

# A Review of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* of Religious Tolerance in QS. Al-An'am Verse 108

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## ABSTRACT

Islam has given great concern to the need for religious tolerance since the start of Islamic civilization in the world. Specifically, Indonesia is a developing country with a large Muslim population and is known as a pluralistic nation, a nation with various religions, ethnicities, tribes, and cultures. This study discusses how the opinion of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* regarding religious tolerance. This research is a literature study using the *tahlili* interpretation method. The study results indicate that *Tafsir Al-Misbah* describes that our actions criticizing others' beliefs are dangerous because we do not know what they will repay for our actions to them.

**Keywords:** *Tolerance, Tafsir Al-Misbah*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are social creatures who cannot be separated from their interaction with the social environment in each period. Interaction is needed to meet the needs to live every day as a human being. In social interaction, social humans will meet various colors of different groups in terms of religion, culture, or ethnicity (1). Religion is an acknowledgment of an individual or a group and is a rule that emphasizes belief in God's existence; religion is also a guide to human life. Because with the existence of religion on earth, it has a harmonious purpose and meaning, i.e., to make what is on earth peaceful and happy in living creatures. Also, it becomes a guiding way to achieve peace and happiness in the world of life later (2).

In religious science, the guarantee of freedom in choosing a religion can be seen basically by the absence of pressure in choosing a religion so that no power can force someone to join a religion (3). Moreover, tolerance is a pattern of provision to widen the existence of human rights and civil liberties for all groups (4). Respect in choosing a religion is the basis used to establish a happy bond between religious communities, which has a comprehensive nature (5). Freedom to choose religious beliefs has a complex and long period, as (6) said, indirectly influences religious

tolerance and does not depend on age or level of intelligence (7).

The discussion on religion is considered sensitive due to the susceptibility to conflict. It is based on the fact that each individual has their beliefs, and religion is also a way of life for each individual. If an individual is convinced of the religion he believes in, he will not think that what he considers true in his religion is the same as the religion of other people (7). Faith or religion already has its truth that they believe in, as stated in Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6, with the meaning, "You have your way, and I have my Way." From this verse, we are taught how we should hold fast to what we believe today.

Islam itself also teaches its people not to force our religion to be accepted by them because we need to respect these differences in beliefs to maintain tolerance. As explained in Surah A-Baqarah verse 256, verse says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." What is meant by this word is that Allah SWT requires that every human being has peace in religion, and Islam is also a religion that puts character first (9). Therefore, the ethics are also related to the discussion of tolerance in Surah Al-An'am verse 108, which also mentions ethics when with them (non-Muslims). Verse 108 is more focused on ethics in verbal use.

As a Muslim, it is also emphasized to be polite to anyone, whether from fellow Muslims or non-Muslims. Furthermore, we are always led to use kind words lest we make fun of, gossip, and criticize. Such actions can cause the person to be offended and cause division, and indirectly, we also violate what Islam has taught, teaching peace and lest we break the ties of brotherhood.

This discussion is also interesting to study because Indonesia is one of the developing countries with many adherents of several beliefs. The number of religions adopted by the Indonesian people is also the cause of the vulnerability of disputes due to individuals and groups who still do not understand or know the meaning of tolerance. Actually, there are many ways or actions to show tolerance, but in this discussion, we try to focus more on oral etiquette, always to use good words, lest we criticize, curse and even blaspheme other people's religions.

