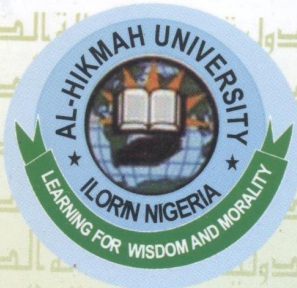


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A DISCOURSE ON SHA'RĀWĪ'S INTERPRETATION OF QUR'AN 8:60 - 61 AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

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ABSTRACT

Intolerance is considered a major cause of crisis in countries like Nigeria with diverse culture and religion. It is however, a non disputable fact that the development of any nation in the world is strictly attached to how harmonious such nation is and this accounts for why scholars and spiritual leaders have a lot to do in making a call for peace. It is on this background that this paper analyses the interpretation of Qur'an 8 Verses 60-62 by As-Sha'rāwī, a contemporary jurist and exegete. The verses discuss the relationship of Muslims with the non Muslims at a time when the later demonstrates hostility against Muslims and later incline to peace. These verses were given diverse interpretations by exegetes of the Qur'an especially in respect of its status of abrogation, but the stand of the scholar in discussion along with those who support his view is embraced by the researcher because it gives a solution to contemporary global problem. This paper discussed his views in contrast to other opinions with the objective of establishing the relevance of his interpretation to religious tolerance in Nigeria in particular and in the world generally. Historical, interpretive and inter-exegetical analyses were adopted for collecting relevant data of the work. Findings of the paper revealed that the exegete's method of interpretation is an indication of his understanding of the contemporary society and contrary to the position of some other exegetes, his approach to interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an would create a harmonious co-existence in Nigeria, if put into practice.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is a compendium of rules and regulations governing life and living of all creatures. It is as a result of this that Muslims, in finding solutions to any of their problems, make recourse to its verses for guidance, having been assured that in it lies the desired guidance. Allah says;

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ
الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا

Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is the straightest path
and gives tidings to the believers who do good works that there
will be a great reward for them (Q17:9)

In an attempt to solve some global problems, Muslim scholars and Qur'an exegetes make meaningful contributions in the field of preaching peace and harmony in view of the fact that even when the Qur'an does not support cowardice, Muslims are discouraged from initiating aggression against non Muslims. Contemporary Qur'an exegetes, in their interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an, emphasise the pertinence of harmony. Among these scholars is Muhammad Mutawalliyy As-Sha'rāwī, a descendant of Ali bn Abi Talib, who was born in Dakadous village, Markaz Ghamr in Egypt on April 15, 1911, As-Sha'rāwī had a

Certificate of Higher Degree from the Faculty of Arabic Language, Al-Azhar University, Cairo in 1941 and engaged in teaching in the same institution until 1950 when he was appointed a lecturer at King Abdul Azeez University in Makkah in the rank of a professor. He later returned to Egypt where he was appointed the Director of the Islamic call of Tanta Institute in Cairo and subsequently, the Director for Da'wah and Ministry of Endowment in 1961. In 1963, As-Sha'rāwy returned to Cairo and served as the Director of the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. In 1970 and 1976, he was appointed a visiting professor at King Abdul Azeez University in Makkah and a Minister of Endowment and Al Azhar Affairs respectively. As-Sha'rāwy was given the title of 'the Preacher of the Century' for his widespread popularity in the field of Islamic propagation. To his glory; he was the first non Saudi to deliver sermon on the mount of Arafat before his death in 1418AH in Cairo.¹ As-Sha'rāwy has to his credit, a number of publications in various disciplines among which are; Secrets of the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Islam and contemporary thought; Islam and women, creed and curriculum; *Shura* and legislation in Islam; Prayer and the pillars of Islam; One hundred questions and answers in Islamic Jurisprudence; Women as God wanted; Miracle of the Qur'an; On the table of Islamic thought and Fate and destiny.²

AS-SHA'RĀWY AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

As-Sha'rāwy, like some few other Qur'an interpreters, is of the view that verses on peace and religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence with non Muslims in the Qur'an are not abrogated as supposed by some interpreters. This position is entrenched in his interpretation of Q8:60-62

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ
وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَأَخْرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ
شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ (٦٠) وَإِنْ جَدَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ
فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ (٦١)

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power including steeds of war to strike terror into the hearth of the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom you may not know but whom Allah doth know. Whatever you shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly. But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou(also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah; for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things. (Q8:60-61)

Commenting on this verse, As-Sha'rāwy is of the view that

فالقصد - إذن - من إعداد هذه القوة هو إرهاب العدو حتى لا يطمع
فيكم؛ لأن مجرد الإعداد للقوة، هو أمر يسبب رهبا للعدو. ولهذا تقام

