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Comparative Analysis of the Concept and Function of Tolerance in the Qur'an and the Bible

Hadi Zeini Malekabad¹ 

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Abstract

Tolerance and forbearance are foundational concepts that play a decisive role in interpersonal, social, and international relations. In light of the rise of religious extremism, sectarian violence, and the spread of exclusivist discourses, re-examining the authentic teachings of religions on tolerance has gained renewed importance. Adopting a comparative approach, this article examines the concept, theoretical foundations, historical manifestations, and practical functions of tolerance in the two great monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity. The research aims to answer the following questions: 'What is the status of tolerance in these two religions? On what foundations does it rest?' And 'What similarities and differences exist in how it is understood and implemented?' The methodology is descriptive-analytical, based on content analysis of sacred texts (the Qur'an and the New Testament), authoritative commentaries (Islamic exegesis and Church tradition), and contemporary studies in comparative theology. The findings indicate that in both religions, tolerance is not merely an ethical recommendation but a concept grounded in theological and anthropological principles. In Islam, tolerance is rooted in justice and the sanctity of human free will, reflected in verses such as "There is no compulsion in religion" and in the Prophetic Sunnah. In Christianity, this principle is based on the doctrine of divine love and the

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Quran and Hadith, Faculty of Theology, Sistan and Baluchistan University, Zahedan, IRAN. zeini@theo.usb.ac.ir

universality of grace, especially in the words of Jesus concerning love for one's enemies. Nonetheless, when comparing doctrine with historical and social practice, differences emerge that are attributable to the cultural context, legal structures, and social aims of each religion. The conclusion is that despite divergences in detail, the principle of tolerance has the potential to serve as a shared religious value, providing a basis for interfaith engagement, reducing conflicts, and fostering a culture of peace.

Keywords: Tolerance, Islam, Christianity, Qur'an, Gospel, Interfaith Dialogue, Comparative Theology.

Introduction

In today's tension-filled world, where religious and cultural clashes are among the most critical global challenges, attention to the concept of tolerance and forbearance has become highly significant. The world's major religions have always claimed to call for peace and coexistence. Islam and Christianity, as two Abrahamic religions with a global reach, possess both commonalities and distinctions in their understanding and implementation of the principle of tolerance. Although, in certain interpretations and historical practices, religion has been turned into an instrument for justifying violence, a return to the primary religious sources shows that both religions are, in essence, compatible with the principle of tolerance. Comparative studies in the field of the theology of religions can lead to a clearer explanation of points of convergence and divergence, as well as to the promotion of a culture of interfaith dialogue. From an Islamic perspective, tolerance is not only a moral virtue but also a necessity for the realization of justice and peace in society. In Christianity as well, forbearance is rooted in the doctrine of divine love, which regards all human beings as children of God. This article seeks, on the

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basis of authentic sources, to present a comprehensive picture of the concept of tolerance in both religions.

1. Problem Statement

In the contemporary era, with the expansion of communication and the coexistence of multicultural and multi religious societies, the importance of concepts such as tolerance, forbearance, and interfaith dialogue has become more evident than ever. Nevertheless, we still witness diverse and at times conflicting interpretations of religious teachings concerning acceptance of the other, respect for religious diversity, and the ethics of dialogue. In this context, the monotheistic religions, especially Islam and Christianity, as two major global faiths, exert significant influence on the shaping of social, political, and cultural attitudes and behaviors. One of the central themes in the comparative analysis of these two religions is their approach to "Tolerance": "A concept that has played a pivotal role both in the realm of theology and sacred texts and in the historical and social practice of their followers."

Despite substantial common ground between Islam and Christianity in their call for love, non-violence, and respect for human dignity, the historical record, theological interpretations, and legal-judicial teachings of both religions regarding adherents of other faiths or religious minorities have diverged. Moreover, some narratives of the history of these religions depict them as violent and exclusivist, whereas their primary sources contain clear teachings on compassion, forgiveness, and the acceptance of differences. Thus, a scholarly and comparative examination of this issue can lead to a

more balanced reassessment of the religious heritage and to the revitalization of its tolerant potential in the contemporary world.

The present article seeks to answer this fundamental question: 'What are the points of similarity and difference between the teachings and historical practice of Islam and Christianity regarding tolerance, and how can the existing resources in the primary texts of these two religions be utilized to expand dialogue and coexistence in the modern age?'

2. Literature Review

The theme of tolerance in religions, especially in Islam and Christianity, has long attracted the attention of religious thinkers, moral philosophers, and scholars of comparative theology. In recent decades, particularly with the growth of interfaith dialogues and the global focus on human rights and peaceful coexistence, comparative studies on the concept of tolerance in monotheistic religions have increased.

