Spain.

Islamic tolerance allows non-Muslims to live according to their customs, even if these are forbidden in Islam. Thus Christians are allowed to breed pigs, eat pork, make and drink alcohol in Muslim countries even though such things are forbidden in Islam and it would not be asking Christians too much to refrain from such practices out of respect for Islam. In Egypt, for example, courts administer to non-Muslims laws of their own religious denominations, which are all incorporated into Egyptian law.

Some people in the West quote, as an example of Muslim intolerance, the fact that in the past they called Jews and Christians *dhimmis* (ignoring the real sense of this term which means 'those who enjoy protection') and the fact that Muslims collected *jizya* tribute from them. The *jizya* was 1 *dinar* a year for every able-bodied male who could fight in the army – monks were exempted. As non-Muslims they were not obliged to fight for the Muslim armies. This is a liberal attitude, which recognised that it would be unfair to enlist people who do not believe in Islam to fight for the Muslim state, something which their own religion and conscience might not allow them to do. The *jizya* was their contribution to the defence of the Islamic state they lived in. Muslims, on the other hand were obliged to serve in the army, and all Muslims had to pay the much higher *zakat* tax, part of which is spent on defence. When non-Muslims chose to serve in the Muslim army they were exempted from the *jizya*, and when the Muslim state could not defend certain subjects from whom they had collected *jizya*, it returned the *jizya* tax to them giving this as a reason. In return for the *jizya* non-Muslims also enjoyed state social security.

The Muslims charged Christians 1 *dinar* a year and allowed them to live in Muslim society and practise their religion freely; the Christians, in Jerusalem, Spain and other places, did not charge Muslims 1 *dinar* a year – instead they wiped them out.

It is a fact that there have always been Christians and Jews living among the Muslims, some even serving as members of the government at the height of the Islamic state; but no Muslims were left, for example, in Spain, Sicily, and other places from which Christians expelled them, and genocide was still practised in Europe in the 20th century.

Within the Muslim world itself, people are aware of the magnanimous nature of Islam as expressed by the Prophet, who called it '*anifiyya sam'a* 'lenient and magnanimous'. There have always been different *madhhabs*, or schools of law, which accept each other, enlightened by the statement attributed to the Prophet: 'Differences of opinion in my community are a mercy'. There is nothing in Islamic history similar to what happened between the Protestants and the Catholics, or the conformists and non-conformists in the West.

Leniency marks Islamic teachings, even in strictly legal matters. In the Qur'an, the door is always open for repentance and making amends for major penal offences like premeditated murder, highway robbery, theft and adultery, as well as in all offences that require punishment in this world and the next. Apostasy has no punishment in this world specified in the Qur'an; the penalty is left to the Day of Judgement:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ ۖ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ ۖ وَصَدٌّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ  
وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ ۚ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ  
يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا ۚ وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ  
فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۚ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

They will ask you about fighting in the sacred month. Say: "Fighting in it is an awesome thing (grave transgression); but turning men away from the path of God and denying Him, and turning them away from the Inviolable House of Worship and expelling its people there from - all this is yet more awesome (greater transgression) in the sight of God, since oppression is more awesome (greater transgression) than killing." Your enemies will not cease to fight against you till they have turned you away from your faith, if they can. But if any of you should turn away from his faith and die as a denier of the truth - these it is whose works will go for nought in this world and in the life to come; and these it is who are destined for the fire, therein to abide.

2:217

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى  
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ۚ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ  
يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

O you who have attained to faith! If you ever abandon your faith," God will in time bring forth in your stead people whom He loves and who love Him - humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth: people who strive hard in God's cause, and do not fear to be censured by anyone who might censure them: such is God's favour, which He grants unto whom He wills. And God is infinite, all-knowing.

5:54

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ارْتَدُّوا عَلَى أَدْبَارِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهُدَى ۖ الشَّيْطَانُ سَوَّلَ لَهُمْ وَأَمْلَى لَهُمْ

VERILY, those who turn their backs on this message after guidance has been vouchsafed to them, do it because Satan has embellished their fancies and filled them with false hopes:

47:25

In the Bible the situation is different:

If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in,

that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods you have not known), then you must enquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It is to remain a ruin for ever, never to be rebuilt. Deuteronomy: 13:12–16

هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنشِئُ السَّحَابَ الثِّقَالَ  
وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ الصَّوَاعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ  
يُجَادِلُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ الْمِحَالِ  
لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُمْ بِشَيْءٍ إِلَّا كَبَاسِطٍ كَفَّيْهِ إِلَى الْمَاءِ  
لِيَبْلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَالِغِهِ ۚ وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ  
وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَظُلُمًا ۖ لَئِنْ دَعَوْهُمُ بِالْعَدْوِ وَالْأَصَالِ ۖ  
قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلِ اللَّهُ ۚ قُلْ أَفَاتَّخَذْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ نَفْعًا  
وَلَا ضَرًّا ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ ۚ أَمْ هَلْ تَسْتَوِي الظُّلُمَاتُ وَالنُّورُ ۚ أَمْ جَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ  
شُرَكَاءَ خَلَقُوا فَتَشَابَهَ الْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

A man or woman who is proved to be worshipping other gods is to be stoned to death to 'purge the evil from among you'.