## 2. METHOD

This research utilized a literature study with *tahlili* interpretation. The primary data consisted of various tolerance verses in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, and the secondary data included literature, research, and related studies. The researchers also examined the text in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* regarding tolerance and observed the background of Quraish Shihab to find out more about the character of the *mufasir* himself and his interpretation of the meaning of tolerance.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Muhammad Quraish Shihab was born on February 16, 1944, in Sindenreng Rappang (Sindrap) Regency, South Sulawesi Province. In 1967, he received the honor of Lc or equivalent to undergraduate with the Faculty of *Ushuluddin*, Department of Hadith Interpretation, Al-Azhar University. He continued his education at the same faculty in 1969 and received the honor of M.A., which was used to become an expert in the interpretation of the Qur'an. In 1980, he returned to continue his education and recorded on a paper titled "*Nadzm al-Durar lil al-Baq'a'i Tahqiq wa Dirasah*." As a talented writer and contemporary *mufasir*, M. Quraish Shihab has obtained various works that have been widely printed and circulated. Works that especially coincided with the study of the Qur'an include *Tafsir Al-Manar: Philosophy of Islamic Law* (1987), *Its Weaknesses and Specialties* (1984), *Lanterns of the Heart: Wisdom of Life and Stories of Life* (1994), *Reading the Qur'an: The function of revelation and its function in social life* (1994), *Lantern of the Heart: Stories and Wisdom of Life* (1994), *Knowledge of the Qur'an: Maudhu'i's Interpretation of Various Conflicts of the Ummah* (1996), and *The Miracles of the Qur'an*

*Judging from the Various Factors of Scientific Language and Codes as well as Unseen Notices* (1997) (10). Of the many works, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Impressions, messages, and similarities of the Qur'an* is his creation. Through this interpretation, his footsteps continue to soar as one of the *mufasir* in Indonesia, who can record the 30 Juz interpretations of the Qur'an from volumes 1 to 15.

Meanwhile, the prohibition of criticizing and cursing the beliefs of other people has been explained in the QS. Al-An'am verse 108, namely:

كَذَلِكَ عَلَّمَ بَعِيرٌ عَذْوًا اللَّهُ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ دُونَ مَنْ يَدْعُونَ الَّذِينَ تَسُبُّوا وَلَا يَعْمَلُونَ كَانُوا بِمَا فَعَلْتُمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ رَبَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ ثُمَّ عَمَلُهُمْ أُمَّةً لِكُلِّ رِيَّةً

Translation:

'O believers!' Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah, or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance. This is how We have made each people's deeds appealing to them. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do (11).

The reason for the revelation of Surah Al-An'am verse 108 is that at a time when Abi Talib was about to die, the Quraysh disbelievers said,

"You go to Abi Talib, instruct him to prevent Muhammad from preaching because we feel tired of killing Muhammad after he died. With that, the Quraysh disbelievers, including Abu Jahal, Abu Sofyan, Umayyah, Nadhir bin Harist, Uqbah bin Abi Mu'ith, Ubayyin, Amru bin Ash, and Aswad bin Bukhtari, sent a man by the name of Muttalib to be permitted Abi Talib regarding the Quraysh leaders to visit."

Muttalib said to Abi Talib, "O Abi Talib, your superiors ask for permission to visit you." Abi Talib allowed them to visit. When they had visited, they hastily said, "O Abi Talib, you are our ruler and leader. Muhammad has harmed us and denounced what we worship. We agree with you inviting Muhammad to tell him not to make fun of our God and enjoin his Lord." Then, the Messenger of Allah brought him, and he immediately visited Abi Talib. Abi Talib said to Rasulullah SAW, "O Muhammad, this is entirely your Ummah, and children descended from your uncles." Rasulullah SAW said, "What do you mean?" They replied, "We encourage and have ambitions for peace."

We have ambitions for you to stay away from making fun of our Lord and end up calling you to pray to your Lord." Rasulallah SAW said, "Do you agree with my request to say one sentence that can find peace among the Arabs and those around them if I agree to your request?" Abu Jahal said, "By your father, I will fulfill what you have asked for ten times. What sentence is that?" Rasulallah SAW replied, "Read, there is no god to worship except Allah SWT." Hearing this answer of Rasulallah SAW, they ignored it as loud as possible. Thus, Abi Talib said, "O son of my brother, say another sentence because your people feel their hearts jolt to hear that sentence." Rasulallah SAW replied, "O my dear uncle, by Allah SWT, I will not say anything other than the sentence *"Laa ilaaha illallah,"* even if the sun is placed in my hand." They were very angry at this answer and rushed to say, "O Muhammad, will you stop yourself from mocking and insulting our Lord, or will we retaliate by insulting the God you worship?" In this regard, Allah SWT says in verse 108 regarding the prohibition for Muslims to insult what the Quraysh disbelievers worship. It is so that they do not make fun of Allah SWT (12).

