

An Issue of Freedom of Belief  
in Modern Islamic Exegetics

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## Abstract

The exegetical tradition (tafsir) played an important role in Islam since the times of the early Muslims (as-salaf as-salih). Despite the complex changes in social, political and, to some extent, religious life in the Muslim countries during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, tafsir represents the main trends of how the Glorious Qur'an is being used for the reforms in Islamic societies. In our study, which is based on the Arabic texts of the commentaries of 20<sup>th</sup> authors (Rashid Ridha, Mustafa al-Maragi, Muhammad as-Shanqiti, at-Tahir ibn 'Ashur, 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sa'di, Sulayman al-Ashqar and others), we considered tafsir as a mirror, in which the modern Islamic culture shows its relation to the issue of the freedom of belief.

The study consists of three parts. The first, "The origins of the freedom of belief", devoted to the study of how the problem of religious tolerance and religious freedom originated both in Western and Islamic culture. The second, "Hurriya al-'ittiqad in 20<sup>th</sup> century tafsirs" is a detailed study of the commentaries to the Glorious Qur'an from the various traditions of the main schools of tafsir. The third part is "Conclusions", where the great respect for the freedom of belief from the viewpoint of Islam is emphasized.



## Introduction

Praise be to Allah the Almighty ‘the Lord of all beings. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His Prophet and Messenger Muhammad ‘upon his family ‘his companions ‘and those who follow his path to the Day of Judgment.

Topicality of the chosen theme. The problem of religious tolerance is one of the most crucial issues in the present world. Religious conflicts ‘prohibitions ‘the spread of the immorality ‘the usage of religious symbols for political targets and other acts result in a great crisis of societies in both West and East. The inappropriate usage of the notion of “tolerance” in West frequently leads to the propagation of antireligious views ‘immoral deeds and ‘what is more important ‘defends radical secularism against the real religious values.

Research Subject. The topic of our study (“An Issue of Freedom of Belief in Modern Islamic Exegetics”) is devoted to the idea of how the Islam may benefit present world by its model of freedom of belief. These benefits are explained in the works of Islamic exegetes. Among the huge corpus of Islamic tafsirs ‘we have chosen the contemporary once ‘due to the tries of their authors to address the most crucial issues of modernity.

Research goals. Using the most notable modern commentaries to the Glorious Qur’an by famous Islamic scholars ‘we will try to reach the following goals of study:

- ١) To explore the origins of the problem of religious freedom in today Social Studies on the West;
- ٢) To show ‘how the problem of freedom of belief was presented in the modern tafsirs;
- ٣) To analyze the parallels and differences in contemporary tafsirs‘ and to emphasize the importance of commentaries ‘based on the way of as-salaf as-salih;
- ٤) To conclude ‘that Islam as a middle way proposes the most

suitable model of religious tolerance.

Research method: beside the evaluation of Western understanding of the concept of “freedom of belief” is based on the work with Arabic texts of the published commentaries and their explanations for ayats ٢: ٥, ٢٥٦; ١٨, ٥١; ٢٩ from the Glorious Qur’an. These explanations should be compared each to other and the common position will be emphasized in conclusions.

Research sources include the commentaries of Rashid Ridha, Mustafa al-Maragi, Muhammad as-Shanqiti, at-Tahir ibn ‘Ashur, ‘Abd ar-Rahman as-Sa’di, Sulayman al-Ashqar and other notable Islamic scholars of ٢٠<sup>th</sup> century.

Research structure. The study consists of three parts. The first, “The origins of the freedom of belief” devoted to the study of how the problem of religious tolerance and religious freedom originated both in Western and Islamic culture. The second, “Hurriya al-‘ittiqad in ٢٠<sup>th</sup> century tafsirs” is a detailed study of the commentaries to the Glorious Qur’an from the various traditions of the main schools of tafsir. The third part is “Conclusions” where the great respect for the freedom of belief from the viewpoint of Islam is emphasized.