The death penalty mentioned in the *adith* of the Prophet Muhammad was not just for apostasy but for those who commit high treason against the Muslims by joining the enemy at war with them, or who commit other capital crimes against Muslims. The Qur'an itself tells us that a group of 'People of the Book' schemed to enter Islam at the beginning of the day and renounce it at the end of the day so that the Muslims themselves might abandon Islam (3:72

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَجْهَ النَّهَارِ وَكَفَرُوا آخِرَهُ  
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

And some of the followers of earlier revelation say to one another: "Declare your belief in what has been revealed unto those who believe in Muhammad at the beginning of the day, and deny the truth of what came later, so that they might go back on their faith;).

### The Current Meaning of Tolerance

'Tolerance' now refers to tolerating the views, beliefs and practices of others that differ from one's own. This is dictated by the demands of the new

spirit of globalisation, pluralism, democracy, campaigns for human rights, non-discrimination laws, freedom of expression, secularisation, and the dwindling influence of religion in the life of the West. In the light of this there has been more emancipation for women, campaigns against discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, class and more recently sexual orientation, as well as for the protection of minorities. This new sense of tolerance is broadening so fast that there are people now, even in the West, who are worried about the extent of the new spirit of tolerance:

The redefined notion of tolerance, on the other hand, doesn't merely ask for a respect of differences but often demands acceptance of the beliefs and practices of others.

Against this background, the Islamic revival, which reasserts the role of religion in the Muslim countries, appears to many people in the West to be intolerant.

Can Islamic teachings be 'tolerant' in this current sense? Can Muslims maintain that Islamic teachings could be reinterpreted to sanction campaigns for sexual freedom, for instance? Can Muslims say that these are matters of personal freedom and religion has no say in them? Such a position, if held by a Muslim, would be untenable. Muslims read in the Qur'an that there are things which God has forbidden and even if individuals cannot live up to that standard, no one has the right to determine as lawful that which God has made unlawful (16:116

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمُ الْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلَالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ

Hence, do not utter falsehoods by letting your tongues determine at your own discretion, "This is lawful and that is forbidden", thus attributing your own lying inventions to God: for, behold, they who attribute their own lying inventions to God will never attain to a happy state!). Those who deviate from religious

norms know they are deviating and know that God forgives those who come back to Him but would not accept from them to claim or campaign for their practices to be accepted as a norm.

### **Limits to the Concept of Tolerance**

Islamic law does not search into the heart or the private behaviour of any person: the Prophet of Islam even recommended that individuals who deviate from religious norms should keep their sins to themselves and ask God for forgiveness but, as Law, Islam protects social order. Thus it ordains enjoining what is good, and forbidding what is wrong. In fact, no religion can be said to be fully 'tolerant' in this respect, nor can any legal system. In this age of political lobbies and campaigns, Islam would not allow campaigning

for the decriminalisation of drugs or practices that fundamentally undermine the family system:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Verily, as for those who like to hear foul slander spread against any of those who have attained to faith grievous suffering awaits them in this world and in the life to come: for God knows the full truth, whereas you know it not..

24:19

### Muslims in non-Muslim Countries

In Western society, where religion is increasingly marginalised, Muslims, within their own community, are under the obligation to maintain the Qur'anic injunctions of ordering what is good and forbidding what is wrong, and acting within the general rule,

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

16:125 CALL you (all mankind unto your Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner- for, behold, your Sustainer knows best as to who strays from His path, and best knows He as to who are the right-guided.)

They are under the obligation not to dilute their religious teachings in keeping with whatever practices or campaigns appear in the society around them. In their relations with others, the guiding principles for Muslims are that

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۚ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from the way of error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing. (2:256),

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!" (109:6)

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۚ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ ۚ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ سُرَادِقُهَا ۚ وَإِنْ يَسْتَعِثُّوا يُعَاثُوا بِمَاءٍ كَالْمُهْلِ يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهَ ۚ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَفَقًا

And say: "The truth has now come from your Sustainer: let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it." Verily, for all who sin against themselves by rejecting Our truth We have readied a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water hot like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest!

(18:29).

Muslims are under a religious obligation not to force their religion or norms on others and they are forbidden to accept norms of 'tolerance' that undermine their religious teachings, which others may attempt to force on them. They are under a religious obligation to co-operate with other people who work to maintain what is good, but not to do what is wrong:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَحْلُوا شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ وَلَا الشَّهْرَ الْحَرَامَ وَلَا الْهَدْيَ وَلَا الْقَلَائِدَ وَلَا أَمِينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَانًا ۖ وَإِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَاصْطَادُوا ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاَنُ قَوْمٍ أَنْ صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَنْ تَعْتَدُوا ۚ وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى ۚ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

O you who have attained to faith! Offend not against the symbols set up by God, nor against the sacred month of pilgrimage, nor against the garlanded offerings, nor against those who flock to the Inviolable Temple, seeking favour with their Sustainer and His goodly acceptance; and only after your pilgrimage is over are you free to hunt. And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of aggression: but rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God is severe in retribution!

5:2

A draft report presented to the European Parliament in 1997, entitled 'Fundamentalism: a challenge to the European Judicial System'<sup>10</sup> asserted that:

The model of Western society draws its characteristics from the history of Europe. Some key elements of this are democracy, the rule of law, human rights, separation of church and state. It shows evidence of a great tolerance with regard to ideas, convictions and different modes of life...

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights are all cherished by Muslims.

'The history of Europe' with regard to tolerance has already been discussed. As for respect for human rights, the European country that issued a Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen two centuries ago still denies Muslim girls the right to wear headscarves in school.

If, because of their historical background, some in the West feel that in

order to become tolerant, they have to 'separate Church and State', and distance themselves from religion, Muslims do not have to abandon their religious teachings in order to become tolerant: true tolerance is enshrined in the teachings of the Qur'an.