In the field of Islamic sources, works such as *Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī's "al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmīyya bayna al-Juhūd wa al-Taṭarruf"* (2009 AD) have sought to analyze the balance between fidelity to Islamic principles and the modern imperatives of tolerating others. Likewise, *Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's "Fiqh al-Sīra"* (2006 AD/1427 AH) enumerates examples of forbearance in the Prophet's dealings with polytheists, People of the Book, and religious opponents.

In Persian, the book "Tolerance and Violence" by Mohammad Hossein Qadrdan Qaramaleki (2019 AD/1398 SH), published by the Institute for Youth Thought, examines differing views on violence and tolerance in Islam. Some consider Islam a tolerant and accommodating religion, while others

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present a harsher image. This study seeks to present Islam as a moderate and comprehensive religion in which both dimensions are present in the Prophet's practice, yet the foundation is laid on tolerance and rational methods, with recourse to legitimate force only when necessary. Another relevant work is "Rationality and Tolerance in Islam from Lessing's Viewpoint" by Hirsch, which analyzes Lessing's views on Islam, reason, and tolerance during the Enlightenment. The author shows that Lessing's writings are both tolerant and deeply engaged with Islam and its rationalism, while also examining the influence of his historical context on his ideas. This rigorous and accessible analysis clarifies the place of Islam within Enlightenment thought in Europe. On the other hand, in the Christian tradition, classical works such as "The Common Good and Christian Ethics" by David Hollenbach (2002 AD) and "Dialogue with the Other" by David Tracy (1990 AD) have sought to reinterpret the notion of tolerance within the context of social theology and Christian ethics. The Catholic Church, through the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the declaration "Dignitatis Humanae," (1965 AD) for the first time explicitly recognized the principle of religious freedom and respect for the beliefs of others. Hans Küng, in his book "Global Responsibility," (1991 AD) founded the idea of a "Global Ethic" on the basis of shared religious principles, with particular emphasis on tolerance and dialogue. Likewise, Farid Esack in "Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism" (1997 AD) offers a new perspective on the Qur'an's engagement with religious pluralism and tolerance. The article "A Comparative Study of the Concept of Tolerance in John Locke's Thought and Islamic Thought Based on the

Qur'an" by Bahram Nasiri and Mohammad Reza Haji Esmaeili (2022 AD/1401 SH) is a comparative study in this field.

Nevertheless, despite the considerable volume of theoretical and historical works, studies that comprehensively and comparatively analyze the teachings, historical practice, and social function of tolerance in Islam and Christianity, while drawing simultaneously on primary sources, are rare. The present article seeks to fill this gap with a systematic, comparative approach grounded in first-hand sources.

3. Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical method with a comparative approach. Data collection tools consist of written library sources and comprehensive software collections of exegesis and hadith, including sacred texts, authoritative commentaries, historical sources, and contemporary studies in the field of comparative theology. Data analysis is carried out with an emphasis on intra-religious interpretation as well as comparison with inter-religious perspectives.

4. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The concept of tolerance is one of the most fundamental principles in intercultural, interreligious, and social relations. It occupies a prominent place in moral philosophy, human rights, sociology of religion, and comparative theology. In the theoretical foundations of this research, philosophical, religious, and ethical approaches to tolerance are examined to provide a basis for the comparative analysis of Islamic and Christian teachings.

4.1. Conceptual Definition of Tolerance

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Tolerance means accepting and enduring religious, cultural, racial, and intellectual differences without necessarily accepting their truth or correctness (Forst, 2003: 64). John Locke, in his "A Letter Concerning Toleration," regards tolerance as a foundation for civil life that makes peaceful coexistence possible (Locke, 1689: 17). In contemporary philosophy, Rainer Forst and Charles Taylor have elaborated deeper layers of tolerance with an emphasis on intercultural justice.

4.2. Qur'anic and Islamic Foundations of Tolerance

In the Qur'an, numerous verses stress the absence of compulsion in religion, the call to patience, peaceful dialogue, and justice in dealing with others, including: "There is no compulsion in religion," (al-Baqarah: 256) "Repel [evil] with that which is best," (al-Fuṣṣilat: 34) and "Let not the hatred of a people lead you to act unjustly." (al-Mā'idah: 8) These notions have been further developed in both legal and mystical exegeses.

4.3. Evangelical and Christian Foundations of Tolerance

In Christianity, the doctrine of "Love" or "Agape" is one of the most fundamental theological concepts and is regarded as the cornerstone of forbearance and tolerance. This kind of love, understood as pure, unconditional, and divine, is taken as the basis for Christians' interactions with others (Nygren, 1953: 75).