## Part I. The origins of the freedom of belief

The problem of religious freedom which respectively related to the complex issues of the freedom of consciousness, tolerance, speech and some others constitutes one of the most crucial quests in the contemporary social studies. Since the “freedom” as a moral value became to serve as one of the makers of Western civilization a priori (i.e. even if we do not exactly know what freedom is we know that we need it) its various dimensions pretend to be the only true criteria of the real humanistic culture. Growing from the time of Renaissance, the idea of religious freedom came to us through a very complicated political, social and cultural changes; in the West its inner sense evolved in the context of relation between the state and the church, the state and minorities, challenges of political radicalism (Nazism, Communism) and nowadays, integration of the immigrants into what is called as “traditional European culture”.

Despite the huge amount of classical and recent studies on the religious freedom, still the problem of the features of its origin exists. Few scholars have sought to explain the rise of – or more precisely – the change and fluctuations in – religious liberty in any theoretically systematic way, as Anthony Gill points out. As a result, the question about the origins of religious liberty was not seen as much of question at all<sup>(1)</sup>. However, two scientific approaches are corresponding all the mentioned tries. One, which applies for the intellectual roots of the idea of the equality of religions (i.e. in the philosophy of Enlightenment), refers to the tolerance as the result of growth in scientific progress and related social changes like the secularization

(1) Gill, Antony, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3.

and so on<sup>(١)</sup>. The second ‘which identify itself as the political one’ claiming for the role of the political interest ‘which come from both the side of religious actors and secular rulers<sup>(٢)</sup>.

However ‘the new fundamental problems arise when we are talking about the religious liberty from the non-Western or ‘what is more important, “non-Christian” and “non-secular” perspective. Anat Scolnicov rightly notices ‘that more than a subject of other human rights ‘such as “torture” or “slavery” ‘“religion” is a concept defined by the culture to which it belongs. This concept loses much of its meaning outside its cultural context. Therefore ‘more than other human rights ‘freedom of religion can be interpreted differently by different cultures<sup>(٣)</sup>. The problem is more complicated if someone takes into account the position of Wilfred Smith ‘argued in his well-known “The Meaning and End of Religion”: “Religion as a systematic entity ‘as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘is a concept of polemics and apologetics”<sup>(٤)</sup>. So ‘interpreted in this way‘ religious freedom can be understood only as the one of the Western ideas ‘which seems to be project onto the other parts of the world by the means of colonialism and ‘in our days ‘globalization. But perhaps most important ‘globalization has created all kinds of identity dilemmas in which religion plays a complicated part. It makes rather more difficult questions: is religion about belief? Is it about a way of

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(١) Taylor ‘Charles ‘A Secular Age (New York: Harvard University Press٢٠٠٧) ‘p. ٤-٢٦.

(٢) Gill ‘Antony ‘Op. cit. ‘p. ٨.

(٣) Scolnicov ‘Anat ‘The Right to Religious Freedom in International Law Between group rights and individual rights (New York: Routledge٢٠١١) ‘p. ٢٣.

(٤) Smith ‘Wilfred Cantwell ‘The Meaning and End of Religion (New York: Fortress Press١٩٩١) ‘p. ٤٣.

life? Or is it a marker of identity? Or what combination of the three?<sup>(١)</sup>

Despite the obvious dependence of the concept of the freedom of religion (and ‘consequently ‘the idea of religious tolerance) from the Western thought ‘this doesn’t mean that other cultures/civilizations are not possess the similar ideas ‘widely discussed in various research books. Due to the goal of our study – which is the observation of this problem in the contemporary Islamic exegetics – we will try to show ‘how the autochthonous culture reacts on the “Western” kind of tolerance ‘answering to the modern challenges from its own tradition. This will help us to define the real nature of the theory of Islamic religious tolerance ‘promoted not only by various Muslim groups around the world ‘but inclined to the politics of the governments of Muslim countries as well. Thus ‘our exploration will be restricted to the most traditional part of Islamic religious traditions – the Qur’anic exegetics ‘which ‘however ‘was the object of many changes during the ٢٠<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of ٢١<sup>th</sup> centuries. Comparing the modern Western understanding of the freedom of religion with the statements of contemporary exegetes ‘our study will show the inner evolution of tafsir and its evaluation of the new issues of public and private law.