According to M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, the word *Tasabhu* is taken from the word *sabba*, which means that the utterance that contains insults about something or lineage is something lacking or disgraceful to him, whether the incident or even more so if he does not know the truth. Meanwhile, scholars believe that it does not include in the definition of this word discriminating against an opinion or attitude, nor does it include a wrong evaluation of a religion if the evaluation comes from followers of other religions (13). Criticizing, cursing, and insulting a religion is a prohibited act. It is because religion is an important and sensitive matter and is highly guarded because it is related to belief.

The verse was actually shown to the Muslims, who at that time were prone to clashes with the polytheists who worshiped idols. Over time, this verse is shown to all religious people to avoid disputes and can help bring about inter-religious harmony. If we look, some of the verses read:

عَلِمَ بِغَيْرِ عَدْوٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ دُونَ مَنْ يَدْعُونَ الَّذِينَ تَسُبُّوا وَلَا

If observed, the verse above is more general, not specific to one belief group, so it is more directed to believers not to insult the worship of other people or adherents of other religions (non-Muslims). Thus, this reproach can make them attack back and curse Allah and make Muslims provoke their anger (14). On the other hand, this verse also has a role as a guide for Muslims so that they do not criticize non-Muslim Gods and those who do not believe in other than Allah because they may repay our actions beyond the reasonable limit.

In words *عَمَلُهُمْ أَمَةٌ لَكُنْ رَبَّنَا كَذَلِكَ*, it means, "Thus, We have made every Ummah consider everything that they have done, are doing, and will even do to be true." Scholars define this verse as "we honor every believer with the inclination of their souls towards the practice, but it has also been explained which is bad and which is good" (15). On this side, Allah SWT has a more profound and perfect argument against their freedom to think good and love their idols, even fanatics, because they have a will over their actions.

In verse, *يَعْمَلُونَ كَانُوا بِمَا فَعَلْتَهُمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَىٰ ثُمَّ*, it means, "then, to God the place of return, He repays all their deeds; if they are good, good will be theirs; and vice versa, if their deeds are bad, they will get worse." Also, to God, all affairs will return after death, and all will get a reward according to their rights, and God is All-Knowing of what has been done.

Allah SWT said this verse along with Allah's prohibition on the Muslim group, who at that time, always doing actions that Allah SWT hates. This act is to denounce and curse the beliefs and worship of the polytheists. Therefore, Allah SWT says with this verse as a prohibition against criticizing what they worship or the beliefs of the polytheists because it could be that from that reproach, they (the polytheists) can curse or criticize Allah SWT with more than what we have done to the polytheists. It is because they do it without a strong knowledge base.

This verse also relates to the Muslims and polytheists in Mecca. However, this verse is also public, not specific to the people of Mecca. Hence, this verse can also be used as a basis for the general public in the event of a similar incident. Therefore, this prohibition also applies to beliefs in other countries. In Indonesia itself, there are Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Kong Hu Chu, and local religions. In other words, we must be careful in communicating with them because it relates to Surah Al-An'am verse 108, which explains the prohibition against criticizing the beliefs of others.

Meanwhile, there are several forms of reproach, namely those used as jokes, views, and ridicule.

a. Criticizing in the form of ridicule

What is meant by criticizing by ridiculing is intentionally saying or mentioning the shortcomings and disgrace of others to get ridicule material in the environment (16). The act of ridicule can occur due to the individual's mistakes in terms of words and actions. Also, ridiculing, in other words, demeans the individual himself, in which case, we feel better than those we despise. Allah SWT actually has also warned against this action, which has been said in Q.S Al-Hujurat verse 11.