In the New Testament, Jesus says to his followers: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) Likewise, in the Gospel of Luke we read: "But love your enemies, do well to them, and lend to them

without expecting to get anything back." (Luke 6:35) These teachings promote a spirit of forgiveness, compassion, and non-violence, and have laid the groundwork for the acceptance of the principle of tolerance in the Christian tradition.

In the early Christian centuries, the Church Fathers played a key role in interpreting these teachings. Saint Augustine, although in some writings, such as Letter 93 to Vincentius, defends the use of coercion to correct heretical beliefs (Augustine, 1994: 388), nonetheless views the goal of such coercion as guiding people to the truth rather than exercising domination. Thomas Aquinas, in the "Summa Theologiae," also acknowledges the presence of the People of the Book in Christian society, while at the same time insisting on the need to prevent the public propagation of erroneous doctrines (Aquinas, 1947: 1432).

From the seventeenth century onward, the Western Church's approach to tolerance underwent transformation. With the emergence of the Reformation, although treatment of opponents was initially quite harsh, gradually tolerance-oriented movements such as the Quakers, along with thinkers like John Locke, opened new horizons in Christian theology. In his "Letter Concerning Toleration," Locke regards freedom of belief as a natural right of human beings and argues that the state should not intervene in religious matters (Locke, 1983: 27). By distinguishing between the institutions of church and state, he laid the foundations of modern thought on religious toleration.

4.4. Approaches in Sociology and Philosophy of Religion

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From the perspective of the sociology of religion, tolerance is considered an indicator of pluralistic and democratic societies. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann regard tolerance as a condition for the continuation of "Shared Meaning" in pluralistic societies. Likewise, in the philosophy of religion, tolerance is viewed both as a moral virtue and as a framework for interreligious dialogue (Zagzebski, 2004: 217).

5. Discussion

After presenting the theoretical foundations of the study, this section explains the main body of the article.

5.1. Tolerance in Islamic Culture

In the Islamic tradition, tolerance holds a fundamental place not only as a moral virtue but also as a strategic principle in religious, cultural, and social relations. This concept is rooted in the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the conduct of the Ahl al-Bayt, juristic sources, and the ethical and mystical heritage of Islam. This broad foundation indicates that tolerance is not merely an ethical recommendation; rather, it is structured and grounded in epistemological, religious, and legal principles.

One of the most important Qur'anic foundations of tolerance is verse 256 of Surah *al-Baqarah*:

"There is no compulsion in religion; truth has become clear from error."

This verse clearly rejects coercion in matters of faith. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* argues that the verse "There is no compulsion in religion" emphasizes the

impermissibility of forcing inner beliefs. According to him, faith and inner conviction belong to the internal realm and arise from inward causes; therefore, they cannot be changed through force or coercion, since coercion can only influence outward actions and physical movements. Thus, the principle in this verse is the prohibition of coercion in belief and faith, not merely in outward actions. This view is based on the essential distinction between inner convictions and external behaviors (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 2, 342).

Ālūsī also maintains that this verse is not among the verses presenting arguments for monotheism; rather, it is an independent statement that follows the presentation of those arguments and indicates that coercion in the essence of religion and faith is impossible (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 2, 14). *Qurṭubī* likewise considers this verse to concern matters of belief rather than legal rulings or practical actions (Qurṭubī, 1985 AD/1364 SH: 3, 279). *Quṭb Rāwandī* analyzes the verse by emphasizing the semantic distinction between verses concerning faith and those concerning jihad. The verse "There is no compulsion in religion" indicates that belief must be based on free choice and cannot be imposed, whereas the verse "Fight them until there is no more persecution" refers to striving to establish and protect religion. Both verses reflect the divine will in guiding humanity, but in different domains, one in the realm of inner belief, the other in the sphere of action and struggle against oppression (Quṭb Rāwandī, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 1, 345). *Fakhr Rāzī* also emphasizes that this verse demonstrates that coerced faith lacks value and that guidance must be the result of reason and free will (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 7, 15).

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Other Qur'anic verses likewise emphasize respect for human freedom in accepting religion, including:

- "And had your Lord willed, all those on earth would have believed together," (Yūnus: 99)
- "For you is your religion, and for me is mine," (al-Kāfirūn: 6)
- "You are not a tyrant over them." (Qāf: 45).