Notwithstanding the fact that modern trends of Islamic thought are well studied ‘a contemporary exegetics – in contrast to the traditional one – needs further research. J. Pink rightly notes ‘that field of contemporary Qur’anic commentaries has by large been neglected by scholars. Several individual commentaries have received a certain amount of attention ‘while comparative studies or surveys that are at

(١) Kwame ‘Anthony Appiah ‘Causes of Quarrel: What’s Special about Religious Disputes ‘in Religious Pluralism ‘Globalization‘ and World Politics Challenges (Oxford: Oxford University Press‘ ٢٠٠٨) ‘p. ٦٦.

least remotely up-to-date are scarce . By the <sup>(١)</sup>modern Islamic exegetics” we mean all the efforts in Islamic understanding of the Qur’an which can be traced to the revival of the ١٩<sup>th</sup> century. Since the appearance of the “modernism” in Islam was the result of the familiarity with the West (and some authors like Albert Hourani determine it with a reference to French invasion into Egypt <sup>(٢)</sup> in ١٧٩٨) the exegetic tradition became to reformulate itself in a terms of new social circumstances. Taking into consideration the fact that modern Islamic exegetics represented by more than five generations of scholars we may trace a significant steps of development in this tradition. For instance J. Pink takes a June war of ١٩٦٧ as a starting point for the “nowadays Islamic exegetics” . This <sup>(٣)</sup>however can only partly be justified because for instance “The Simplified Tafsir” (at-Tafsir al-Muyassar) first published in Saudi Arabia at ١٩٠٠ is more conservative and restricted to tradition (at-tafsir bi l-mathur) than exegesis of Mustafa al-Maragi appeared in ١٩٤٧. Moreover the ideas of both Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Ridha stated in the “The Beacon” (Tafsir al-Manar) which was publishing from the ١٩٠٠ to ١٩٢٧ influenced a number of other commentaries

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(١) Pink, Johanna, Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur’anic Exegesis: Qur’anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and their Interpretation of Q ٥: ٥١١ Die Welt des Islams ٥٠ (٢٠١٠), p. ٤.

(٢) Hourani, Albert, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: ١٧٩٨-١٩٣٩ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ١٩٨٢), p. ١٣٦.

(٣) Pink, Johanna, Op. cit., p. ٦.

(even those famous like the tafsirs of al-Maragi and ibn Badis) ‘which may be named as “al-Manar school” . The <sup>(١)</sup> impact of their exegetical ideas (some significant parts of which ‘according to the traditional classifications ‘can be determined as tafsir bi r-ray ‘i.e. “individual commentary”) is important even today ‘in the work of the later generations of scholars.

(١) Ennaifer H'mida ‘Les commentaires coraniques contemporains: Analyse de leur méthodologie (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica ١٩٩٨ ‘), p. ١٢.

## Part II. Hurriya al-`ittiqaḍ in ٢٠th century tafsirs

Using the methodologies provided by J. Pink (H. Ennaifer (H. Busse (1) J. McAuliffe (٢) and other authors in this study we will take some of the Qur'anic texts as a starting points to see to which extent its modern interpretations include an answer to a problem of religious tolerance as a value. However in the mentioned works only relation to Christians was noted without systematic analysis how the religious tolerance origins from the viewpoint of Islam. Referring to the previous outline of the problem of religious freedom we should point on the three patterns of tolerance which can be found in Islamic culture. That is the level of individual choice to believe (ikhtiyar) the level of relations between the groups of believers (mu`ammalat) and finally status of believers of other religions and disbelievers in Islamic community (traditionally zimmi). Since not every modern tafsir is systematic as the medieval one we choose the following ayas related by exegetes to the problem of religious tolerance: "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily the Right Path has become

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(1) Heribert Busse 'Jesu Errettung vom Kreuz in der islamischen Koranexegese von Sure ٤: ١٥٧ Oriens ٣٦ (٢٠٠١) p. ١٦٠-١٩٥.