يَكُونُوا أَنْ عَسَىٰ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ يَسَخَرُونَ لَهَا  
 مِنْهُمْ خَيْرًا يُكُنَّ أَنْ عَسَىٰ نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءِ وَلَا مِنْهُمْ خَيْرًا  
 الْفُسُوقُ الْأَسْمُ بِنِسِّ بِالْأَلْقَابِ تَتَابَرُوا وَلَا أَنْفُسَكُمْ تَلْمِزُوا وَلَا  
 الظَّالِمُونَ هُمْ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتَّبِعُ لَمْ وَمَنْ الْإِيمَانِ بَعْدَ

Which means,

O, believers! Do not let some 'men' ridicule others, they may be better than them, nor let 'some' women ridicule other women, they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the 'true' wrongdoers.

b. Criticizing in the form of jokes and playing

Playing or joking here is an act to get satisfaction and have fun (17). In the Qur'an itself, it is also mentioned about messing with the word *laib*, which means "playing". Criticizing in a joking way is strictly prohibited because we have insulted the individual himself. In addition, if we insult other people's religions or beliefs secretly and make fun of them, it is really an unjustified act because we involve God in the joke (18).

An example of an act of criticizing in a joking way is that we carry a cross or a cross necklace, and then we throw it and make it into a toy so that laughter and satisfaction will arise for us. This action has no benefits and can even trigger a dispute if the brother concerned can get carried away by the atmosphere of conflict. The Qur'an has also explained it in Surah Al-An'am verse 32.

أَفَلَا يَتَفَقَهُونَ لِلَّذِينَ خَيْرٌ الْأَخِرَةُ وَلِلَّذِينَ ضَلُّوا لَهَا لَعِبٌ إِلَّا الدُّنْيَا الْحَيَاةُ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Meaning,

This worldly life is no more than play and amusement, but far better is the 'eternal' Home of the Hereafter for those mindful 'of Allah'. Will you not then understand?

This verse explains that if we make it a place to play and have fun in this world, we really belong to a group of people who lose because we are too busy thinking about the world to forget the hereafter. This verse is also a parable for people who are still shaping this

world as a place to play around until they forget what the previous prophets had taught.

c. Criticizing in the form of views

Criticizing in this form is the act of judging the beliefs of others from our eyes, with no scientific basis. Thus, what happens is the emergence of the bad side of other religions. It is because we think it is not in accordance with what we believe, so that mindset forces us to underestimate their beliefs. Hence, we convey the shortcomings or vices of other religions to people without a solid basis. There is also a similar action, but differently, namely with the media; it can be social media and print media, like magazines or newspapers for print media, while social media can go through many platforms. One example is Charlie Hebdo's actions in one of the newspapers, namely the French satirical newspaper, which reprinted caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. This action provoked the anger of the Muslims in the world to the incessant boycott of products from France. This incident illustrates the danger of reproach because it can impact certain communities.

After looking at the explanation about criticizing other religions and the forms of reproach, it can be seen how the impact will be if we take these actions. Allah SWT says that such actions are strictly prohibited because the act of insulting or even involving God in such insults will cause great harm. Thus, Allah SWT revealed Surah Al-An'am verse 108:

كَذَلِكَ عَلَّمَ بَعْضَ عَدُوِّ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ دُونَ مِمَّنْ يَدْعُونَ الَّذِينَ تَسُبُّوا وَلَا يَعْمَلُونَ كَانُوا بِمَا فَعَلْتُمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَىٰ ثُمَّ عَمَلُهُمْ أُمَّةٍ لِّكُلِّ رِيَّةٍ

Meaning,

'O believers!' Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah, or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance. This is how We have made each people's deeds appealing to them. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do.

From the verse above, we can see what kind of impact this reproach has had. Therefore, they will do what the Muslims have done to them, especially their religion, such as insulting, offending, and blaspheming. They will also do the opposite, which is our actions that have insulted the beliefs they believe in. From these

actions, conflicts and disputes will arise, and a sense of tolerance will be lost, where tolerance highly upholds the value of harmony. Hence, it is necessary to maintain harmony between people and maintain religious tolerance in society.