The Qur'an also recommends peaceful conduct even toward opponents:

- "Repel evil with that which is best," (Fuṣṣilat: 34)
- "Debate with them in the best manner." (al-Naḥl: 125)

Ibn Kathīr writes in his commentary: "These verses indicate that the propagation of Islam should be accompanied by gentleness and sound reasoning, not by force and violence." (Ibn Kathīr, 1978 AD/1419 AH: 1, 521) In the Prophetic tradition, tolerance is not merely theoretical but also practical and institutional. During the Treaty of *Ḥudaybiyyah*, the Prophet (PBUH), despite having military superiority, accepted the conditions proposed by the polytheists in order to preserve peace (Ibn Hishām, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 2, 310). In his encounter with the Christians of *Najrān*, he engaged them in dialogue in the Prophet's Mosque and preserved their full freedom of belief (Wāqidī, 1978 AD/1409 AH: 3, 1154). The well-known saying of the Prophet, "Whoever harms a *Dhimmī*, I will be his adversary, and whoever I am his adversary, I will contend with him on the Day of Resurrection," (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 5, 111; Manāwī, 1977 AD/1356 SH: 6, 19) reflects the

depth of his concern for the rights of followers of other religions living under Islamic rule.

Imam Ali (AS), in his letter to *Mālik Ashtar* regarding the people under his governance, emphasizes:

"People are of two kinds: either your brothers in faith or your equals in creation." (Nahj al-Bālagha, n.d.: 427)

This statement represents a turning point in Islamic political jurisprudence and the rights of minorities. It emphasizes that human beings are either brothers in religion and faith or equals in creation and human nature. Such a perspective encourages dealing with others on the basis of compassion and understanding, without allowing apparent or doctrinal differences to hinder tolerance and respect. Consequently, all people should be treated with kindness and sincere tolerance, for in essence all share a common humanity. This outlook forms a foundation for benevolent conduct and a compassionate ethos within society.

In Islamic jurisprudence, tolerance also holds a special position. Shaykh Ṭūsī, in "*al-Nihāyah*," considers social interaction with the People of the Covenant (*ahl al-Dhimma*) permissible, provided that it does not lead to corruption and that justice is observed (Ṭūsī, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 265). Allamah Hillī in "*Tadhkirat al-Fuqahā*" (1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 405) and *Muḥaqqiq Narāqī* in "*Awa'id al-Ayyām*" (1994 AD/1415 AH: 120) likewise emphasize the necessity of preserving the dignity and security of non-Muslims within the "*Dār al-Islām*." Ayatollah Subhani, in "Eternal Charter," also stresses the principle of "Good conduct toward non-Muslims." (Subhani, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 7, 275)

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In the field of Islamic ethics, Ṭūsī in "Nasirī Ethics" introduces tolerance as part of the virtue of justice and as a necessary condition for healthy social life (Ṭūsī, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 136). Ghazālī in "*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*" likewise recommends that inviting others to religion should be accompanied by mercy, wisdom, and patience rather than violence and threats (Ghazālī, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 1, 287).

Within the mystical tradition, tolerance is regarded as one of the pillars of spiritual wayfaring. Ibn 'Arabī in "*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*" states that, in essence, all religions represent paths toward the Truth (Ibn 'Arabī, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 1, 274). The famous verse by Sa'di in the *Bustan*, "The children of Adam are members of one body, created from the same essence," which is rooted in a Prophetic tradition, reflects the profound Islamic view of human solidarity and tolerance at the existential level (Sa'di, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 9). It emphasizes the unity of humankind and the necessity of compassionate ethics in religious life.

In sum, tolerance in Islam is not merely an ethical recommendation; rather, it is a religious and social principle grounded in revelation, tradition, reason, and historical experience. In encounters with others, whether People of the Book, polytheists, or non-believers, it establishes a clear framework of fairness, respect, and peaceful invitation.

5.2. Tolerance in Christianity

Tolerance in Christianity is a fundamental concept emerging from the central teachings of the religion, namely love, grace, and forgiveness. From the perspective of Christian theology, human beings, as creatures of God and

recipients of divine grace, deserve respect, love, and acceptance even if they hold different beliefs. Within this framework, tolerance is not merely an ethical recommendation but the practical manifestation of divine love in human relationships (Rahner, 1984: 17).

One of the most important sources for understanding tolerance in Christianity is the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew it is stated: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) This teaching represents the height of tolerance and a peaceful spirit that goes beyond mere endurance of others and calls for unconditional love. The theological foundation of this principle lies in the belief that God's love extends to all people, even sinners: "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45)

In Pauline theology as well, tolerance is closely connected with love and humility. In the Epistle to the Colossians it is written: "Bear with each other and forgive one another." (Colossians 3:13) Likewise, in the Epistle to the Romans it is stated: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18)

The Church tradition, particularly in the early centuries of Christianity, also promoted tolerance as necessary for the survival of the faith within a non-Christian society. Tertullian, one of the Church Fathers, defended freedom of religion by stating: "Religion cannot be imposed, since faith must be voluntary." (Tertullian, 1986: 42) Saint Augustine, in his writings, especially "The City of God," also refers to tolerance in the guidance and education of those who have gone astray. In Book 19 of this work he considers peace and religious tolerance necessary for social life, although in other

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writings, such as Letter 93 to Vincentius, he supports conditional coercion for guiding those in error (Augustine, 1981: 416-417; Letter 93, 1:388).