(٢) Jane Dammen McAuliffe 'Qur'anic Christians. An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ١٩٩١).

distinct from the wrong path” (Qur’an ٢: ٢٥٦) <sup>(١)</sup> “O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as Auliya' (friends, protectors, helpers, etc.) they are but Auliya' to one another” (Qur’an ٥: ٥١) “And say: "The truth is from your Lord." Then whosoever wills let him believe and whosoever wills let him disbelieve” (Qur’an ١٨: ٢٩). Especially we are conscious that the issue of religious tolerance in tafsir cannot be restricted to the commentaries on these ayats. Nonetheless the most important trends are present here to great extent.

It seems that the first of the commentaries that devotes much for the question of relation between Islam and other religions (and consequently status of these religions) is Al-Manar of Muhammad ‘Abduh (١٨٤٩ – ١٩٠٥) and his student ‘Rashid Ridha (١٨٦٥ – ١٩٣٥). In the beginning of interpretation of the classical explanation of the reason of revelation (sabab an-nuzul) is mentioned which shows how the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him!) banned the forced conversation of children into Islam <sup>(٢)</sup>. Beside these traditional statements ‘Rashid Ridha argues for the peaceful spread of Islam against the unnamed “enemies” who insist that it was spread by the sword. Even more the author states that the time of ٢: ٢٥٦ revelation is a Madinah period of Islam when Muslim community was suffered

(١) All the quotations are from the translation of meanings by Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an ١٩٩٧).

(٢) Tafsir al-Manar (Al-Qahirah: Dar al-Manar ١٩٤٧/١٣٦٦) vol. ٤, p. ٣٧.

from the aggression of Meccan polytheists and some Jewish tribes. However ‘writes he ‘even in these turbulent times Islam called for the grace and absence of any forced conversion. Rashid Ridha mentions the words of his teacher Muhammad ‘Abduh ‘who understood the spread of some religion by force as a kind of politics which ‘in this case ‘has nothing to do with a real faith (iman). So ‘in contrast to other religions (the authors of al-Manar take Christianity as an example) ‘Islam by no means uses a force.

The same principle of peace is included in al-Manar commentary under the explanation of ٥: ٥١ recognizing wilaya (“friendship” in Ali Quli Qarai translation) with non-Muslims as a “mutual help” (tanasur) and “alliance” (muhalifah). Rashid Ridha explains ‘that wilaya is forbidden because of its real goals and not the differences in belief between Muslims and followers of other religions. Its real reason is hostility towards the followers of Islam. As a result ‘the real friendship and good relations with the followers of Judaism and Christianity are not banned here ‘in contrast to the classical explanations of az-Zamakhshari and al-Baydhawi. He uses as the argument the permission of marriage with Christian or Jewish women (Qur’an ٥: ٥) and ‘respectively ‘ayat on relation between spouses: “and He has put between you affection and mercy” (Qur’an ٣٠: ٢١). So ‘concludes Rashid Rida ‘obviously ٥: ٥١ is revealed against the hypocrites among Muslims ‘who wished to destroy the order of Islam ‘and not the Jews and Christians as they are . (١)

The same explanations ‘borrowed from al-Manar and

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(١) Op. cit. ‘vol. ٦p. ٤٢٥-٤٢٧.

shortened ‘were proposed by Mustafa al-Maragi (١٨٨١ – ١٩٤٥).