Insulting and offending other people is actually very unjustified, especially when it involves a person's beliefs, race, ethnicity, and culture. It is based on the fact that Indonesia has *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (different but still one), so it applies to all the general public, not only Muslims but also non-Muslims, both need to understand the meaning of diversity. Therefore, if the foundation of harmony is strong, it needs to be based on a high sense of tolerance between religious communities. The prohibition of insulting or offending has also been explained in Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6, "You have your way, and I have my Way." What is meant by this word is that we need to hold fast to the beliefs we have believed in, and we need to maintain an attitude of tolerance to create inter-religious harmony.

#### **Implications of QS. Al-An'am verse 108**

Islam has its perspective in assessing inter-religious harmony, which results from mutual love and affection for one another. It is because, in this world, no religion teaches its people not to respect, to berate and even insult adherents of other religions. Allah SWT explains it in QS. Al-An'am verse 108:

كَذَلِكَ عَلَّمَ بَغْيِرَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوهُ اللَّهُ ذُونِ مَنْ يَدْعُونَ الَّذِينَ تَسُبُّوهُ وَلَا يَعْمَلُونَ كَانُوا بِمَا فَعَلْتُمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَىٰ ثُمَّ عَمَلُهُمْ أُمَّةٍ لِكُلِّ رِيَّةٍ

Meaning,

'O believers!' Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah, or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance. This is how We have made each people's deeds appealing to them. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do

The verse contains a warning not to insult a belief held by an individual or group. In terms of different beliefs and points of view, it cannot really be used as a factor to hate each other. Therefore, forcing them to convert to Islam by insulting the religion they believe in cannot be understood (19). This action is not justified because it is outside the meaning of Islam itself, which gives freedom to choose their way of life.

This verse is also related to the prohibition of insulting other religions and their adherents. If this happens, it is feared that it will result in more harm,

namely disputes between religious communities to the point of insulting the God they believe in. Behind the revelation of a verse, there must be something contained in verse. Allah SWT explains to everyone, never criticize or insult the religion that other people believe in terms of Aqedah and social aspects. It is because religion has become a way of life for everyone to be more organized; therefore, religion is very important for everyone because religion can foster human beings to have noble and virtuous character (20). Religion also teaches many things, ranging from things of kindness, honesty, caring, and justice.

In this regard, tolerance is vital in the nature of freedom, respect, views, and beliefs. It will lead to harmony between religious communities. Therefore, tolerance has a great influence on religious people. We can see that if there is no tolerance between religious communities, there will be chaos between religious communities.

Tolerance also has a big impact on religious life. The act of insulting other religions, which we consider wrong, is prohibited because every religion does not teach it. Islam has clearly prohibited it by sending down the QS. Al-An'am verse 108. This verse is a reminder for Muslims, especially to avoid insulting other religions because these actions will have a very bad and dangerous impact on the individual side of religion and social life. One of the forms is feeling that their religious teachings are the most correct and good, while other religions have wrong and misguided teachings (21). From this assumption, they will be offended and cause chaos in the environment. These things usually happen to people who still lack knowledge in religious knowledge, so they look down on other religions (22).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Criticizing or insulting is an action in the form of words, attitudes, or even actions taken by individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions. The act is in the form of insults thrown at one individual or group to bring religion, ethnicity, race, and culture. From these actions, they will offend adherents of other teachings. Insulting the teachings of other religions is prohibited because it has offended the creed and can damage the rules in society and tolerance among religious people. Therefore, Islam strictly forbids its followers to insult in any form. There are several forms of insulting other religions, ranging from making fun of, laughing, playing, and certain views. In the form of behavior or actions, it is also strictly prohibited, such as making caricatures, playing with religious symbols, trampling on holy books, and imitating the style of worship with a

specific purpose, and this is done openly, for example, imitating the style of worship of other religions and then used it as a laughing stock and uploaded on one of the social media platforms.

Meanwhile, the impact of such insulting actions is that they will avenge what we have done to them. Also, they can do much more than we can do to them. Not only will they humiliate each other, but they also will impact the estrangement between religious people. We can see this from several events that occurred in Indonesia. With this discussion, it can be taken into consideration for Muslims to avoid prohibited actions by religion, which of these actions will lead to the collapse of inter-religious harmony and create a bad view for them about the religion of Islam.

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