During the Middle Ages, with the consolidation of ecclesiastical authority, there was a departure from this approach, and events such as the Inquisition and the Crusades reflected episodes of religious violence; however, during the Reformation period, Martin Luther and John Calvin, by emphasizing the "Freedom of Conscience" and the authority of Scripture, opened new avenues of reflection on tolerance. Luther, in his well-known treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian," stresses the primacy of personal faith and the individual's relationship with God (Luther, 2008: 12-15).

In the contemporary era, the Second Vatican Council marked a turning point in the Church's perspective on religious tolerance. The declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* states: "Truth cannot flourish except in an atmosphere of freedom; therefore religious freedom is the fundamental right of every human being." This perspective redefines the theological basis of tolerance by emphasizing human dignity and freedom of conscience.

In contemporary theology, thinkers such as Hans Küng, with the idea of a "Global Ethic," and John Hick, with the theory of religious pluralism, have attempted to interpret religions not in opposition to one another but in interaction. In his important work "Project for a Global Ethic," Küng writes: "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions, and no peace among the religions without dialogue and tolerance." (Küng, 1991:102)

John Hick, in "The Interpretation of Religion," by criticizing religious exclusivism, also defends a pluralistic perspective that makes tolerance and dialogue possible among followers of different religions (Hick, 2004: 211).

Overall, the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, the tradition of the Church Fathers, Reformation reflections, and modern approaches in Christian theology all indicate that tolerance in Christianity is not merely a temporary tactic but a fundamental theological–anthropological principle capable of extending to the level of global interactions.

5.3. Similarities and Differences in Theories of Tolerance in Islam and Christianity

In examining theoretical perspectives on tolerance in Islam and Christianity, one can identify both fundamental similarities and differences that arise from the epistemological and theological foundations of these two religions.

Similarities

- 1) **Monotheism as a shared foundation:** Both religions regard monotheism as the basis of their spiritual systems and, on this basis, consider the dignity of human beings, created by God, as inviolable.
- 2) **Human freedom and dignity:** Both traditions view human beings as free agents capable of guidance. This outlook makes the acceptance of religious diversity possible and even necessary.
- 3) **Non-coercive invitation to faith:** In Islam, the principle "There is no compulsion in religion," (al-Baqarah: 256) and in Christianity, Christ's call for the free acceptance of truth, both indicate an orientation toward tolerance and the rejection of coercion.

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- 4) **Prophetic models:** Both religions present their prophets as models of tolerance. The Prophet Muhammad's agreements in Medina and Jesus Christ's encounters with the Pharisees provide examples of patient and forbearing conduct.

Differences

- 1) **Justice-centered theology in Islam vs. love-centered theology in Christianity:** In Islam, divine justice stands at the center of religious thought, framing tolerance within the bounds of justice. In Christianity, however, the central axis of theology is God's love and grace, which can allow for a broader inclusivism.
- 2) **The role of law (Sharia):** In Islam, Sharia plays a fundamental role in guiding social life and may at times limit the logic of tolerance through juridical requirements. In Christianity, especially after the Reformation, legal structures largely gave way to moral teachings and personal faith.
- 3) **Engagement with religious "Others":** In Islamic thought, non-Muslims are often conceptualized within the framework of the "People of the Book," who possess specific rights. In Christianity, the outlook is more often grounded in universal love and a general invitation to all.
- 4) **Historical developments:** Historical experiences such as the Islamic caliphates or the Catholic Church have led to differing practical interpretations of tolerance. Islam has at times exercised tighter control over religious minorities through jurisprudential frameworks,

while Christianity has experienced periods ranging from tolerance to violence.

This theoretical analysis shows that despite conceptual and contextual differences, both religions possess the capacity to develop discourses of tolerance, provided that their texts and traditions are reinterpreted through an ethical and rational approach.

5.4. The Social Function of Tolerance

Tolerance is not only a theological concept but also a strategic component for preserving social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in multicultural and multi-religious societies. In both Islamic and Christian traditions, tolerance is recognized as a tool for realizing social justice, reducing violence, promoting dialogue, and strengthening social capital.

In Islam, the conduct of the Prophet in Medina is an example of the social function of tolerance. The establishment of the "Constitution of Medina" for the peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Jews, and polytheists indicates the institutionalization of tolerance within the social structure (Ibn Hisham, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 2, 137). Likewise, teachings such as "Repel [evil] with what is better" (al-Fuṣṣilat: 34) show the preference for dialogue over conflict in society.