Referring to the traditions from the tafsir of at-Tabari ‘al-Maragi tries to show ‘that even this highly authoritative tafsir explains wilaya from ة: ة١ as a “mutual help” and “alliance” between the hypocrites and Jewish tribes of Medina . As<sup>(١)</sup>for the ٧: ٢٥٦ “there is no compulsion in religion” means only the ban of the forced conversion to Islam. Moreover ‘he adds to the ideas of his forerunners an important statement. Muslims ‘al-Maragi writes ‘recognize “No compulsion in religion” as the principle (asas) of their belief and the pillar (rukn) of its politics. So ‘nobody should be forced to embrace Islam ‘as nobody should be forced to leave it. Interestingly ‘he speaks about “the best kind of polemics” as the result of “freedom of call” (hurriya ad-dawwa) ‘which Muslims should defend even by the means of jihad.

We may conclude that for al-Maragi religious freedom is a freedom to invite people to Islam ‘without force conversion but ‘from the other side ‘without any barriers from unbelievers <sup>(٧)</sup>.

The next of important commentaries is the Zahrat at-Tafsir by Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abu Zahra (١٨٩٨ – ١٩٧٤). An expert in Sharia ‘he begun to write his own commentary since the ١٩٥٠s.<sup>(٧)</sup> This exegete sees the mentioned verse from Surah “al-Baqarah” (٧: ٢٥٦) from the two vistas.

(١) Tafsir al-Maragi (Al-Qahirah: Matba’ah al-Babi al-Halabbi ١٩٤٦/١٣٦٥) ‘vol. ٤٢ p. ١٣٥-١٣٦.

(٧) Op. cit. ‘vol. ٤٢ p. ١٨.

(٧) Pink ‘Johanna ‘Op. cit. ‘p. ١٠.

The first is that from the epistemology. Abu Zahra writes ‘that iman and ‘relatively ‘acceptance of some religion is “the intellectual perception” (al-idrak al-fikri). As a result ‘it should be a voluntary action ‘based on a completely free choice. The author takes “compulsion” in the most literal way: for him ‘no religiosity is possible by any means of force.

The second is that from the perspective of Islamic call (dawah). Its starting point is a “wisdom” and “good advice”‘ mentioned in other verse of the Qur’an (١٦: ١٢٥).

In general ‘Abu Zahra insists that only knowledge is a way to iman. Thus ‘the explanation of “what is correct” does not include any force. To my mind ‘there are some traces of Asha’ri theology ‘where rationality plays a role of some basis for the religion.

Abu Zahra gives detailed explanations of ٥: ٥١ . He tells us‘ that in relation to Muslims non-Muslims divided into the three groups: a group which live in peace wish Muslims ‘a group which is hostile expressively ‘and a group ‘which hide its hate to Islam. There is no barrier in relation with the first group; however ‘any help for the second and third groups is an injustice (zulm) to other Muslims. In contrast to his forerunners ‘Abu Zahra does not mention here the issue of jizyah; this author tried to define possible relations with non-Muslims from the positions of modernity.

The next tafsir from the Egyptian school is the work of Muhammad ibn al-Khatib (١٩٠٠ – ١٩٨١) ‘first published in ١٩٦٤.

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(١) Zahr at-Tafsir (Al-Qahirah: Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi) ١٩٨٧ ، p. ٢٢٤١-٢٢٤٢.

Explaining ٢: ٢٥٦ in his “The most clear commentary” (Awdhah at-tafsir) ‘ibn al-Khatib writes that this ayat is a point for the “freedom of religion” (hurriyah al-‘ittiqad) ‘so the “religiosity” must be like a kind of scientific research. For this exegete ‘verse ١٨: ٢٩ gives for humanity a chance to choose .<sup>(١)</sup>

The same position is stated in the tafsir of famous Egyptian scholar Muhammad bin Mutawwali ash-Sha’arawi (١٩١١ – ١٩٩٨) who writes about freedom to choose between the faith and arrogance.

However ‘on the opinion of this scholar ‘ayat ٢: ٢٥٦ cannot be used to avoid some prescriptions of Islam: if someone ‘by the free will‘ embraces Islam ‘he should follow all the prescriptions of faith ‘wish him to do it or not .<sup>(٢)</sup> In the same way as Rashid Ridha and al-Maragi‘ ash-Sha’arawi uses this verse against those who argues for the spread of Islam by sword<sup>(٣)</sup>.