العروض العسكرية ليرى الخصم مدى قوة الدولة، وحين تبين لخصمك القوة التي تملكها لا يجتري عليك، ويتحقق بهذا ما نسميه بلغة العصر «التوازن السلمي». والذي يحفظ العالم الآن بعد سقوط الاتحاد السوفيتي هو التوازن السلمي بين مجموعات من الدول، بالإضافة إلى العامل الاقتصادي المكلف للحرب، فالقوة الآن لا تقتصر على السلاح فقط، ولكن تعتمد القوة على عناصر كثيرة منها الاقتصاد والإعلام وغيرها. وصار الخوف من رد الفعل أحد الأسباب القوية المانعة للحرب. وكل دولة تخشى مما تخفيه أو تظهره الدولة الأخرى. وهكذا صار الإعداد للحرب ينفي قيام الحرب.

The objective of setting up this strength is to scare the enemy against aiming at attacking you because setting up strength will scare the enemy. Military parade is staged to let the enemy know the strength of the nation and whenever your enemy is aware of your strength, he will not be brave to attack you and this will result to what is called in the contemporary language as peace building. It is this peace equity that is saving the entire nations after the fall of the Soviet Union. This is in addition to the economic factor that is attached to war. Strength is not restricted to weapon but extends to other things such as financing and adequate communication. The fear of the consequence (of war) is considered a strong preventive measure to war. Every country fears what the sister country hides or exhibits as its power. This is how the preparation for war averts war.³

As-Sha'rawy, in his interpretation of the verses on conflict, positioned that the essence of getting prepared for war in Islam is not to initiate the war but rather, to prevent it and to accommodate peace and tolerance. It thereby follows that the preparation for war by Muslims is a measure to establishing peace on earth. In his interpretation of verses 61 and 62 he argued further

أي أن الله لم يطالبنا بأن نكون أقوياء لنفتري على غيرنا، فهو لا يريد منا إعداد القوة للاعتداء والعدوان، وإنما يريد القوة لمنع الحرب ليسود السلام ويعم الكون؛ لذلك ينهانا سبحانه وتعالى أن يكون استعدادنا للقتال وسيلة للاعتداء على الناس والافتراء عليهم. ولهذا فإن طلب الخصم السلم والسلام صار التزاماً علينا أن نسألهم. وإياك أن تقول: إن

هذه خديعة وإنهم يريدون أن يخدعونا؛ لأنك لا تحقق شيئاً بقوتك،
ولكن بالتوكل على الله عَزَّ وَجَلَّ والتأكد أنه معك، والله عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يريد
الكون متسانداً لا متعانداً. وهو سبحانه وتعالى يطلب منك القوة لترهب
الخصوم. لا لتظلمهم بها فتقاتلهم دون سبب

Allah does not demand that we should be powerful so that we may calumniate others. He did not demand that our setting of strength should be for transgression and calumny. He desires the strength for abortion and of war for peace to reign on earth. This is why Allah forbids that our preparation for war should be a means of transgressing and calumny on mankind. Therefore, if the warring party seeks peace and reconciliation, we must reconcile with them and you should not say that 'they are only tricking us', you cannot achieve anything by your power but by depending on Allah and being optimistic of His support. Allah wants the entire society to be united and not disintegrated. He requires strength from you to scare the enemies and not to oppress or fight them over an unjust purpose⁴

As Sha'rāwī, like other Qur'an interpreters who uphold his view, presented Islam as a religion of perfect peace and complete harmony. He argued logically that the verse on inclination to reconciliation with a warring party on demand still remains enforced and not abrogated because Islam does not only preach peace and tolerance but condemns initiation of conflict and aggression. The view of As Sha'rāwī gains the support of a renowned revolutionist among the exegetes in his commentary on the verse where he said;

فهو إلقاء الرعب والرهبنة في قلوب أعداء الله الذين هم أعداء العصبة
المسلمة في الأرض. الظاهرين منهم الذين يعلمهم المسلمون ومن وراءهم
ممن لا يعرفونهم، أو لم يجهروا لهم بالعداوة، والله يعلم سرائرهم
وحقائقهم. وهؤلاء ترهبهم قوة الإسلام ولو لم تمتد بالفعل إليهم.
والمسلمون مكلفون أن يكونوا أقوياء، وأن يحشدوا ما يستطيعون من
أسباب القوة ليكونوا مرهوبين في الأرض