In Christianity as well, the teaching of love for one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39) and the call to peace and forgiveness are the main pillars of social order. In church tradition, especially after the Protestant Reformation and the Second Vatican Council, tolerance has been manifested in the form of "Religious Freedom" and "Respect for other beliefs." (Dignitatis Humanae, 1965: 103)

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From a social perspective, tolerance leads to the reduction of religious and ethnic tensions in pluralistic societies, the creation of a space for dialogue and understanding among religions and cultures, the strengthening of civil rights for minorities, the guarantee of their participation in political and social structures, and the enhancement of cultural resilience in the face of extremism and religious violence.

Today, the social function of tolerance has also been emphasized in international documents such as the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1948) and the "Universal Declaration on the Dialogue among Civilizations." (UNESCO, 2001)

Consequently, tolerance, as a religious value, has the potential to be employed as a social strategy in the contemporary world, especially in societies faced with religious and cultural diversity, where it can serve as the axis for redefining collective identity and a just social order.

5.5. A Critical Examination of Historical Practice

Although the theoretical teachings of Islam and Christianity regarding tolerance are founded on exalted ethical and theological principles, in the course of history the followers of both religions have at times diverged from these principles in practice. A critical examination of historical practice shows that violence, exclusion, and intolerance have, in certain periods, replaced teachings of forbearance, phenomena influenced by political, economic, and social factors.

In the history of Islam, examples of departure from the principle of tolerance can be seen in the Ridda (apostasy) wars after the Prophet's death, as recorded

in sources such as "*Tarikh al-Ṭabarī*" (Ṭabarī, 1978 AD/1409 AH: 3, 552) and *Ibn Athīr*'s "*al-Kāmil fī al-Tarikh*." (Ibn Athīr, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 2, 298) During certain periods, the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates adopted harsh and violent measures against their religious and sectarian opponents, including the Kharijites, Shi'as, and Mu'tazilites. *Ibn Taymīyyah*, in "*Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*," while criticizing Shi'a views, strongly defends the legitimacy of using power against "Innovators." (Ibn Taymīyyah, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 2, 472) Likewise, *Mas'ūdī* in "*Murūj al-Dhahab*" reports incidents of violence by Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs against different sects, especially during the time of *Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf* and *Mutawakkil* (Mas'ūdī, 1409 AH: 3, 185-192).

In the field of jurisprudence, some classical Sunni sources, such as *Ibn Qudāmah*'s "*al-Mughnī*" and *Sarakhsī*'s "*al-Mabsūṭ*," imposed certain restrictions on *Dhimmi*s; among them, prohibiting the construction of new places of worship, riding horses, or appearing in public wearing clothes similar to those of Muslims. *Ibn Qudāmah* in "*al-Mughnī*" explicitly states that *Dhimmi*s must have distinguishing marks separating them from Muslims (Ibn Qudāmah, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 10, 670). *Sarakhsī* in "*al-Mabsūṭ*" elaborates the rulings concerning *Dhimmi*s within the Ḥanafī legal framework and supports banning them from certain professions (Sarakhsī, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 10, 112).

Nevertheless, some modern Muslim thinkers, such as *Muḥammad Abū Zahra*, in "*Tarikh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīyyah*," while acknowledging these restrictions, regard them as related to specific historical and security conditions and emphasize the possibility of peaceful and equal coexistence with followers of other religions (Abū Zahra, n.d.: 241).

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On the other hand, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in the Charter of Medina, recognized religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities (Ibn Hishām, n.d.: 1, 502). The Rightly Guided Caliphs in some cases adopted tolerant policies. In Islamic Spain (Andalus) and during parts of the Abbasid period, Jewish and Christian scholars were active within the Islamic intellectual system (Gutas, 1998: 42-58). Thus, the historical practice of Muslims is a mixture of tolerance and violence.

In the history of Christianity, one of the most prominent examples of conflict with tolerance was the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, which was active from the 15th to the 19th centuries and led to the execution, torture, and expulsion of thousands of Jews, Muslims, and dissenters (Kamen, 1998: 103-147). The Crusades (11th-13th centuries), launched under the slogan of reclaiming the Holy Land, resulted in widespread bloodshed, as recorded in both Muslim and Christian historiography (Tyerman, 2006: 299-415). The medieval Church, particularly through its emphasis on the doctrine "Outside the Church there is no salvation" (*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*), stressed religious exclusivism and suppressed any form of dissent (Pelikan, 1984: 120-133).