The similar ideas can be found in tafsir of Tunisian scholar Muhammad ibn ‘Ashur (١٨٧٩ – ١٩٧٣) ‘who was influenced much by Muhammad Abduh. He sets a close link between ٢: ٢٥٦ and previous ayat al-kursi (٢: ٢٥٥) ‘arguing ‘that truth became obvious and does not need any kind of force to accept it . By<sup>(٤)</sup> “religion” in ٢: ٢٥٦

(١) Muhammad al-Khatib ‘Awdhah at-Tafsir (Al-Qahira: al-Matba’ah al-Misriyah‘ ١٩٦٤/١٣٨٣) ‘p. ٢٥٥.

(٢) Tafsir ash-Sha’arawi (Al-Qahirah: n.p. ١٩٩١) ‘p. ١١١٣.

(٣) Op. cit. ‘p. ١١١٤.

(٤) Ibn ‘Ashur ‘Tafsir at-Tahrir wa t-Tanwir (Tunis: Dar at-Tunisiya li-Nashr‘ ١٩٨٤) ‘vol. ٤٣p. ٢٥

definitely Islam is meant ‘which should be accepted only by free choice. Ibn ‘Ashur supposes that “no compulsion in religion” was revealed after the victory over Makkah. This ayat cannot be “abrogated” by other and ‘as a result ‘both Jews and Christians must be left on their believe and pay a jizyah <sup>(١)</sup>. Obviously ‘ibn ‘Ashur was less devoted to modernity in his tafsir than some of his contemporaries.

Interesting commentaries on the problem of religious tolerance are included in widespread tafsir of Sayyid Qutb (١٩٠٦ – ١٩٦٦). He clearly notes that “freedom of religion” (hurriyah al-ittiqad) is a first of the basic rights of every human. Qutb writes that those ‘who reject this right ‘reject the idea of humanity as it is . However <sup>(٢)</sup> “freedom of religion” should be also a freedom for Islamic call and a safety from the temptations and offensives. For him ‘any other kind of freedom is not a real freedom at all. Mentioning the topic of relations with Jews and Christians ‘Sayyid Qutb writes ‘that in reality Islam does not pressure them to left their beliefs (because of God’s order in ٢: ٢٥٦). But even the good relations (mu’ammala) with the followers of Judaism and Christianity does not signify even partial recognition of their faith . Being influenced by the reformist views of <sup>(٣)</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh and his students ‘Sayyid Qutb tries to reformulate his ideas on the contexts of his own views of what is “true Islam” and ‘respectively “true religion” as it is.

The same background is present in the books of Said Hawwa

(١) Op. cit. ‘vol. ‘٣p. ٢٨

(٢) Sayyid Qutb ‘Fi Zilal Qur’an (Al-Qahirah: Dar Ash-Shuruq ‘n. d.) ‘vol. ‘١p. ٥٦١.

(٣) Op ‘cit. ‘vol. ‘٣p. ٩١٥.

(١٩٣٥ – ١٩٨٩) ‘a Muslim activist from Syria ‘who proposed the new way of reform ‘called him al-ihya ar-rabbaniya (“God-given revival”). (١) He divides between the fight with unbelievers ‘declared in the Qur’an ‘and the compulsion to Islam. Despite the declaration of fight against unbelievers ‘only Arabic polytheists are pressured to embrace Islam. In general ‘force to Islam is not from Islam at all‘ concludes Hawwa . (٢) It seems to be that this exegete tries to preserve medieval interpretations of these verses as they are. However ‘like the previous commentators ‘he refuses to signify this ayat as the one of abrogated ones (mansukha).