The objective, then, is to strike terror into the hearts of God's enemies who are also the enemies of the advocates of Islam throughout the world, be they open with their hostility and known to the Muslim community, or others who may be discreet with their real feelings, not openly stating their hostile attitude to Islam. God is certainly aware of their true feelings and sympathies. Such people are intimidated by the might of Islam even though they may not suffer its consequences

directly. The Muslims are required to gather all the strength they can have so that they remain feared by other people.⁵

In further lending credence to this view, Wuhbah identified lessons derived from this verse thus;

1. Muslims must be at constant alert against any attack by the enemies. They should equip themselves with necessary ammunitions against the oppression of oppressors.
2. It is necessary for certain money to be set aside for the purchase of ammunitions in defense of the state
3. Reconciliation and peace should be given priority over violence and aggression. When the warring party laid down her weapons and incline to peace, the Muslim leader should give preference to peace provided it will not have a negative effect on Muslim
4. Muslims should rely on Allah in all their affairs and have confidence in His support at all times.⁶

Summarizing the lesson of this verse. A contemporary scholar, Muhammad Mahmud simply put it thus;

وهذا يفيد أن دين الإسلام دين السلام والمحبة، وأنه عدو للحرب إلا إذا اقتضتها الظروف القاهرة.

This implies that Islam is a religion of peace and love and it is an enemy of war except when situation necessitates it⁷

However, some Qur'an interpreters are at disagreement with As Sha'rāwy over the interpretation of the verses. At-Tha'labiy⁸ is of the opinion that Q8:61 which discusses the need to incline to peace when the enemies incline to it, was revealed before *suratu tawbah* (Chapter 9) and it was abrogated with the following two verses of the *surah*

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ
وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَاقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ
فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.(Q9:5) And

قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ
وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا

الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

Fight against such of those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low. (Q9:29)

By the stand of those who uphold that the rulings of Qur'an 8:61 was abrogated with the above two verses and even when the warring party inclines to peace, they should still be fought may not stand the challenge of time because even though the two verses were revealed after Qur'an 8:61, what needs to be understood is that

- 1- Qur'an 9:5 was revealed in respect of the idolaters who associate partners with Allah and Qur'an 9:29 was revealed in respect of the people of the book while Qur'an 8:61 was revealed in respect of the hypocrites who are Muslims only by proclamation. The subject matter and the target audience of the verses differ and hence, it may not be admitted as abrogate
- 2- In Qur'an 8:5. Even the idolaters are spared of hostility the moment they repent and become Muslims. This will be considered their inclination to peace. Equally, in Qur'an 9:29, payment of *Jizya* (tax) is considered the inclination of the people of the book
- 3- Proceeding on hostility after the enemies inclination to peace will not portray Islam as a religion of peace especially when sincerity of intention is established in their inclination.

With these observations, one will want to alien with the stand of As-Sha'rāwīy in view of the fact that taking the opposite stand will amount to considering Islam a religion of violence and aggression which, as will be discussed below, is not so.

ISLAM AND THE QUESTION OF PEACE AND TOLERANCE

Peace in Islam is more than a mere desire, it is a principle that is deeply rooted in all the fabrics of Islam. The good life is in submitting to God and in worshipping Him as The Creator and recognising the innate nature of man. The individual who will recognize his true nature on which every person is created will be able to live together in society with peace and affection to each other. A true Muslim will neither allow himself to be harmed nor harm any other person. The Prophet of Islam emphasized on the need for peaceful co existence when he said:

you cannot enter the paradise unless you have faith (in Allah) and you cannot have faith unless you love one another. Can I guide you towards an act which, if you embark on it you will love one another? Propagate peace.⁹

The teaching of Islam is that of unity of origin that implies necessity of communality. All mankind originated from the same creator and thus, must learn to accommodate one another. Allah emphatically mentions the unity of origin in the Qur'an thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا
زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ
وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

O mankind, fear your Guardian Lord who created you from a single person, created out of it his mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women...(Q4:1)

Ibn Āshūra is of the view that Allah gave an indiscriminate invitation to the God fearing to explain that all mankind come from the same origin and they share common ideology.¹⁰ Sayyid Qutb further elucidates thus

ولو تذكر الناس هذه الحقيقة، لتضاءلت في حسهم كل الفروق الطارئة،
التي نشأت في حياتهم متأخرة، ففرقت بين أبناء «النفس» الواحدة،
ومزقت وشائج الرحم الواحدة. وكلها ملابسات طارئة ما كان يجوز أن
تغطي على مودة الرحم وحققها في الرعاية، وصلة النفس وحققها في
واستقرار هذه الحقيقة كان المودة، وصلة الربوبية وحققها في التقوى.
كفيلًا باستبعاد الصراع العنصري، الذي ذاقته منه البشرية ما ذاقته،
وما تزال تتجرع منه حتى اللحظة الحاضرة في الجاهلية الحديثة،
التي تفرق بين الألوان، وتفرق بين العناصر، وتقيم كيانها على أساس
هذه التفرقة، وتذكر النسبة إلى الجنس والقوم، وتنسى النسبة إلى