With the onset of the Reformation, some Protestant denominations, such as the Anabaptists, voiced the slogan of greater tolerance, but they themselves became victims of intolerance (Estep, 1996: 65-90). It was only with the emergence of Enlightenment philosophy and the influence of thinkers like John Locke in his *A "Letter Concerning Toleration"* (1689) that the theoretical foundation of tolerance in the West was strengthened. The Second Vatican Council (1965) marked the official beginning of a shift in the Catholic

Church's perspective on religious freedom. The document *Dignitatis Humanae* affirmed the recognition of freedom of conscience and the right to choose one's religion.¹

Furthermore, Western colonialism in the 18th to 20th centuries utilized Christian religious identity to justify dominance over other nations, such as in Africa and South Asia, where Christian missionaries entered with cultural and religious goals but at times served the interests of colonial powers (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991: 30-72).

In the Islamic world, the instrumental use of religion to consolidate political power has historical precedents; for instance, the Safavid dynasty in Iran, by adopting Twelver Shi'ism as the official state religion, sought to impose Shi'ism throughout its territory. This process was often accompanied by coercion, the public suppression of Sunnis, and the elimination of non-Shi'a religious institutions. Western scholar Andrew J. Newman, in his book "Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire," (2006 AD) notes that Safavid religious policy, especially during the reign of Shah Abbas I, led to structural "Shi'ification" using political force, religious cleansing, and religious exclusivism (Newman, 2006: 135-161).

On the other hand, during the Umayyad Caliphate, religion was also used as a tool to legitimize the caliphate. By proposing the concept of "Religious Caliphate," the Umayyads often persecuted their political and religious opponents under the label of "Innovators." Particularly during the era of *Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf*, the confrontation with the Kharijites and Shi'as were accompanied by military and religious severity. Islamic historians such as Ṭabarī in "*Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*" (Ṭabarī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 6, 300-

¹ . More detailed discussion and references to works have been provided earlier.

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345) and *Ibn Athīr* in "*al-Kāmil fī al-Tarikh*" have reported in detail the repression and political confrontations of the Umayyad caliphs with opponents, including Shi'as and Kharijites (*Ibn Athīr*, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 4, 341-345). Moreover, the Umayyad practice of utilizing Friday sermons to legitimize government actions and appointing judges aligned with the ruling power is an example of the ideologization of religion in the service of politics (*Kennedy*, 2004: 120).

In conclusion, it can be said that the historical conduct of the followers of these religions has not always been in accordance with their religious teachings. Political and ideological exploitation of religion has been a primary factor in violence and intolerance. A critical re-reading of religious history paves the way for a return to the original spirit of religions and the reconstruction of religious interactions based on mutual respect. Contemporary comparative theology, by critiquing history and focusing on authentic sources, provides the capacity to reclaim the concept of tolerance. This historical review shows that although tolerance is rooted in sacred texts, its social realization requires a modernist, critical, and contextual interpretation of these texts, as well as the reconstruction of religious social and political structures.

5.6. Comparative Table of Tolerance

Comparison Axis	Islam	Christianity
Theological Basis of Tolerance	Human dignity (al-Isrā': 70), "No compulsion in religion" (al-Baqarah: 256)	Universal love (Matthew 5:44), Freedom of conscience (Galatians 5:1)
Key Texts	The Qur'an, Prophetic Sunnah, Constitution of Medina	The New Testament, Pauline Epistles, Teachings of Jesus (Sermon on the Mount)
Theoretical Manifestations	Coexistence with <i>Ahl al-Dhimma</i> , emphasis on justice and kindness to non-Muslims	Call to love one's enemies, acceptance of differences in the early Church
Historical Practice	Relative coexistence in Andalus and the Abbasid era; periods of exclusion and violence also occurred	Inquisition, Crusades, Reformation, evolution after the Enlightenment
Intra-Religious Tolerance	Various disputes with internal groups (Kharijites, Mu'tazilites, Shi'as, etc.)	Schisms between Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants
Inter-Religious Tolerance	Recommendations for kindness to People of the Book, restrictions under certain conditions	Periods of coexistence and periods of forced proselytization

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Evolution in Contemporary Interpretation	Emphasis on coexistence and interfaith dialogue in new Islamic discourse	Emphasis on human rights, religious freedom, official documents like <i>Dignitatis Humanae</i>
Challenges Ahead	Religious extremism, rigid literalism, political pressure	Extreme secularism, instrumental use of religion in politics

This table presents a structural comparison between the theoretical foundations, religious texts, historical experience, and contemporary developments in Islam and Christianity regarding the concept of tolerance. It shows that both religions possess capacities for tolerance and interaction, but their historical performance has varied depending on social and political contexts. This comparison can be examined across three main layers:

A) Theoretical Foundations

Both Islam and Christianity contain teachings about tolerance in their primary texts.