The next Syrian exegete ‘Wahba az-Zuhayli (born ١٩٣٢) in his “The Middle Commentary” is clearer in his views on religious tolerance. He argues against the idea of “orient lists” that Islam was spread by sword and states ‘that all the wars Muslim hold were defensive only. There are no barriers for the peaceful coexistence between Islam and other religions (at-ta’aish ad-dini as-salami) . (٣)

The next important tradition of tafsir ‘which continue its development today ‘is a Saudi school ‘based on the teachings of as-salaf as-salih and reviled by the followers of Sheikh Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab (١٧٠٣ – ١٧٩١). To great extent devoted to the traditional Sunni exegetics ‘scholars of this school try to solve the

(١) Weismann ‘Itzhak ‘Sa’id Hawwa and Islamic Revivalism in Ba’thist Syria‘  
Studia Islamica ‘No. ٨٥. (١٩٩٧) ‘pp. ١٣١-١٥٤.

(٢) Sa’id Hawwa ‘Al-Asas fi Tafsir (Al-Qahirah: Dar as-Salam ١٩٨٦) ‘vol. ٤٢٠. ٦٠٠.

(٣) Op. cit. ‘vol. ٤١٠. ١٤٩.

issues of modernity from the classical viewpoint ‘which is the accurate reception of Qur’an and Sunnah. Muhammad Amin Ash-Shanqiti (١٩٠٥ – ١٩٧٤) one of the most popular exegetes of Saudi school ‘writes in his explanation on the ١٨: ٢٦ (“Let anyone who wishes believes it ‘and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it”) ‘that absence of compulsion here does not mean “the choice” ‘but definitely “the treat” to unbelievers <sup>(١)</sup>. The same position is stated in the tafsir of ‘Umar al-Ashqar (born ١٩٤٠) ‘who links its meaning to the next part of ayat (“Verily ‘We have prepared for the Zalimun (polytheists and wrong-doers ‘etc.) ‘a Fire whose walls will be surrounding them (disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah)”). For <sup>(٢)</sup> these exegetes ‘this kind of “choice” is the only parable of the wrong way ‘which finishes in the hell. Similar ideas expressed by al-Ashqar in his commentary to ٢: ٢٥٦ which ‘on his opinion ‘speaks only about those who pays jizyah. The same view is included in the recent “The Simplified Tafsir” (At-Tafsir al-Muyassar) ‘prepared by a group of notable scholars from the authoritative King Fahd Glorious Qur’an Printing Complex (Medina ‘Saudi Arabia). Thus ‘the meaning of ayat

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(١) Ash-Shanqiti ‘Muhammad Amin ‘Tafsir Adhwa al-Bayan (Ar-Riyadh: Dar ‘Alam al-Fawa’id ‘n. d.) ‘vol. ٤٤٦-٤٤٧.

(٢) Al-Ashqar ‘Umar bin Sulayman ‘Zubda at-Tafsir bi-Hamish Mushaf al-Madina al-Munawwarah (Dhuha: Wizarah al-Awqaf wa sh-Shuyun al-Islamiyah‘ ٢٠٠٧/١٤٢٨) ‘p. ٢٩٧.

restricted to those who pays jizyah <sup>(١)</sup>. Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri (born ١٩٢١)  
 in his own tafsir notices ‘that this verse related to Jews ‘Christians‘  
 Sabians and Zoroastrians ‘who should pay jizyah and may embrace  
 Islam voluntary . On the other hand ‘scholars who base their  
 commentaries on the teachings of as-salaf as-sahih completely  
 recognize a possibility of cooperation with the believers of other  
 religions ‘restricting it to the “earthly issues” (dunyawi) . <sup>(٢)</sup>

(١) At-Tafsir al-Muyassar (Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah: Mujamma' al-Malik Fahd  
 li-t-Tiba'ah al-Mushaf ash-Sharif ٢٠٠٦/١ ٤٢٧) ،p. ٤٧.

(٢) Al-Jaza'iri ‘Abu Bakr ‘Aysar at-Tafasir li-Kalam al-‘Ali al-Kabir (Al-Madinah  
 al-Munawwarah: Maktabah al-‘Ulum wa l-Hikam ٢٠٠٣/١ ٤٢٤) ،Vol. ١،p. ١٣٠.