الإنسانية الواحدة والربوبية الواحدة. Had people been

mindful of this fact, they would have paid little or no attention to all the differences that came into their lives at a later time. Differences which led to discrimination between the descendants of a single soul and to the severance of ties of a single universal kinship. All these differences are purely circumstantial and should never have been allowed to take precedence over the tie of kinship and its claim to be fostered, the tie of belonging to one soul which deserves to be maintained, and the tie of belonging to the one Lord who must be feared. Had this fact been truly appreciated, it would have ensured that no racial discrimination could ever take place in human society. We know how much mankind has suffered from racial discrimination and continue to suffer even today, in a latter day ignorance that seeks to consolidate its own existence through discrimination between people on the basis of their colour or race. It upholds the ties of race and

nationality and totally ignores the ties of a single humanity and a single Godhead.¹¹

The position of Sayyid Qutb is that the difference in our races, tribes and nations are only convenient labels for identification of certain characteristics in us, but before Allah, we are all one and equal as contained in Q49:13. In a further elucidation to the call for peace and tolerance by Islam, Albanna, while interpreting the verse of the Qur'an

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
 الْمُعْتَدِينَ

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors(Q2:190).

Observed that civil life in Islam is aimed towards peace. Nevertheless, Islam deals with reality and as long as there are people that follow their own desires and self-interest, there will always be conflict and war. But if war is for the sake of stopping an aggressor, aiding truth and achieving justice, then it is a virtue since it encourages goodness and prosperity for the people. It is a source of evil, social vices and degradation for mankind when it is used as a tool for the wrong-doer, corruption, transgression and oppression of the weak. Islam came to deal with this reality.¹² in a further elucidation to the verse by Yusuf Ali, he is of the view that the unbelievers should not be attacked but if they are the first to launch hostility against the religion of Islam, Muslims should not lag in rooting out the tyranny.¹³

Qur'an 2:190 as quoted above, is a condemnation of initiation of aggression except if it is launched for the purpose of self defense or other justifiable causes and even then, limit should not be exceeded. In a situation where aggression is already the order of the day, Qur'an encourages Muslims to champion the cause for peace. Allah enjoins an invitation to mutual understanding in numerous verses of the Qur'an such as:

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 term as between us and you, that we worship none but God, that we associate no partner with Him, that we erect not among ourselves lords and partners other than God...(Q3:64)

The invitation in this verse is to discussion on issues of common goal among people of different faiths for the promotion of unity.¹⁴ The implication is that all divine religions teach submission and monotheism even though the approach differs. Whenever a major difference is noticed, the cause will be easily identified as human made.

The Qur'an equally enjoins Muslims to co-operate with non-Muslims and render to them such assistance that will not mean a compromise of faith or ideology. Justice in Islam is absolute and it cuts across the boundary of race, clan and religion. The Qur'an warns:

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ اَنْ صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ اَنْ تَعْتَدُوا
وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوٰى وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْاِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
اِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

...and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the sacred mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part), help one another in righteousness and piety, but help not one another in sin and rancour. Fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment (Q5:2).

The Qur'an teaches equal right to the practice of religion and discourages any attempt to force the practice of religion on an individual or a group. Compulsion is not in any way compatible with religion because religion is a matter of faith which must come from the mind and if it were the will of Allah that everybody should be of the same faith, His omnipotence could have made mankind alike just like He rightly told His Prophet in Q10:99.

In conclusion, even though, Nigeria is considered a multi-faith nation, the fact still remains that the dominant religions are Islam and Christianity and these two religions have many things in common. There is the need for tolerance for the society to move forward and an adequate interpretation of verses on peace and harmony will go a long way in uniting citizens of this country

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having identified the relevance of adequate interpretation of verses of the Quran, this paper recommends that:

- Our religious scholars should work together to undermine bigotry and extremism and encourage communism.
- Our religious leaders should work towards reclaiming the integrity of their religion and promoting peace in the society.
- Adherents of various religions should see one another as brothers for the well being of the society.
- Our political leaders should stop using religion to score political points or to divide communities.
- Our government should equally assist religious leaders in actualising religious tolerance in the society. And finally.
- The heads of government in power at any time should know that he is a leader over all the religious adherents in the country and so, no religion should be sidelined in any of the national activities or rights

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