Criterion	Islam	Christianity
Qur'anic or Scriptural foundation	"There is no compulsion in religion" (al-Baqarah: 256); "Argue with them in the best manner" (al-Nahl: 125)	Christianity: "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44); "All who take the sword

		will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52)
Emphasis on coexistence	Invitation to peace and justice with non-Muslims (al-Mumtaḥanah: 8)	Love for all people and forgiveness of sinners
Approach of the Prophet or founder	The Prophet Muhammad in the Treaty of <i>Ḥudaybiyyah</i> , his conduct toward the People of the Book, and welcoming the Christians of Najran	Jesus' forgiveness of the adulterous woman and his interaction with the Samaritans

Analysis: From a textual perspective, both religions possess strong capacities for tolerance. Islam emphasizes justice, dialogue, and the absence of compulsion in religion, while Christianity places greater emphasis on unconditional love and forgiveness. The Islamic approach combines reason, prudence, and ethics, whereas Christianity at the theoretical level sometimes operates in a more idealistic framework.

B) Historical Experience

Throughout history, both Islam and Christianity have experienced periods of tolerance as well as violence.

Criterion	Islam	Christianity
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Periods of tolerance	The Prophetic era, Muslim rule in Andalus, and at times the Ottoman Empire	The Byzantine Empire before the schism and the later Middle Ages
Periods of violence	The Umayyads, Abbasids, and the Safavids in conflicts with internal opponents	The Crusades, the Inquisition, and repression of Protestants
Interaction with minorities	The system of <i>Dhimmi</i> status with specific rights, though sometimes discriminatory	Minorities were often subjected to severe pressure or exile

Analysis: In certain periods (such as Andalus or the Ottoman Empire), Islam presented clear historical examples of tolerance, whereas in the West the Middle Ages were often associated with religious violence. Both traditions, at times, diverged from their original teachings.

C) Contemporary Situation and Capacity for Adaptation

Criterion	Islam	Christianity
Capacity for reinterpreting texts	Dynamic jurisprudence (<i>fiqh</i>) and active <i>ijtihad</i> in some schools	Historical interpretation of the Bible and the growth of liberal theology

Engagement with modernity	Challenging in some societies, yet undergoing transformation	Institutionalization of tolerance within secular Western societies
Presence in democracies	Diverse models, ranging from the Islamic Republic to Turkey and Malaysia	Mostly within liberal secular countries, with a history of reform-minded churches

Analysis: Christianity, especially in the West, has been able to adapt itself to secular environments and modern human-rights concepts. In Islam, although there is a very high theoretical capacity, in practice it faces challenges such as fundamentalism, rigid interpretations, and authoritarian governments.

Conclusion

The comparative study of tolerance in Islam and Christianity shows that both religions, at the level of their core teachings, convey explicit messages of patience, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions in Islam, as well as the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, all emphasize peace, avoidance of coercion, love, and respect for others. Nevertheless, the historical conduct of followers of both religions has not always aligned with these principles, and in many periods has been accompanied by challenges such as violence, exclusivism, forced proselytization, and excommunication.

Comparative analysis demonstrates that non-religious factors, such as politics, power, colonialism, and ideological interpretations, have played a

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fundamental role in distancing practice from tolerance. At the same time, historical experience also includes successful examples of peaceful coexistence, such as the Islamic Golden Age in Andalus or the era of religious reform in Europe.

In the contemporary era, both religious traditions face new challenges such as extremism, radical secularism, and globalization. However, the internal capacities of sacred texts and reformist religious approaches make it possible to reread and revive principles of tolerance. An effective path forward lies in returning to authentic religious sources, critically examining historical practices, and engaging in interfaith dialogue based on mutual respect. From a theoretical standpoint, both religions clearly possess capacities for tolerance, but Islam, due to its greater emphasis on justice and social order, offers a more realist model.

From the perspective of historical experience, Islam in periods such as Andalus and the Ottoman era displayed stronger manifestations of tolerance. In terms of the contemporary situation, Christianity, owing to theological reforms and the experience of secularism in the West, has in practice provided a more open space for tolerance and forbearance. Therefore, neither religion is inherently opposed to tolerance; however, when viewed from the angle of adapting teachings to contemporary experience, Christianity, particularly in the West, has been more successful in institutionalizing tolerance within social and political structures. At the same time, Islam has a greater potential to present an indigenous model of tolerance in diverse societies, provided that its sources are interpreted dynamically and rationally.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of theological and educational reexamination of teachings on tolerance and proposes that the Abrahamic religions, by focusing on shared values, can help lay the groundwork for lasting peace and constructive interaction in the contemporary world.

In the end, strengthening tolerance is not only a social necessity but also a religious responsibility for followers of divine religions, a responsibility that, by returning to the human-divine essence of faith, can lead to sustainable peace in the modern world.

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