(٣) Kitab Usul al-Iman fi d-Dhaw al-Kitab wa s-Sunnah (Al-Madinah al-  
 Munawwarah: Mujamma' al-Malik Fahd li-t-Tibaa al-Mushaf ash-Sharif.  
 ٢٠١١/١ ٤٣٢) ،p. ٢٦٧.

## Conclusions

Notwithstanding the development of new trends in Qur'anic exegetics during the last half of 20<sup>th</sup> century 'in general majority of tafsirs are rooted in the works of their forerunners 'be it classical medieval commentaries (at-Tabari 'al-Qurtubi 'ibn Kathir and so on) or the masterpieces of reformers like al-Manar of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Ridha. In general 'the analyzed corpus of contemporary Islamic exegetics may be classified in accordance with the criteria of geography and local traditions (i.e. Egyptian school' Saudi school 'Syrian school and so on). Thus 'in contemporary Islamic approach to the study of the Qur'an we observe various positions which are differing much in particular issues. The one of these issues is a problem of human rights 'which became much discussed in both Islamic and non-Islamic academic circles in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our study shows 'that modern commentaries of the Qur'an were highly interested in the problem of inter-religious relations from the viewpoint of Islam and 'as a result' the problem of religious tolerance.

What do religious tolerance means from the vistas of Qur'an? The multiplicity of answers is given leads to a few main positions' which may be summarized as follows.

The first is what may be called as "the limited tolerance"' described in the works of Rashid Ridha 'Mustafa al-Maragi 'Sayyid Qutb 'Muhammad as-Sha'arawi and Muhammad ibn al-Khatib. Denouncing the classical type of relations with Jews and Christians as dhimmies 'this author argues for the tolerant relations 'which

guarantees the absence of any threats to Islam. “Freedom of religion” here means also a freedom to practice someone’s believe freely and a possibility to realize a call to Islam.

The second position ‘which is more theoretic ‘represented by the works of commentators like Wahba Zuhayli ‘Muhammad Zahra. These authors argue for the impossibility of the spread of any religion by sword and a great harm which such claims make for Islam. Speaking about the issue of free will and acceptance of religion as a conscious act ‘these scholars apply to the rationality of Islam. These commentaries give an in-depth view on the fundamental issues of Islam and modernity ‘founding a strike base of knowledge and‘ finally ‘ijtihad.

Third position is supported by the teachings of as-salaf as-salih and great imams of Islamic Ummah. Claiming for the tolerant coexistence between religions ‘the authors like ‘Umar al-Ashqar insists on the strict traditional interpretations of the verses like ٢: ٢٥٦. This approach claims for the possibility of cooperation with the followers of other religions in the “earthly” (dunyawi) issues. This means that ‘in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah ‘nothing is prevent from the peaceful coexistence of Muslims with the followers of other religions ‘when there are no threats to the religion of Islam.

Finally ‘none of the mentioned commentaries recognize the tolerant verses of Qur’an as “the abrogated one” (mansukh) ‘in contrast to significant part of medieval tafsirs. So ‘these statements are actual along with the other elements of Islamic creed. And ‘what even more important ‘majority of contemporary tafsirs presents the formulation of Qur’anic tolerance in a way ‘where traditional Muslim

idea of peaceful coexistence and Western understanding of tolerance are combined. This is a kind of tolerance ‘which Europe ‘to some degree ‘has lost – freedom ‘which is for and not against religion‘ freedom ‘which helps us to enrich our spiritual experience for the religious ‘and not secularist and consumerist sense of life. Thus‘ Islamic model of religious tolerance is more perfect and suitable for the human societies ‘than the secular one.

May Allah bless His Last Prophet ‘Muhammad the Chosen One.

There is no god ‘but Allah. He gives success and He knows what is correct.

Source: Yakubovych, Mykhaylo. An Issue of Freedom of Belief in Modern Islamic Exegetics, in *Mu'ttamar al-Islam wa s-Salam*, Ad-Dammam: Jami'ah ad-Dammam, 1433/2012, Vol. 2, pp. 1345-1391.